

MAHATMA GANDHI

VOLUME VIII

Final Fight for Freedom

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by

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FOREWORD

The Quit India movement continues to be a subject of abiding interest to our scholars and general public. We do not yet have an authentic and detailed account of what proved to be the final struggle for India's freedom. I happened to be an active participant in the first phase of this struggle, mostly as an underground worker. Gandhiji and all the members of the Working Committee were put under arrest in the early hours of 9 August. It was no surprise to most members of the Committee that they were effectively barred from carrying on the struggle which had not yet started. Rumours had been afloat that the Government contemplated drastic action soon after the A.I.C.C. passed its famous Quit India resolution. They were borne out by the speedy action taken by the Government. To Gandhiji, his arrest came as a surprise. He had believed that if the Government was genuinely anxious to avert a serious crisis in that critical phase of the war, he would be allowed to present his reading of the situation to the Viceroy for a detailed consideration and discussion. This did not happen. The Viceroy instead unleashed a campaign of terror and repression. The country was almost leaderless after the countrywide arrests of the Congress leadership on August 9, 1942. India's, especially young India's, answer to the savage repression was the heroic struggle that followed.

I met Pyarelalji on the morning of the 9 August 1942, to consider what our duty to the country should be in response to the Government's sudden onslaught on the Congress. I was then the Permanent Secretary of the A.I.C.C. It was a brief and hurried meeting, but we both decided that the delegates still present in Bombay should have something in their hands which would spell out our non-violent response to the repression that the Government had unleashed. There was no time to lose. Together with Mrs. Sucheta Kripalani we collected a group of young men and women who were ready for any sacrifice or any work to advance the struggle. I immediately sat down to draft a series of instructions to Congress workers and the people of the country in general. These instructions were copied out in hand by about a dozen workers and also cyclostyled and handed to A.I.C.C. delegates and non-delegates to be carried to their provinces. Later we issued instructions to various sections of our people, such as women, industrial labour, youth, peasantry, students, etc. In these instructions we laid



emphasis on the need to paralyze the Government in all possible ways open to us, care being taken that our activities did not transgress the limits of non-violence. This non-violence was interpreted in wide terms and precluded loss of life.

The struggle, when it ensued after the arrest of the leading figures of the Congress, took on an epic character. It is true that a large number of workers went underground and there were activities which did not conform to Gandhiji's definition of truth and non-violence. Notwithstanding all this, however, a considerable part of the movement remained within peaceful and non-violent limits. In the early stages the struggle spread with lightning speed. In several parts of the country there was hardly a village which did not have stories to tell about its participation in the struggle and the repression, at times savage and brutal, it brought from the Government. We have no proper and connected account of the movement as it spread and grew. The movement was brutally suppressed but the flame was kept alive all the time. The fear was always there that it might erupt again somewhere or the other if the Government relaxed its vigil. The apparent suppression of the movement could by no means be interpreted to mean that it had failed. The fact that millions participated in it and thousands, including the cream of India's leadership, were behind the bars, was enough indication of the rebellious mood of the people. We had enough brave souls like Jayaprakash Narayan, Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia, Aruna Asaf Ali, Achyut Patwardhan, Sucheta Kripalani and a number of others, who through underground work sought to keep the flame of rebellion burning. We have no reliable, detailed account of this great struggle. Some efforts have been made in this direction. It is our good fortune that we had in our midst Pyarelalji, who endeavoured to fill this gap to a considerable extent. We have a few excellent volumes which chronicle Gandhiji's life and work from birth to death, for which we are indebted to Pyarelalji. He had quite a few other plans in his mind, but he passed away while he was in the midst of this important and valuable activity. Luckily for the country we have Dr. Sushila Nayar, the devoted sister of Pyarelalji, who has undertaken the responsibility of finishing the unfinished task. It is for her a labour of love. Dr. Sushila Nayar has a whole lot of other responsibilities in the field of constructive work, but she has nevertheless found time for this



literary activity. The present volume is a valuable addition to the corpus of literature which has grown round the message and life of Mahatma Gandhi.

The present volume is much more than an account of what happened during the Quit India movement. It gives in considerable detail the political and international background of the struggle. It needed to be explained how Gandhiji, who had offered full moral sympathy and support to Britain and the Allied nations at the beginning of the war, came to the conclusion, as the war progressed, that Britain should quit India immediately both for her own good and the good of the country and the Allied cause, including that of China and Russia. The war had then reached a critical stage, with the Japanese advancing and posing a threat to India. This created a highly difficult situation for the country. India could not afford to be a passive spectator. How to meet the situation effectively was the problem. There were other aspects too. Gandhiji wished to have an opportunity of discussing the whole situation with the Viceroy as a friend and well-wisher of Britain and the Allied cause. As the spokesman of the Congress he had no objection to Allied troops being stationed in India for the defence of the country, even though this went against his own personal creed of non-violence. The Viceroy in his wisdom allowed this opportunity to slip and thereby plunged India into the 'Do or Die' campaign.

As the war progressed it was found that India had a vital and crucial role to play even for the freedom and independence of China and Russia. America carried on her shoulders a large part of the burden of carrying on the costly war. Roosevelt was anxious that India should play her due part and right conditions should be created to this end. His interventions could bear no fruit with Churchill frowning on all such interventions.

It must have cost Dr. Sushila Nayar a lot of time and trouble to gather all the material pertaining to the Quit India movement and the whole international background and why Gandhiji found himself compelled to launch what he described as "the biggest fight in my life". This comprehensive treatment I do not find in any of the several publications on the subject which have made their appearance in the recent past. Not all the opinions and judgments expressed in the volume may find ready acceptance from all the friends who choose to read it. It would however be readily conceded that the movement played a decisive



part in creating conditions in which Britain found herself obliged to transfer power to India, if only after dividing the country. A great page in the history of India's struggle for freedom deserved to be recorded for the benefit of the present and future generations. This volume will go a long way to fulfil that need.

New Delhi
8-8-1996

SADIQ ALI



INTRODUCTION

1

The present volume, Volume VIII of the series, covers the period from October 1939 to 6 May 1944. The events that stirred the country during this crucial period of India's history bear the indelible impress of Gandhiji's stewardship of the nation. This period marks the penultimate phase of Gandhiji's striving to secure the emancipation of India through nonviolence, so that the light of swaraj could reach the humblest hut and India's millions could feel the glow of freedom.

The volume opens with a recapitulation of the fateful happenings of September 1939, following British declaration of war against Germany, India being dragged into the war on the side of Britain without the Indian Legislatures or Indian political parties having been consulted, and the Congress protest against the step, culminating in the resignation of the Congress Ministries in the Provinces.

The Congress demanded that if the war was being fought to safeguard democracy in the world and to end the menace of Fascism, Britain must concede to India the right of self-determination, to be exercised through a constitution drawn up by a Constituent Assembly elected on the widest possible franchise. In the interim period the Congress asked for the setting up of a National Government responsible to the Legislature.

The demand was turned down. The Viceroy declared that while the British Government was committed to Dominion Status for India as its ultimate aim, just then all that could be offered was a promise of consultations after the war for the modification of the Government of India Act, 1935. So far as a National Government was concerned, the Muslims, the Depressed Classes and the Princes were opposed to it.

As fruitless negotiations with the Viceroy dragged on, Congressmen became impatient. Gandhiji was pressed to start a civil disobedience campaign. Gandhiji did not consider the time opportune for such a campaign. There was, he said, absence of discipline in the Congress. It was divided into so many groups and factions: the Royists, ex-terrorists, Gandhiites and so on. Some of the groups were still further divided.



Towards the end of February 1940 the Congress Working Committee met at Patna. Azad, Nehru and other leaders expressed themselves strongly in favour of a mass movement being launched. Gandhiji was reluctant to do so. Nevertheless the Working Committee passed a resolution mentioning the possibility of a civil disobedience movement, to be started when Gandhiji was satisfied that the Congress organization was fit to carry it on.

While the Congress was thus preparing for a mass movement for swaraj, Muslim separatism under Jinnah was preparing to oppose the demand. During the brief tenure of the Congress Ministries Jinnah's antipathy towards the Congress had turned into manic hatred. With the Congress now in political wilderness and the British openly hostile to it, Jinnah was emboldened to go all out against the ideal of Indian nationalism for which the Congress had always stood. He declared, quoting British official reports in support, that Islam and Hinduism were not merely separate religions but separate civilizations, that they were essentially exclusive and precluded any merging of identities and unity of thought.

The result was that in the country everywhere communal tension mounted. Fanatical Muslim bands like the Khaksars in North India and the Hurs in Sind roamed the streets, looting and killing. In Sind, in particular, Hindu villagers starting migrating *en masse* to urban areas in search of safety.

On 22 March 1940 the Muslim League at its annual session in Lahore passed the resolution that became the basis of its *jihad* for Pakistan. The resolution asked for demarcation of geographically contiguous units into regions so constituted that the areas in which Muslims were numerically in a majority could be grouped to constitute "Independent States".

2

The Congress also held its annual session at Ramgarh in March 1940. Gandhiji was again pressed to launch a mass civil disobedience campaign. He again expressed his unwillingness. He also made the point that it was not the right moment to ask the British to make a declaration of independence for India. The demand should be for a Constituent Assembly and the Congress should be



prepared to accept the decisions of the Constituent Assembly whatever these might be.

The resolution that the Congress finally passed mentioned the possibility of a mass civil disobedience movement being launched "as soon as Congress organization is considered fit for the purpose, or in case circumstances so shape themselves as to precipitate a crisis".

In the months that followed the Working Committee continued to press Gandhiji to start civil disobedience and Gandhiji continued to resist the demand.

A new dimension to the debate was added by a sudden and ominous change in the war situation in Europe. In April 1940 the armies of Nazi Germany, which had kept their operations confined to Eastern Europe for seven months since the beginning of the war, turned round to the West. In a lightning campaign they quickly conquered the Scandinavian and the Benelux countries and by the middle of June overran France, posing a threat to the British Isles.

The impact on India was immediate. The fear that England might be invaded plunged the country into confusion. A fear psychosis gripped the country. Not only might India's security be threatened, but anarchy and disorder might follow in the wake of British collapse.

The Congress Working Committee met at Wardha and then a week later in Delhi and considered the situation. Civil disobedience was forgotten. It was felt that the Congress must seek responsibility in the Government at the Centre and make common cause with the British in the war. Gandhiji argued that the defence of the country was a matter for the Indian people and not for the British Government and that when the situation arose the thing to do for the Congress would be to organize non-violent resistance against the invader. But the Working Committee would not go along. Invading armies, said the members, could not be resisted through non-violence. In the resolution passed the Working Committee, while reaffirming its adherence to non-violence in the struggle for independence, said that so far as external aggression and internal disorders were concerned, it was unable to go full length with Gandhiji. The resolution absolved Gandhiji from the responsibility for the programme and policies of the Congress.



The resolution, while reiterating the demand for recognition by Britain of complete independence of India, asked for immediate formation of a provisional National Government as a transitory measure, so that the Congress could "throw in its full weight in the efforts for the effective organization of the defence of the country".

The A.I.C.C. meeting at Poona held towards the end of July 1940, ratified the resolution.

There was now no talk of civil disobedience.

What was more, Gandhiji had been sidelined.

3

The British rejected the demand for a provisional National Government. The Viceroy declared that within the framework of the existing constitution all that he could do would be to expand his Executive Council by bringing in representatives of political parties.

The rejection of its demand came as a great disappointment to the Working Committee. It met at Wardha in the third week of August 1940. Its readiness to join the war effort if its demands were conceded had availed it nothing and it realized that a mass struggle to enforce its demand was the only course left to it. It requested Gandhiji to come back and lead the Congress in the struggle. Gandhiji said that in view of the Delhi and Poona resolutions of the Congress he could not do so. He suggested that the Congress might launch a struggle on its own and leave him out. The members of the Working Committee said that there was no hope of any struggle succeeding unless it was led by Gandhiji. They said that the Delhi and Poona resolutions had lapsed and they were fully with Gandhiji on the question of non-violence. Gandhiji said he would launch a struggle but in his own individual capacity. He might even go on a prolonged fast.

The A.I.C.C. met in Bombay in the middle of September 1940 to consider when and on what issue civil disobedience should be started. Gandhiji was against launching a movement on the issue of swaraj. But civil liberties could be made an issue, he said. There was no freedom of speech or pen, repression was



severe, with more than 2,000 Congressmen in jail, and there were forced war levies.

Gandhiji was also greatly troubled by the sufferings that England was going through. Even as the A.I.C.C. was in session, massive bombing of civilian population in England was going on, with as many as 625 bombers and 648 fighters of the German air force making repeated sorties with their lethal cargo. Large parts of London were in flames, thousands of Londoners had been killed and many thousands rendered homeless.

Gandhiji appealed to Britain unilaterally to cease fighting and stop the senseless violence. Britain summarily dismissed his appeal.

The resolution passed by the A.I.C.C. expressed sympathy with the British people in their suffering and assured them that while the Congress did not wish to embarrass the British, it could not take the self-imposed restraint to the point of self-extinction. The Congress must insist on the fullest freedom to pursue its policy based on non-violence.

Gandhiji approached the Viceroy with the suggestion that Congressmen and others should be allowed freedom to speak against the war. The Viceroy turned down the plea. He said he could not acquiesce in the interference with the war effort which would be involved in the freedom of speech that Gandhiji sought.

When the Working Committee next met at Wardha in October 1940 Gandhiji informed the members that he had decided to start individual civil disobedience, that the first satyagrahi to offer civil disobedience would be Vinoba Bhave and after his arrest Jawaharlal Nehru. The members were not entirely pleased, but accepted Gandhiji's decision.

Vinoba Bhave duly started his satyagraha on 17 October by making anti-war speeches to small gatherings. On 21 October he was taken into custody. The Government issued orders that the Press was not to publish anything relating to civil disobedience which might not be approved by Government. Gandhiji, finding himself unable to submit to such pre-censorship, closed down the *Harijan* weeklies.



On 31 October Jawaharlal Nehru was arrested even before he could offer satyagraha. He was tried for having made some seditious speeches earlier and sentenced to an aggregate of four years' imprisonment. It was of course sheer vindictiveness.

On 5 November at a meeting of the Working Committee Gandhiji announced that the list of would-be satyagrahis would be enlarged by the inclusion of the members of the Working Committee and the A.I.C.C. and members of the Central and Provincial Legislatures. By the end of December some 700 Congress leaders belonging to these categories were in jail.

Subhas Bose, who had been removed from the Bengal P.C.C. for indiscipline, asked Gandhiji for permission to participate in the satyagraha. Gandhiji would not agree. He wrote to Bose that the differences between him and Bose were fundamental and that the two of them did not even mean the same thing by independence.

The satyagraha was suspended for the duration of Christmas and New Year holidays, so that officials did not have to interrupt their holidays because of the movement.

From 5 January 1941 even people outside the approved categories were permitted to offer satyagraha. Lists of those volunteering were prepared and sent to the P.C.C.s, after which they came to Gandhiji. Those wishing to court imprisonment were asked to declare their faith in non-violence and freedom from domestic commitments. Thousands upon thousands volunteered. The authorities found it impossible to arrest all. When those arrested were produced before the Magistrates, the latter began to avoid awarding jail terms to offenders and merely imposed fines.

On 8 January 1941 Maulana Azad was arrested and tried for speeches he had delivered at Allahabad a few days earlier. He was sentenced to 18 months' imprisonment. Gandhiji directed that no successor to Azad be appointed. All office-bearers of the Congress, from the village level to the Provincial level, if fit and approved by him, he said, were expected to be in jail. The struggle would be a prolonged one.

By the summer of 1941 more than 20,000 satyagrahis were in jail.



As the movement gathered momentum, Jinnah and the Muslim League intensified their campaign of hatred against the Congress and the Hindus, giving rise to widespread communal riots. In Bengal Hindu village after village was burnt down by frenzied Muslim mobs. There were riots in Ahmedabad, Bombay and many areas of Bihar in April and May. In Ahmedabad in a single day 55 persons were killed and 390 injured.

Gandhiji called upon the people to defend themselves, non-violently if possible, violently if necessary. Congressmen, however, he directed, must try to control riots non-violently.

In the surcharged atmosphere many Congressmen did not like this advice. K. M. Munshi wrote to Gandhiji that when life, home, shrine and honour of women were threatened by goondaism, in his view organized resistance was the paramount duty of one and all. He resigned from the Congress on the issue.

On 22 June 1941 Hitler invaded Soviet Russia. The invasion was massive, sudden and wholly unexpected by the Russians. In the initial weeks and months they could offer no effective resistance and Nazi hordes quickly penetrated deep inside Russia. In October 1941 Hitler boasted that Russia was finished and would never rise again. The possible collapse of Russia again sent waves of fear and anxiety all over India. Apprehension rose that after conquering Russia the Nazis might head towards India, which was a colony of Britain. Soon, however, the Russians first checked and then hurled back the Nazi forces, and everyone could breathe again.

Another threat, however, developed in the Far East. On 7 December 1941 the Japanese struck at the American naval base at Pearl Harbour in the Pacific and completely destroyed it. Simultaneously they attacked and speedily conquered many American and British possessions and bases, including Hongkong, Malaya, Bangkok, Phillipines, Java and Borneo. Within a few months Japan was poised to advance on India.

On 3 December 1941 the Government of India announced that it had decided to release all civil disobedience prisoners alongwith Azad and Nehru.



Immediately on their release Azad and Nehru proceeded to Wardha to see Gandhiji and to attend the meeting of the Congress Working Committee, which had been called to consider the situation anew. Gandhiji, in a statement, advised the members of the Working Committee and the A.I.C.C. not to offer satyagraha afresh but to be available for meetings and consultations. Others who had offered satyagraha but had not been arrested and those who had been released, he suggested, should, instead of offering satyagraha, devote themselves to constructive work.

On 23 December 1941 the Working Committee met again at Wardha, against the backdrop of relentless Japanese advance towards India and its fall out in the coastal areas of India. In Assam in the East and Rameswaran in the South people began fleeing from the cities. Life in Calcutta and Madras was almost paralyzed. Schools and colleges closed down. Railway stations became choked with crowds of people intent on running away from danger zones.

What should be done to keep the country together in such a situation and to defend it? That was the most important question that confronted the Congress leadership. The country clearly had lost faith in the willingness or ability of the British Government to defend India. The Working Committee had to decide whether there should be a change in the attitude the Congress had so far adopted towards the war. Another question was whether any change should be made in the way civil disobedience was being carried on.

The resolution that was passed after eight days of intense debate by the Working Committee showed the Congress leaders' ambivalence on the question of non-violence. The resolution, while expressing sympathy with the victims of Fascist aggression, declared that a subject India could not offer voluntary or willing help to British Imperialism, and that, therefore, the resolution passed by the A.I.C.C. at Bombay continued to remain the policy of the Congress.

This implied that if the British should concede the Congress demand for swaraj, India would give voluntary and willing help to the British war effort. Gandhiji was quick to see the contradiction between the Bombay resolution, which called for resistance to aggression through non-violent non-cooperation, and the resolution which the Congress Working Committee had now passed and which envisaged active help in the war effort if the demand for swaraj was



conceded. In a letter to Azad Gandhiji pointed out this contradiction. However, he said, it was possible that his own interpretation of the Bombay resolution had been wrong and it had never been the intention of the Congress leadership to give up violence in resisting foreign aggression. In that case, Gandhiji wrote, it would be best for him to continue his mission all by himself. Since, to him non-violence came before everything else, he asked to be relieved of the responsibility laid upon him by the Bombay resolution.

The Working Committee again acceded to his request. Gandhiji first thought of advising those who believed in non-violence for resisting aggression to work for the defeat of the resolution at the coming A.I.C.C. session to be held at Wardha on 15/16 January 1942, but later changed his mind. So long as the Congress demand remained unconceded, he said, the votaries of violence and the votaries of non-violence were in the same boat and everyone was free to interpret the resolution in his own way.

The A.I.C.C. passed the resolution. It also decided to discontinue the Individual Civil Disobedience movement, which, in any case, had lost much of its vigour.

The Japanese advance towards India in the meanwhile continued. Singapore fell, and soon after Rangoon was occupied. Gandhiji and the Working Committee advised Congressmen to take up the work of mobilizing the people for self-defence independently of the Government. Congressmen were asked to set up peace brigades to provide protection from dacoities, etc., that had been on the increase.

6

On 2 January 1942 T. B. Sapru and twelve others sent a memorandum to Churchill in an attempt to end the deadlock. The memorandum in concrete terms asked for (1) conversion and expansion of the Viceroy's Executive Council into a National Government consisting of non-officials from political parties and having charge of all portfolios subject to responsibility to the Crown, (2) restoration of popular Governments in the Provinces, (3) direct representation of India in the Imperial War Cabinet, and (4) consultation with the National Government on the same footing as with Dominion Governments.



Amery and Linlithgow opposed the demands set forth in the memorandum and advised Churchill to stand firm. But pressure on the British Government to do something positive was mounting.

In February 1942 Chinese leader Marshal Chiang Kai-shek paid a twelve-day visit to India, ostensibly for consultations with the Viceroy on the war situation. But primarily, he let it be known, the purpose of his visit was to meet Gandhiji and Jawaharlal Nehru. In his farewell message to India Chiang gave expression to his hope that Britain would as speedily as possible give India real political power, so that India might be able to play its role in the war effort against Japan.

Jinnah was touched to the quick by Chiang's expression of hope that India might be given political power. He protested that India was not a nation state.

During all this time the British Cabinet remained seized with the question of what response to make to Sapru's memorandum. Deputy Prime Minister Attlee insisted that something must be done to ease things in India. There was also pressure from the U.S.A. Churchill first thought of making a broadcast to India. But later the Cabinet decided to send Stafford Cripps, a member of the Cabinet, to India with a draft declaration, the terms of which had first been proposed by Amery. The draft declaration stipulated setting up in India after the war a constitution-making body elected by the members of the newly elected Provincial Legislatures. The British Government undertook to accept the constitution that might be drawn up by this body, subject to the right of any Province not prepared to accept the constitution to retain its existing constitutional position. The non-acceding Provinces could negotiate separate treaties with Great Britain.

In the interim period the British Government would continue to bear responsibility for the defence of India but would invite immediate and effective participation of the leaders of political opinion in the counsels of their country.

Cripps arrived in Delhi on 23 March 1942. The situation in the country was perilous. Imminent landings of Japanese forces by land, sea and air were feared. In the coastal areas British Governors and high officials had started making plans to save British lives. In Madras the Governor shifted his headquarters to Chittoor,



fearing attack on Madras. In Orissa the Ministers were reported to be getting ready to adjourn the Assembly and go back to their homes. Foreign soldiers, who had been pouring into India, were misbehaving with the public and molesting women.

Gandhiji advised the people not to panic, to stay at their posts and fearlessly to face whatever came.

Negotiations with Cripps went on from 23 March to 10 April. The Congress objected to the freedom of secession proposed to be given to the Provinces under the draft declaration and to the protection being given to the Princes. But what finally rocked the boat was the obstinacy of the British Government in refusing to allow popular representatives in the contemplated National Government to share any part of the responsibility for running the defence of the country, which would render the transfer of responsibility into a farce.

7

Meanwhile the Japanese menace drew even nearer. Japanese navy was in complete control of the Bay of Bengal. Vishakhapatnam, Cocanada, Colombo and Trincomalee had been bombed and landings of Japanese troops in Orissa and South India were hourly feared. The British military, by common perception, was quite incapable of checking the tide of Japanese advance, and the British administration could not provide even a modicum of civil defence.

What the British were doing was to terrorize the Indian people. In East Bengal village after village was being evacuated by the Army. Houses, boats, wells and tanks were being taken over or destroyed lest they fell into enemy hands. There was even talk of abandoning Calcutta. The same policy of scuttle was being pursued in Orissa.

Gandhiji came round to the view that the continued stay of the British in India would not make for the country's defence. It would only ensure her further ruin. But if the British were to leave India to her fate, as they had left Singapore, non-violent India would lose nothing. It was even possible that in that case Japan might leave India alone. The safety of India, therefore, he wrote, lay in an orderly and timely British withdrawal from India.



The Congress Working Committee did not have an agreed view in the matter. Jawaharlal Nehru was preaching guerilla warfare against the Japanese. Rajaji was for making common cause with the British for the defence of India. He even initiated moves for setting up a coalition Government in Madras with the help of the Muslim League and the Justice Party. He went so far as to say that if the central leadership of the Congress did not approve the move, the Madras Congress would break away from the parent body. In order to end the hostility between the Congress and the Muslim League, he proposed that the Congress should accept the Muslim League demand for separation – in other words, concede the principle of Pakistan.

The A.I.C.C. met at Allahabad at the end of April 1942 and discussed a draft resolution Gandhiji had sent from Wardha. Gandhiji himself did not attend the meeting.

Gandhiji's draft resolution made the point that the British could not defend India. Whatever they did would be for the defence of the British Empire, not of India. Therefore India could defend herself only if the British withdrew from India. Japan, his draft resolution further said, had no quarrel with India, and if the British withdrew it was possible that Japan might not attack India. If it did the people of India would offer the Japanese forces complete non-violent non-cooperation and give them no assistance of any kind.

There was a heated discussion on Gandhiji's draft resolution. Jawaharlal Nehru thought that the resolution, as worded, might be interpreted to mean that Gandhiji favoured the Japanese. He produced another draft, whose purport was more or less the same but which did not have the ring of favouring Japan. This alternate draft was accepted by the Working Committee, after which it was finally passed by the A.I.C.C. on 1 May.

The dithering and confusion of the preceding three years was now ended. The Congress now had a clear policy and programme – that of making the British to withdraw unconditionally from India as soon as possible, and preparing the masses for non-violent defence against Japan.

The Allahabad A.I.C.C. also marked the final parting of the ways between the Congress and Rajaji. Rajaji had tried to have a resolution passed by the A.I.C.C.



recognizing the Muslim League's claim for separation from India and had failed in the attempt. He now proceeded on a tour of the country openly preaching his line. He found a ready ally in the Communist Party of India. The party advocated the line that what the Muslim League was demanding was the right of self-determination for certain provinces, which ought to be conceded.

8

The rulers were not pleased by the Allahabad A.I.C.C. resolution. They began to prepare themselves for action against Gandhiji and for the suppression of the Congress. Gandhiji on his part, now that the A.I.C.C. had committed itself to non-violent non-cooperation not only against the British but also against Japan in the event of Japan invading India, gave up his earlier hesitation and declared that he was ready to launch a mass civil disobedience movement to persuade the British to withdraw from India. He made it clear that the struggle would be a mass satyagraha – an out-and-out satyagraha against the British.

Lest the movement might be construed by the Americans and the Chinese as designed to hamper the war effort, Gandhiji made the point that when the British withdrew from India, American and Allied troops would be allowed to continue to use India as a base of operations against Japan.

The Congress Working Committee met at Wardha from 8 to 14 July and after prolonged deliberations passed a resolution, jointly hammered out by Gandhiji and Jawaharlal Nehru. The resolution gave notice to the British that if they failed to withdraw from India, the Congress would be compelled "to utilize all the non-violent strength it might have gathered since 1920 for the vindication of India's political rights and liberty". Such a widespread struggle, the resolution clarified, would inevitably be under the leadership of Gandhiji. The final decision was however left to the A.I.C.C., which was due to meet in Bombay on 7 August.

Non-Congress political groups greeted the Working Committee's resolution with howls of outrage. The Liberals, the Muslim Leaguers, the leaders of the Depressed Classes, Royists, Communists and the Princes – all united to condemn the resolution. Rajaji wrote to Gandhiji that the demand made in the resolution must either lead to anarchy, if conceded, or to self-inflicted suffering,



if rejected. British power, he argued, could not withdraw without handing over charge to some authority.

Jinnah denounced the resolution as an attempt to blackmail the British into establishing a Hindu raj under the aegis of British bayonet.

In England, as was only to be expected, the British Press condemned the resolution as advancing demands which it was impossible to concede. The Labour Party viewed the possibility of a civil disobedience movement in India with grave apprehension and expressed the opinion that it might destroy all hopes of Indian freedom.

The Viceroy's administration in India prepared itself to suppress the movement and the Congress. The Home Department of the Government of India informed London that it had perfected plans to avert, to abort and to suppress the movement.

The rulers were full of hatred against Gandhiji, whom they considered "the villain of the piece". It was even suggested that he might be deported to Mauritius or Kenya. "If he fasts," one of the Governors wrote, "let it not be known; and if he dies, announce it six months later."

Much before the A.I.C.C. was due to meet, plans were ready to intern Gandhiji at the Aga Khan Palace in Poona and the members of the Working Committee at the Ahmadnagar Fort.

On 5 August 1942 the Working Committee finalized the resolution to be submitted to the A.I.C.C. The resolution emphasized the urgent necessity of the ending of British rule in India. It said the declaration of India's independence would be followed by the formation of a Provisional Government representative of all sections of the people of India. The primary function of the Provisional Government would be the defence of India with all the armed as well as non-violent forces at its command, together with the Allied powers. The resolution gave the A.I.C.C.'s sanction for the starting of a mass struggle on non-violent lines on the widest possible scale, "inevitably" under the leadership of Gandhiji, should the need arise.

The A.I.C.C. began its session on 7 August and passed the resolution on 8 August. Gandhiji told the delegates that even though the resolution had been



passed, he did not intend to start the movement right away. He intended first to wait upon the Viceroy and plead with him for the acceptance of India's demand for the withdrawal of British rule. The process was likely to take two or three weeks. He told Congressmen to be ready to "do or die".

The following day, 9 August, early in the morning, in accordance with plans prepared beforehand, Gandhiji, the members of the Working Committee and some fifty leaders of the Bombay Congress were taken into custody. Of the members of the Working Committee, Rajendra Prasad had not been able to go to Bombay because of illness. He was arrested at his house in Bihar and taken to Hazaribagh Jail. Members of the A.I.C.C. were arrested at various railway stations on their way back to their respective provinces.

All Congress Committees at all levels were declared unlawful. The Press was placed under strict censorship.

9

The sudden blow struck at the only organization that stood guard against chaos and anarchy in the country and safeguarded the interests of the people, particularly when it had committed no breach of law, sent the whole country into a paroxysm of fury. Masses of people, undirected, unorganized and without leadership rose into spontaneous action, giving violent expression to their hatred of British rule.

In Bombay, Gujarat, Delhi, U.P., Bihar, Bengal, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, crowds, roused to madness, took to the streets, indiscriminately attacking everything that symbolized British rule. In the two months that followed railway stations were set on fire and railway tracks damaged, post offices and police outposts were burnt and untold numbers of Government offices of various sorts destroyed or damaged. In many places there were even killings of Europeans and policemen.

The rulers let loose their entire might to crush the rebellion. In addition to the police, the army was pressed into service. No less than 57 battalions were deployed to put down the upsurge. Before many weeks were out, according to official records as many as 658 people had been killed in firings by the police and the army.



People were arrested indiscriminately. By the end of 1942 the Government admitted that some 40,000 persons had been arrested and jailed. In jails prisoners were mercilessly flogged, tortured and subjected to prolonged interrogations. Women were assaulted, stripped and raped.

People were tied to trees and beaten. Flogging as a form of punishment was widely resorted to in many places, so much so that voices were raised in British Parliament in protest against the inhuman measure.

The first paroxysm of fury of unorganized and leaderless mobs had been quelled within two months. Then followed organized mass action by students and youth generally. These were directed and programmed by the leaders of the Socialist wing of the Congress, who had managed to evade arrest. These activities were by and large aimed at sabotage of the war effort. They did not prove as easy to crush, and continued with varying intensity throughout 1943. In Bihar protracted guerilla activity against the British went on for months. In many places, such as Midnapore in Bengal, Ballia in U.P. and Satara in Maharashtra parallel governments were run for varying periods.

The movement was in the end put down, as was only to be expected. For its only driving force was the popular hatred of British rule. It was unplanned, unorganized and unled. It lacked any clearly defined objective. In a sense, however, it did succeed. More than any other event, it opened the eyes of British rulers to the fact that they could not hope to go on governing India for ever, that the masses of Indian people hated their rule and that very soon they would have to wind up their Empire in India, which was gradually becoming for them a liability rather than an asset.

Gandhiji, lodged in the Aga Khan Palace, with Kasturba Gandhi, Sarojini Naidu, Mahadev Desai, Mirabehn and this author as his companions, was profoundly distressed at the tragic turn of events. His distress further deepened when on 15 August, just six days after his arrest, Mahadev Desai suddenly died from a heart attack in the detention camp.

After his clarification at the A.I.C.C. that he did not plan to launch a movement right away but would first seek an interview with the Viceroy, Gandhiji



had been certain that he would not be arrested. He had been unaware that while the Congress leadership had been deliberating on the policy it should adopt in the critical situation that faced the country, the rulers had been perfecting their own plans to strike at the Congress.

The reign of terror let loose by the regime following the passing of the Congress resolution and the counter-violence resorted to by the masses profoundly saddened Gandhiji. On 31 December 1942 he wrote to Linlithgow, the Viceroy, regretting the policy of ruthless repression being pursued by the rulers and challenged the Viceroy to prove that he, Gandhiji, had been in error or that Indian demand for the withdrawal of the British was in any way unjustified.

In his answer Linlithgow referred to murders, burning alive of police officers, wrecking of trains and the destruction of property being indulged in by mobs and laid the responsibility for them on the Congress, and above all on Gandhiji himself. Should Gandhiji retrace his steps, he wrote, the Government would be willing to reconsider its policy.

Gandhiji wrote back that while he deplored the mob violence, he held the Government responsible for it. The retracing, therefore, had to be done by the Government.

The Viceroy stuck to the Government's version of the events and to the policy being pursued, and Gandhiji gave notice of a 21-day fast.

Gandhiji began the fast on 10 February 1943 and ended it on 3 March. The rulers had been certain he would not be able to survive the fast, and had even made arrangements for his funeral. However, even though during the fast there were times when his condition became extremely critical, so that his life hung in the balance, he survived the ordeal and all India heaved a huge sigh of relief. The rulers were visibly disappointed.

While Gandhiji argued with the regime and mortified the flesh to vindicate the truth as he saw it and the Congress leadership remained imprisoned in the Ahmadnagar Fort and other jails, the Muslim League was having a heyday. With the help of the British Governors, and through use of trickery, threats and blackmail, Jinnah managed to bring under the effective influence of the Muslim League the Ministries in Assam, Bengal, the Punjab and Sind — the Provinces



which had rejected the Muslim League in the elections held in 1937. By April 1943 he felt so inebriated with the power he had acquired that he called upon his followers to get ready for the battle that he was planning to launch for securing Pakistan by vivisectioning the country. "Collect funds, consolidate the National Guards," he told them. "Let us exploit the Ministries. We should begin our offensive immediately on the termination of the war." He vehemently opposed any suggestion of any official mercy being shown to the Congress.

Sufferings of the people meanwhile continued to grow. Shortage of food in many parts of the country had grown to famine conditions. In the Muslim League ruled Bengal famine reached such proportions that three and a half million people fell victim to its ravages. Millions more died from diseases that came in the wake of famine. Gandhiji poured over the reports in the detention camp. Consciousness of his helplessness to do anything to provide succour to the distressed humanity of Bengal plunged him into deep gloom.

Then came the death of Kasturba – the second death to take place in the Aga Khan Palace detention camp. (Why it is called a 'palace' God only knows. There is nothing palatial about it.) From the very first day of her confinement Kasturba had remained in indifferent health. By the last week of November 1943 she was bedridden with multiple ailments – tachycardia, spells of breathlessness and occasionally pain in the chest. The reluctance of the authorities to let her have the services of physicians and nursing attendants of her choice made matters worse. On 22 February 1944 she passed away in the arms of her husband.

Ba's death devastated Gandhiji. For a time he became distraught. He could think of nothing else. But demands of the country's affairs would not let him nurse his private grief for long. He entered into correspondence with Wavell, the new Viceroy, asking for re-examination of the policy of the Government towards India. Wavell repeated the old arguments, holding the Congress and Gandhiji responsible for the popular violence of 1942-43 and suggested that the Congress revise its policy and accept the proposals enunciated in the Cripps offer as the basis for a settlement.

Disappointed again, Gandhiji then made the request that he and his companions be removed from the Aga Khan Palace to some ordinary jail where



the expenditure incurred on them would be less. After all, he wrote, it was public money that was being spent on their maintenance.

This the Government was willing to consider, but before any decision could be taken Gandhiji suffered a severe attack of malaria. This was not prolonged, but left Gandhiji extremely weak and run down. Wavell was scared. He could not countenance the prospect of Gandhiji dying of illness in jail. With the concurrence of the British Cabinet he ordered the release of Gandhiji and his companions.

Gandhiji was accordingly freed from detention on 6 May 1944 — to begin the last phase of his struggle for India's emancipation.

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SUSHILA NAYAR



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SUSHILA NAYAR



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PART I
TOWARDS CONFRONTATION



CHAPTER I: MOVING TOWARDS CONFRONTATION

1

The year 1940 started with the legacy of a complete deadlock in the political situation in the country. The genesis and nature of that deadlock have been treated in detail in the preceding volume of the series. Nevertheless it would be in order to mention in brief the train of events that brought to an end the tenuous peace that had prevailed for a short period between the two contending forces, viz., British Imperialism and Indian nationalism, and brought all constitutional progress to a grinding halt.

On 3 September 1939, following the declaration of war against Germany by the British Government, the Government of India headed by the Viceroy, without consulting either the Central Assembly or the Provincial Assemblies or leaders of political parties, proclaimed that India too was at war with Germany. The representative of the King Emperor then proceeded to arm himself with a series of emergency powers through Viceregal ordinances, designed to suppress dissent and to gear India's manpower and resources to the needs of the war.

Nationalist India resented this arbitrary act, especially at a time when in the country's eleven Provinces popular Ministries had been functioning under a constitution which was of the British Government's own making. The Congress took serious note of the Viceregal action. The Working Committee in a resolution passed on 14 September expressed its lack of faith in the professions of British and French Governments that they were fighting for the defence of democracy. Often in the past "fervent declaration of faith" on the part of these Governments had been followed by "ignoble desertion". If Great Britain meant what she said, the Working Committee's resolution went on, let her "end imperialism in her own possessions, establish full democracy in India" and let the Indian people exercise "the right of self-determination by framing their own constitution through a Constituent Assembly without external interference". The Working Committee invited the British Government "to declare in unequivocal terms what their war aims are in regard to democracy and imperialism and the new order that is envisaged, in particular how these aims are going to apply to India



and to be given effect to in the present". [*Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Publications Division, Government of India, New Delhi, Vol. LXX, pp. 409-13]

The Viceroy, in answer, started a round of consultations. At short intervals he called for interview not only Gandhiji and the members of the Congress Working Committee, but also, as a counterweight, M. A. Jinnah and other leaders of the Muslim League and a host of rulers of Indian States, leaders of various minority groups and persons representing various vested interests. Altogether 52 persons were thus consulted.

Then on 17 October Linlithgow issued a declaration announcing that "conversations with representatives of so many different points of view revealed marked differences of outlook, markedly different demands, and markedly different solutions for the problems that lie before us".

But that, as everyone could see, was the whole point of the exercise: to let the Congress know – which it already did – that its demand for the independence of India was opposed by a variety of minority and sectional interests.

The Viceroy turned down the Congress demand for a declaration of war aims. His Majesty's Government, he said, had not "yet defined with any ultimate precision their detailed objectives in the prosecution of the war". He however quoted the British Prime Minister's statement that in prosecuting the war Britain sought to lay "a foundation of a better international system", and that "like all the peoples of Europe", Britain longed for peace that would not be interrupted by constant alarms and threats.

As regards Britain's intentions concerning India, he commended the Government of India Act of 1935, work on the federal part of which had been suspended for the duration of the war, but promised reconsideration of the Act after the war "in the light of the then circumstances". The ultimate objective of Britain in regard to India was of course Dominion Status. The Viceroy refused to commit himself to a "more extensive scheme", a "more widely phrased indication of the intentions of His Majesty's Government", for, said he,

it is essential in matters of this nature, affecting the future of tens of millions of people, affecting the relations of the great communities,



affecting the Princes of India, affecting the immense commercial and industrial enterprises ... that the largest measure of agreement practicable should be achieved.

As a short-term measure Linlithgow offered to set up "a consultative group, representative of all major political parties in British India and of the Indian Princes, over which the Governor-General would himself preside", which would have as its object the association of public opinion in India with the conduct of the war. [Ibid, pp. 414-19]

The Working Committee of the Congress considered the Viceroy's statement at its meeting held on 22 October 1939, and found it "wholly unsatisfactory" and "in every way unfortunate". The mention of the differences among several parties in the Viceregal statement, the Working Committee's resolution said, was a screen to hide the true intentions of Great Britain. Extending support to Great Britain under the circumstances would amount to an endorsement of the imperialist policy which the Congress had always sought to end. The Working Committee called upon the nation "to be prepared for all developments and eventualities", and as a first step directed the Congress Ministries, functioning in no less than eight Provinces of India, to tender their resignations. [Ibid, pp. 419-20]

On 26 October Samuel Hoare, speaking in a debate on India in the House of Commons, further expounded the policy enunciated in the Viceroy's statement. He declared that the British Government stood by the statement first made by Lord Irwin that the aim of British policy was the establishment of Dominion Status in India, which meant the status of full equality with other members of the British Commonwealth. But there were difficulties in the way of an early attainment of that goal. These difficulties were created by divisions between the classes and communities in India. Dilating on the divisions, Samuel Hoare said:

The Princes are afraid of domination by British India, the Muslims are firmly opposed to a Hindu majority at the Centre. The Depressed Classes and other minorities genuinely believe that responsible government, meaning a Government dependent on the Hindu majority, will sacrifice their interests.



As long as these divisions existed, it was impossible, he said, to accept the demand for immediate and full responsibility at the Centre on a particular date. He warned the Congress against choosing "the alternative of non-cooperation". If it came to that, the British Government would have no choice. "The King-Emperor's Government must be carried on, and it would be carried on with efficiency, with strength and with justice. We, like any other Government, would give the Viceroy our full support." [Ibid, pp. 421-26]

2

In terms of the Working Committee's resolution of 22 October the Congress Ministries in all the eight Provinces where the Congress was in power resigned. Seven of these Provinces were brought under the Governor's rule. In the eighth, Assam, a minority Government under Saadulla was installed in office.

In the meantime the Viceroy was asked by the Secretary of State to initiate triangular negotiations between himself, the Congress and the Muslim League to secure agreement for Indian representation in the Central Government, subject to British control being maintained over security and the armed forces and the Commander-in-Chief remaining a member of the Viceroy's Executive Council. Further, the powers of the Viceroy must remain undiminished. [Tara Chand, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Publications Division, Government of India, New Delhi, 1972, Vol. IV, p. 298]

At the negotiations which followed on 1 November and to which the Viceroy had invited Gandhiji, Jinnah and Congress President Rajendra Prasad, Gandhiji took up the position enunciated in the various Congress resolutions, viz., that the British Government must make a declaration recognizing India as an independent nation with the right to determine her own future form of Government, without outside intervention, through a Constituent Assembly elected on the widest possible basis of franchise and by agreement in regard to communal representation. Both Gandhiji and Rajendra Prasad reiterated the Congress position that it sought to secure through the constitution such protection for the rights of the minorities as might prove acceptable to them.



Jinnah opposed any such declaration. He opposed the idea of a Constituent Assembly and insisted that the Muslim League's allegations against the Congress Ministries in the Provinces of atrocities against Muslims must be looked into.

The Viceroy in a statement issued on 5 November announced the failure of his efforts to secure agreement between the Congress and the Muslim League. He regretted that he could do nothing in the absence of such an agreement. He said:

There are grave differences of view which have to be ...bridged. There are strong and deeply rooted interests which are entitled to the fullest consideration and whose attitude is not a thing lightly to be brushed aside. There are minorities which are great in numbers as well as great in historic importance and in culture. These are all factors to which full weight has to be given.

But complex as the problems were, the Viceroy said he refused to believe that they were insoluble. He intended to continue his efforts. [Ibid, pp. 429-30]

On 10 January 1940 he made yet another statement. Speaking at a luncheon in Bombay he declared, in a more persuasive language than used before by him, that the offer of the British Government was still open. This was:

(1) that the British Government's objective for India was full Domination Status of the Statute of Westminster variety;

(2) that so far as the intermediate period was concerned they were ready to consider the reopening of the scheme of the Act of 1935 as soon as practicable after the war with the aid of Indian opinion; and

(3) that they were prepared in the meantime, subject to local adjustments between the leaders of the great communities (meaning of course the Congress and the Muslim League), to expand the Executive Council of the Governor-General by the inclusion of a small number of political leaders.

The Viceroy again harped on the claims of the minorities, especially of "the great Muslim minority and the Scheduled Castes", and the guarantees given to them in the past, which must be honoured. [C.W.M.G., LXXI, pp. 433-34]



On the face of it the statement contained nothing new and put forward no new proposals. It was a rehash of the old proposals already considered and rejected by the Congress. Yet for some reasons it was not rejected outright by the leadership. It appeared to them to convey a message that the British were eager for a settlement. Gandhiji accordingly sought an interview with the Viceroy and the two arranged to meet on 5 February. Gandhiji wrote in *Harijan* on 16 January:

I like the latest pronouncement of Lord Linlithgow. I believe in his sincerity. There are undoubted snags in that speech. Many 'i's have to be dotted, many 't's have to be crossed. But it seems to contain germs of a settlement honourable to both nations. [Ibid, pp. 107, 114]

Many leaders, among them Biswanath Das, ex-Premier of Orissa, and Rafi Ahmad Kidwai, ex-Minister in the U.P., made public statements indicating that negotiations for a settlement were underway. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1940, Vol. I, p. 30]

Jawaharlal Nehru, who had remained wholly unaffected by the new Viceregal pronouncement and saw no ground for hope that the British Government would accept the Congress position, warned Gandhiji against the harmful effects of his going to see the Viceroy. He wrote:

An atmosphere of approaching compromise pervades the country when, in effect, there is no ground for it.... This kind of impression is demoralizing. I have noticed during the last fortnight that even our Congress delegates' elections (that is, election of delegates for the approaching session of the Congress) have been influenced by this. Many people who, for fear of possible conflict, were keeping in the background, have now pushed themselves in front again when the possibility of enjoying the plums of office and power seems to dangle again in front of them. The effort of several months to keep undesirables out of the Congress has partly failed because of this sudden change in the Indian atmosphere. [*C.W.M.G.*, LXXI, pp. 199-200]

Gandhiji received the letter after he had already seen the Viceroy on 5 February. The meeting ended in failure, with no agreement being arrived at on



the questions that the British considered as of paramount importance: the question of defence, the question of minorities, the question of the Princes and the question of the European interests.

Gandhiji, in a statement made on the following day in New Delhi to reporters representing various newspapers and news agencies in America and England, said:

The vital difference between the Congress demand and the Viceregal offer consists in the fact that the Viceroy's offer contemplates the final determination of India's destiny by the British Government, whereas the Congress contemplates just the contrary. The Congress position is that the test of real freedom consists in the people of India determining their own destiny without any outside interference, and I see no prospect whatsoever of a peaceful and honourable settlement...unless ...England ...accepts the position that the time has come when India must be allowed to determine her own constitution and her status. [Ibid, pp. 186-87]

On 11 February Secretary of State Zetland, through an interview to *The Sunday Times*, delivered a long homily to Gandhiji and the Congress on the importance of the minorities question being settled by Indians themselves. "Long-range bombardment" by leaders from platform and press, he warned, was not likely to lead anywhere. What was wanted was for them to "escape from the tyranny of phrases", to descend "from the abstract to the concrete". He advised discussions "among those who can speak with authority for their followers, informal and in confidence in the first instance". [Ibid, p. 215] Commenting on Zetland's utterance, Gandhiji said it was "a declaration of war against the nationalists". The burden of solving the minorities question had been sought to be placed upon the nationalists. This was impossible without previous recognition of India's independence. [Ibid, pp. 215-16]

Writing in *Harijan* on the same theme Gandhiji referred to the four pillars on which the structure of the Empire in India rested: the European interest, the Army, the Princes and the communal divisions, with the last three created to subserve the first. The builders of the Empire, he wrote, were asking the nationalists to guarantee the first and deal with the remaining three themselves



before India could be treated as an independent nation. If that was the meaning of what Zetland had said then there was no meeting-ground between the nationalist and the imperialist. He concluded:

If, therefore, Lord Zetland represents the British Government's considered view, it is a declaration of war against nationalist India. For all the four pillars stand firm, rock-like. The more the nationalists try to deal with them ...the firmer they must become. [Ibid, pp. 210-11]

The point was that Zetland did represent the "considered view" of the British Government. The British did not find themselves under any pressure to expedite an agreement with nationalist India. They were already getting enough and more by way of men, money and material for their war effort, to some extent with the aid of the classes and interests that were their mainstay in India but chiefly through the use of strong-arm methods.

Then again, though Britain and Germany were technically at war, so far as Britain was concerned nothing much was happening. It was a period of what came to be described as "the phoney war". The theatre of war still lay in the east. Poland, which was overrun, annexed and divided by Germany and Soviet Russia by the first week of October 1939, received no effective help either from Britain or France. All that the British army did was to sail across the Channel and take position in Flanders along the Maginot Line. The French army did the same. The British Navy made some attempt to blockade supplies to Germany from ports of embarkation in Scandinavia, but only with limited success.

Again when Soviet Russia on 30 November 1939 invaded tiny Finland, the Western Allies merely watched. The Finnish army valiantly resisted the immensely superior Russian army for more than three months. But it was only a matter of time. On 13 March 1940 Finland was obliged to sign an armistice, surrendering to Russia large chunks of Finnish territory and a number of naval bases. For well over seven months since war was declared, the theatre of operations remained far removed from the neighbourhood of England and France.



But if the British were in no hurry to change the status quo in India, Gandhiji, too, on his part did not want to precipitate a fight with the British. Even after the failure of his talks with Linlithgow on 5 February, he refused to be hustled. He wrote in *Harijan* of 17 February:

I am quite convinced that we would put ourselves in the wrong if in our impatience we precipitate the battle or, which is the same thing, bang the door on negotiations. The battle will come at the right time when it is clear beyond doubt that there is no escape from it. [Ibid, p. 201]

The leaders in the meanwhile must keep in constant touch with the people and explain to them each step that was taken, for in a non-violent revolution education of the masses was of utmost importance.

Answering a question as regards the duty of students in the context of the coming struggle, Gandhiji wrote on 12 February:

The fight is going on now and it will continue till the nation has come to her birthright. Civil disobedience is one of the many methods of fighting. So far as I can judge today, I have no intention of calling out students. Millions will not take part in civil disobedience, but millions will help in a variety of ways.

Students, too, could help in "a variety of ways". They might, to begin with, learn the art of voluntary discipline, become national servants instead of finding lucrative careers, make contributions to national coffers out of their allowances, promote communal amity and fraternize with Harijans, spin regularly and use certified khadi and they could set apart some time every week to work in villages.

It might become necessary at some time in the future to call out students, though the possibility was remote, Gandhiji wrote, but even in that eventuality only those would be called who had qualified themselves previously in the ways suggested. [Ibid, pp. 205-6]

On 15 February Gandhiji left Wardha for a visit to Santiniketan and then to Malikanda for a meeting of the Gandhi Seva Sangh. A number of people were eager to join him as companions for the journey. He thought of taking along Kasturba and Amrit Kaur. C. F. Andrews had sent word from Santiniketan that all



who cared to come would be welcome. But Gandhiji had second thoughts about the size of the party. He decided that it would be wrong for him to take anyone whose presence was unnecessary. Kasturba, Mahadev Desai, Pyarelal, Kanu Gandhi and Narayan Desai finally made up his retinue. [Ibid, p. 212]

Welcoming Gandhiji on his arrival at Santiniketan on 17 February, Rabindranath Tagore said:

Just at this moment there are problems that darken our destiny. These we know are crowding your path and none of us is free from their attack. Let us for a while pass beyond the bounds of this turmoil and make our meeting today a simple meeting of hearts whose memory will remain when all the moral confusion of our distracted politics will be allayed and the eternal value of our endeavour will be revealed.

Gandhiji, replying, described his visit to Santiniketan as a pilgrimage. The place had proved to be for him truly an abode of peace. He said he had come simply for the *darshan* and blessings of the Poet, leaving behind him all the cares and burdens of politics.

Gandhiji invited the audience to pray with him that C. F. Andrews, then lying ill in a hospital in Calcutta, stricken by prostate trouble, might soon be restored to health. [Ibid, pp. 220-21]

That was not to be. C. F. Andrews did not recover. On 31 March he was operated upon in a hospital in Calcutta, successfully as it was thought. But on 5 April 1940 he passed away. [Ibid, pp. 391, 393]

Tagore had a long talk with Gandhiji on the future of Visva Bharati. Age was creeping in on him and he was worried about what would happen to the institution after him. When Gandhiji parted from him on 19 February he put a letter in Gandhiji's hand. It said:

At one of its [Visva Bharati's] critical moments you have saved it from an utter breakdown and helped it to its legs.... And now, before you take your leave of Santiniketan I make my fervent appeal to you. Accept this institution under your protection, giving it an assurance of permanence if you consider it to be a national asset. Visva Bharati is like a vessel which is



carrying the cargo of my life's best treasure, and I hope it may claim special care from my countrymen for its preservation.

Commenting on the letter in *Harijan* of 2 March 1940, Gandhiji wrote that he had no doubt whatever that the institution deserved to be freed of all anxiety about its future so far as the financial part was concerned. He assured Tagore all assistance that he was capable of rendering in that regard. [Ibid, pp. 290-91]

Malikanda, near Dacca in East Bengal, was Gandhiji's next halt. He arrived there on 20 February 1940 to attend a session of the Gandhi Seva Sangh. At four prolonged sessions held on 21 and 22 February 1940, morning and evening, the Sangh debated whether its continued existence had any justification. Did it have a role either in politics or in constructive work? To be or not to be was the question with which, Hamlet-like, it was faced.

The Sangh owed its origin, like many other public service enterprises, to the munificence of Jamnalal Bajaj. During the first Non-cooperation movement in 1920, Jamnalal Bajaj had undertaken to support a hundred lawyers who would give up their practice. The question had then arisen whether the lawyers so supported should be encouraged to join the Congress. Gandhiji had advised against bringing them into politics. In subsequent years it was decided to use the money earmarked for the Sangh to support not lawyers but constructive workers. But the Gandhi Seva Sangh did not have a clearly defined field of activity of its own. Its members worked in various constructive work organizations and some, who were more interested in political work, were active in the Congress.

At the time of the Malikanda session, of the 243 total membership of the Sangh, 84 were connected with the Congress organization. The rest worked in various constructive work organizations, such as the Charkha Sangh, the Gram Udyog Sangh, the Harijan Sevak Sangh and the Talimi Sangh. Thirty of these were paid workers.

Gandhiji spoke at all the four sittings, and spoke at length. Gandhiji's theme was the spinning-wheel and non-violence. Answering critics who doubted if the spinning-wheel *alone* could bring swaraj, Gandhiji said the spinning-wheel was *not alone*.



As I have said so often, the charkha is the sun round which all other planets revolve. The acorn is so tiny, but when it takes firm root and grows into an oak, it spreads and supports so much foliage. When the charkha mentality spreads the charkha will not remain alone. It will accommodate so many other industries under its aegis. Its fragrance will pervade the whole world. [Ibid, p. 234]

The important thing was the spirit in which the charkha was plied. If one plied the charkha mechanically, whatever the quantity of yarn spun, it was no use. It was like turning a rosary with the mind wandering everywhere. The spinning must be done with devotion, and with a clear understanding of the philosophy behind the charkha. Only then could one derive strength from it.

Gandhiji said he had been aware of the importance of the charkha even in 1909 when he wrote *Hind Swaraj*, although at the time he had not even set eyes on a charkha. He had written *Hind Swaraj* primarily for Dr. Pranjivan Mehta. It was in the main a reproduction of the dialogue that had taken place between him and Dr. Mehta, whose guest he had been for nearly a month. To begin with Dr. Mehta had considered Gandhiji foolish and sentimental. But gradually he had come round to Gandhiji's view.

The spinning-wheel represented the spirit of ahimsa, said Gandhiji. Ahimsa implied *asvada* (conquest of the palate). It implied frugality. It implied love for the opponent. Did the Gandhi Seva Sangh meet the test? At the conference ghee flowed like water. One must be miserly in spending public money. Then, did they have pity for those who abused them?

Those members of the Sangh who were in the Congress derived their strength not from the Sangh but from the Congress. It was the Congress that provided them the scope for testing their prowess. It was like a stormy ocean. The Sangh was like a harbour and provided no such scope. He himself, Gandhiji continued, had gained strength from the Congress, not from the Sangh. A Gandhian was an individual, but the Sangh was a society. One's being a member of the Sangh and working in the Congress was bound to cause unnecessary bitterness. One way was for members of the Gandhi Seva Sangh to work in the Congress but not to accept any office in the organization. [Ibid, pp. 236-38, 240, 247, 249]



What the Gandhi Seva Sangh could do was to transform itself into a centre of post-graduate studies in constructive work. It could undertake research work for the various constructive work organizations. It could also undertake researches into non-violence. Gandhiji said:

For me non-violence is something to be shunned if it is a private virtue. My concept of non-violence is universal. It belongs to the millions.... Anything that cannot reach the millions is not for me.... We were born to prove that truth and non-violence is not just a rule for personal conduct. It can become the policy of a group, a community, a nation. [Ibid, p. 264]

In the course of the deliberations the members were persuaded that the Sangh had become a superfluity. The resolution that was passed at the conference, while calling upon members of the Sangh who were active in the Congress not to "continue as members of the Sangh", declared that the Sangh from then on would address itself "to that part of the constructive programme which at present does not come within the province of the AISA, AIVIA, etc., e.g. the observation, study and research in the subject of the relation of constructive work to ahimsa". Since there were not enough workers fitted for the job, the resolution said, the membership of the Sangh would remain confined to just nine workers, viz., Shrikrishnadas Jaju, R. S. Dhotre, Kishorelal Mashruwala, Gopabandhu Choudhri, Abhayadevji, S. C. Das Gupta, Dilkhush Diwanji, Sitaram Patwardhan and Krishnadas Gandhi. All the rest would be deemed to have resigned. [Ibid, pp. 439-40]

The Gandhi Seva Sangh had ceased to be.

4

On 28 February Gandhiji reached Patna, where he attended the meetings of the Congress Working Committee held on 28 and 29 February and 1 March 1940.

At the meeting, which was charged with the task of giving shape to the resolution to be considered at the forthcoming session of the Congress at Ramgarh, the members strongly expressed themselves in favour of mass action. Maulana Azad and Jawaharlal Nehru were particularly insistent on it.



Azad argued that, having withdrawn cooperation three months earlier, the Congress must take the next logical step. If the Congress refused to advance, it would be construed as retreat. Gandhiji pointed out the difficulties in the way and the risks attendant on any precipitate action. In Sind there was communal rioting. In East Bengal there was widespread tension. In the Punjab the Khaksars were on the rampage. The Congress ranks were riven by quarrels and indiscipline. He was suspicious of what Subhas Bose, the Kisan organizations and the anti-compromise camp people might do once mass civil disobedience was launched. They were not likely to keep within discipline.

Azad expressed the view that once Gandhiji gave the call, masses in large numbers would follow him and Subhas Bose and others would not have the opportunity for "mischief". On the other hand if the Congress did nothing, they would have a handy stick to beat it with. Gandhiji did not agree that the problems would go away with the launching of civil disobedience.

Nehru said he did not agree with Gandhiji. The Congress seemed to be gripped with a feeling of indecision and insecurity. The Congress spoke with a hundred voices and people were led to believe that it did not mean business. The stalemate was injurious to the country. Repression was continuing and in the absence of any concrete programme Congressmen had gone back to their local quarrels. Subhas was not the right type but why did people listen him? The Congress had done big things in the past and there was no reason why it should not do so again notwithstanding what a few wrong-minded people might do.

Gandhiji said they had not understood his point. All he wanted to say was that conditions were not favourable for mass civil disobedience. They would have to think of some other type of action.

As regards the constitutional package the Congress would settle for, Gandhiji said he had made it clear that if Dominion Status and Independence were not convertible terms, he would not have Dominion Status. In fact what he had insisted on was self-determination. [The Diary of Mahadev Desai (unpublished), Book No. 40, pp. 280-89]

The Working Committee in its resolution passed on 1 March said:



The recent pronouncements made on behalf of the British Government in regard to India demonstrate that Great Britain is carrying on the war fundamentally for imperialist ends and for the preservation and strengthening of her Empire.... Under these circumstances, it is clear that the Congress cannot in any way, directly or indirectly, be party to the war.... The Congress therefore strongly disapproves of Indian troops being made to fight for Great Britain and of the drain from India of men and material for the purpose of the war. Neither the recruiting nor the money raised in India can be considered to be voluntary contributions from India. Congressmen, and those under the Congress influence, cannot help in the prosecution of the war with men, money or material.

The Congress hereby declares again that nothing short of complete independence can be accepted by the people of India.... Dominion Status or any other status within the imperial structure is wholly inapplicable to India.

The resolution reiterated the demand for a Constituent Assembly, elected on the basis of adult suffrage where the rights of recognized minorities would be fully protected by agreement, or by arbitration if agreement was not reached on any point. It repudiated attempts to divide India or to split up her nationhood. It rejected the right of the rulers of Indian States, or of foreign vested interests to come in the way of Indian freedom and declared that sovereignty must rest with the people whether in the States or in the Provinces.

Coming to the political programme the resolution said:

The Congress withdrew the Ministries from the Provinces where the Congress had a majority in order to dissociate India from the war and to enforce the Congress determination to free India from foreign domination. This preliminary step must naturally be followed by civil disobedience, to which the Congress will unhesitatingly resort 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. The Congress desires to draw the attention of Congressmen to Gandhiji's declaration that he can only undertake the responsibility of declaring civil disobedience when he is satisfied that they are strictly observing discipline



and are carrying out the constructive programme prescribed in the Independence Pledge. [C.W.M.G., LXXI, pp. 440-41]

Did the resolution mean that the Congress had closed the door on negotiations ? No, Gandhiji said:

My interpretation of the resolution is that the Congress has not closed the door. It has been closed by Lord Zetland. There can be no negotiations on his terms so far as the Congress is concerned.... The Congress will not rest till India is a free country as Britain is ...the Congress will enter into no compromise that gives India less. [Ibid, pp. 296-97]

In the country at large the Patna resolution was widely interpreted as implying that the struggle was coming; that it was but a matter of days before it was launched. Gandhiji tried to check the enthusiasm of the rank and file from running wild.

On 5 March he wrote in *Harijan* under the caption "When ?":

There is nothing in the resolution to warrant the belief that the atmosphere is suitable for declaring civil disobedience. It will be suicidal to declare it when there is so much indiscipline and violence within the Congress itself.... 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. The apathy about the constructive programme, i.e., spinning and sales of khadi, I take to be positive signs of unbelief. Battle through such instruments is foredoomed to failure....

Let it be clearly understood that I cannot be hustled into precipitating the struggle. They err grievously who think that I can ever declare civil disobedience, having been driven thereto by the so called leftists.... I ask them [Congressmen] to believe me when I say that I am incapable of acting without the fulfilment of the conditions laid down for declaring mass civil disobedience. [Ibid, pp. 305-6]

The British, even those among them sympathetic towards India and her cause, were alarmed by the Working Committee's resolution, especially the indication in it that the Congress might resort to civil disobedience to enforce its demand.



A "very responsible Englishman" expressed his bafflement at the "rather sudden and drastic change from a demand for Dominion Status to one for complete independence". Could India rule herself without any help from the British? He asked. There were forces which regarded the whole idea of non-violence with contempt and which were gloating over the prospect of the British leaving India. If the British were to leave they would be handing over India to chaos and possible, even probable, civil war. They could not contemplate doing so until they had put India firmly on her feet.

It was the purest nonsense, he wrote, to say that the people of Britain were fighting to bolster up British Imperialism: They were fighting to escape what they knew would befall them under Nazism.

Gandhiji, answering him, wrote that he betrayed tragic ignorance of Indian thought. In the first place, complete independence had been the goal of the Congress since 1929. He himself, Gandhiji said, in a letter to Polak in 1937, had said that if Dominion Status with the right to secede was offered he for one would accept it. But the Congress was not bound by his statement. It had not changed its position of rejection of Dominion Status. The offer had not been made and experience and maturer reflection had led him to the view that Dominion Status even of the Westminster variety would not suit India's case. But the English correspondent thought that India could not yet stand on her own feet. If that was his view, then apparently he was not thinking even of Dominion Status. The English belief in the incapacity of India to come to a sane judgment or to defend herself against civil war or foreign aggression was perhaps the greatest stumbling block in the way of a settlement. [Ibid, pp. 313-18]

Another English sympathizer, Carl Heath, wrote to Gandhiji about the feeling in Government circles in England that though they anxiously desired a settlement, the Congress meant by 'settlement' what it alone considered right, in other words, it was one-sided dictation. Heath was afraid that if the Congress followed a line of immovable opposition, the British might do the same, and the time for a peaceful settlement would have passed.

The Constituent Assembly that the Congress demanded must be preceded, Heath wrote, by a small, private but very responsible conference of a dozen representative Indian men. Heath assured Gandhiji that the Government



had not banged the door on negotiations and that they were desirous and willing for a solution. [Ibid, pp. 340-41]

Gandhiji, answering Heath, wrote:

The Congress does not dictate or claim to be infallible. It does, however, deny dictatorship to the Muslim League, for example, and even dares to deny it to the British Government.... Hence, if the British Government will not resign the dictatorship, the Congress has perforce to use its only non-violent sanction to dislodge it from the position it should never have occupied.

....Independence or even the Dominion Status of the sincere type means nothing if it does not mean self-determination by the people of India. The minorities represented on the Assembly will practically dictate their own safeguards. Neither the Congress nor the Muslim League can be allowed to obstruct the proceedings of such an elected Assembly.

There remain the Princes. They are free to come if they are elected not by the common vote but by the vote of their people on the basis of adult suffrage. Pray remember they are a creation of the British Government. The treaties that are adverse to the rights of the people have no value.... But I personally recognize the British Government's difficulty in the matter. They have raised a monster. They cannot all of a sudden abolish him. Therefore I have said: 'Deal with British India only.'

As for "a small private but very responsible conference" suggested by the correspondent, Gandhiji said such a conference or committee could only be appointed by the Constituent Assembly, otherwise it would have no representative character.

Gandhiji asked:

Are the British Government prepared to make a declaration to convene at the earliest opportunity, not later than the termination of the war, a Constituent Assembly of representatives elected on the basis of adult suffrage or an equivalent for the purpose of determining the mode of the Government of India, including Princes' India if possible, and without it if they won't agree? Pending the convening of such an Assembly the



Government of India will be conducted, as far as possible, as if it was responsible to the Central Assembly without the official bloc and the Viceroy's Council shall contain a majority of elected representatives from the Assembly. [Ibid, pp. 330-31]

5

Ramgarh, near Patna in Bihar, had been selected as the venue for the fifty-third session of the Indian National Congress. The election for the presidency of the session took place on 15 February. The official candidate, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, was opposed by M. N. Roy, one-time orthodox Communist then undergoing metamorphosis as "radical democrat". Of the twenty Provincial Congress Committees nineteen participated in the election, no delegates having been elected by the Bengal PCC, which continued its defiance of the Working Committee, impelled in that course by the two Bose brothers, Subhas and Sarat. The Bengal PCC was in fact later suspended by the Working Committee.

The result of the election, announced on 16 February, showed that Azad had won by an overwhelming majority, securing 1,864 votes to M. N. Roy's 183. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1940, Vol. I, p. 220]

Gandhiji attended the session and spoke both at the Subjects Committee and at the open session. Gandhiji left Sevagram* on 13 March and arrived at Ramgarh the following day, in time to open a khadi and village industries exhibition at the venue of the Congress.

At the meeting of the Working Committee, held on 15 March, Gandhiji began by reading out a draft of a resolution sent to him by Jayaprakash Narayan. Jayaprakash in his draft wanted the Congress "to state definitely the ideals of freedom" for which it stood and for which it intended to invite the Indian people to undergo the utmost sufferings.

The ideals of freedom set out by J. P. contained the following points:

The law to be based on the will of the people freely expressed by them; guarantee of full individual and civil liberty and cultural and religious freedom; equality of rights; social justice and economic freedom; collective ownership and control of all large-scale production, with the nationalization of heavy transport, shipping, mining and the heavy industries and decentralization of the textile



industry; reorganization of villages to make them self-governing, self-sufficient units, with land belonging to the cultivator and with no one allowed to have more land than would be required for his and his family's maintenance, so that landlordism on the one hand and farm bondage on the other would be abolished; representation of the workers on the management of State-managed enterprises; abolition of the Princely order and establishment of complete democratic government in the States. [C.W.M.G., LXXI, pp. 422-23]

As reported by Mahadev Desai, Gandhiji saw no objection to the points contained in J.P.'s draft being incorporated in the resolution of the Working Committee passed at Patna on 1 March. The members of the Working Committee were divided on the issue. Maulana Azad, Rajaji (a special invitee to the Working Committee) and Rajendra Prasad were opposed to the idea of adding anything to the resolution as passed at Patna. They thought it was best to stick to the national demand. Rajaji said it was no use discussing how freedom would be used before it had been won. Rajendra Prasad said introducing an economic approach into the national approach would weaken the position of the Congress. Bhulabhai Desai argued that a battle for freedom could only be fought on a national issue, never on an economic issue, which required an internal revolution.

Jawaharlal Nehru disagreed. He thought there was no harm in the Congress expressing its views on the questions raised. There was a debate going on in the world on such things as human rights. H. G. Wells had written on it. What J.P. had said did not go against the Patna resolution. It only called for an extension of the resolution.

Gandhiji again expressed himself in favour of taking the substance of J.P.'s draft. When Congressmen shouted 'freedom, freedom', they must tell the peasants what gain it would bring them. It was a way of educating the people, of drawing them towards the Congress.

"But," said Rajendra Babu, "people are drawn by the idea of freedom in the abstract. Waging a battle for immediate economic gains leads to demoralization when the gains are not forthcoming. All the battles Gandhiji fought were fought on abstract issues."



"Well, then," said Gandhiji, "let us drop the matter. Only, it ought to be made clear that it is not our intention to exploit anyone."

Rajaji said no one doubted it. Nehru challenged this assumption. He said his impression of Indian history was that the Hindus were an imperial race. The whole Gupta period was a story of imperialism. He did not think there was anything wrong in it; in fact he was proud of it. Those were the days of India's strength. It was by no means impossible, he said, that free India might be imperialistic. "Mahatmaji is a practical man," he said, "his chief concern is how the masses can be moved." [The Diary of Mahadev Desai, (unpublished), Book No. 40, pp. 295-301]

The consensus at the meeting being against acceptance of J.P.'s draft, the matter was dropped. Gandhiji, nevertheless, later published it in full in *Harijan* of 20 April, generally commending it.

He wrote:

As an ideal to be reduced to practice as soon as possible after India comes into her own, I endorse in general all except one of the propositions enunciated by Shri Jayaprakash....

Shri Jayaprakash's propositions about land may appear frightful. In reality they are not. No man should have more land than he needs for dignified sustenance. Who can dispute the fact that the grinding poverty of the masses is due to their having no land that they can call their own?

But it must be realized that the reform cannot be rushed. It is to be brought about by non-violent means, it can only be done by education both of the haves and have-nots. The former should be assured that there never will be force used against them. The have-nots must be educated to know that no one can really compel them to do anything against their will, and that they can secure their freedom by learning the art of non-violence, i.e., self-suffering.

Where Gandhiji said he disagreed with Jayaprakash was in regard to his proposition about the Princes. The Princes were, at least in law, independent and Gandhiji could not envisage a settlement in which the Princes would have effaced themselves. A settlement was conceivable in which the big States would retain



their status. Of course the people of the States would have the same rights as enjoyed by the people of British India. They would have freedom of speech, a free press and justice guaranteed to them. Perhaps Jayaprakash did not have faith that the Princes would voluntarily surrender their autocracy. Gandhiji said he had that faith. [C.W.M.G., LXXI, pp. 424-25]

J.P.'s draft resolution having thus been disposed of, the Working Committee took up consideration of the question uppermost in everyone's mind, viz., desirability or otherwise of launching a mass civil disobedience movement to enforce the national demand.

Gandhiji said he had been constantly thinking on the matter. As regards the national demand, his attitude, he said, had become even more stiff than it had been a month or so earlier when he had gone to see the Viceroy. And yet he did not feel that he had the means for undertaking a fight. It was easy to say: "Fight!" But if people took up the fight and then had to retreat because of the indiscipline in the ranks, what then? If he failed to achieve what he sought to achieve by imposing suffering on millions of people it would amount to a betrayal. The indiscipline that prevailed would not be removed by launching a struggle. It went without saying that the fight could be carried on even if large numbers withdrew from the field. Even a small band could continue the battle. But what he had in mind was a mass civil disobedience movement.

Maulana Azad: "It is a matter to be pondered why indiscipline has increased in the Congress during the recent two or three years. Office acceptance surely is one of the reasons."

Gandhiji: "I want to place before you an alternative. Leave me out and start civil disobedience. Let me keep myself in reserve. If things go well, maybe at a later stage I can come in."

Azad: "Such a course is fraught with risk. In this matter everyone looks up to you and to you alone."

Rajaji expressed the view that civil disobedience was not the only course open before the country. The goal, he said, should be related to the strength to achieve it.



Gandhiji: "The only weapon that I have is that of mass civil disobedience. If it fails me, I shall fight alone. I may even go back to Gujarat and fight from there. What oppresses me today is the organizational weakness of the Congress. If you say I need not use the Congress organization I shall find a way. I did not use the Congress organization in Champaran, Kheda or Ahmedabad. I can do much if I can be freed of the burden."

Azad: "Has something happened since Patna to make you change your mind?"

Gandhiji: "No. But even at Patna I was not for launching a struggle right away."

Nehru: "The attack is from the other side and we have to resist it. Had we been a free country and been attacked, we would not have said that since we were weak we would not put up resistance. We must put up resistance and we must find a way of doing so. Whatever steps we take should have civil disobedience as the inevitable consequence. Our voice has become feeble. We have been getting progressively weaker. In a number of ways our country is now weaker than it was when the Ministries resigned. The attacks on us grow each day. You say, 'we are not ready, there is indiscipline'. This confuses us. Considering the supreme position you occupy in the country, how is it possible that there should be a satyagraha and you should keep away from it?"

Vallabhbhai Patel: "The British will say you are cunning and want to keep out of prison and guide the movement. You cannot keep yourself in reserve. I had said I would leave everything to you. But here I must oppose you. You are a great man, but however great a man may be I shall not surrender my will to him. You have done the country much good, but you have also done harm. You have rendered many incapable of thinking for themselves."

The discussion then turned to the Constituent Assembly demanded by the Congress.

"Supposing," Gandhiji said, "there should be civil disobedience, followed by negotiations ending in a settlement and as a consequence a Constituent Assembly came into being. Supposing further that the Muslims came in and put



up the demand that the Punjab, Bengal, Sind and Baluchistan should be handed over to them. We must have a policy to deal with such a demand."

Rajendra Prasad: "And what if they keep away from the elections to the Constituent Assembly?"

"Yes," said Gandhiji. "All these questions have to be considered. I can boldly say that I can go to the Punjab and confront Sikandar Hyat Khan. The end of non-violence is agreement."

Nehru added that the end of violence, too, was agreement, maybe compulsory.

Gandhiji asked the members to consider what would happen if, in the Constituent Assembly they all visualized, the Muslim League achieved a sweeping victory and put up its demands. Would they violently resist the demand? That would not be the way of non-violence. Gandhiji continued:

We must not seek the aid of British Army. It is not for us. I know Munshi, Rajaji, Katju and others sought help of the Army. Even then I had said that if they could not carry on without Army help, they should give up [the Ministries]. We must not think of using British bayonets to enforce the will of the Constituent Assembly. To me this is not an academic issue. Of course it is conceivable that Hindus may not come in the Constituent Assembly in an effective majority. Others may come in large numbers and say they want British Raj to continue. In that case we shall be obliged to fight. But the fight will have to be a non-violent one.

Azad asked Gandhiji if he had a solution. Gandhiji said he had one. He would say to the Muslims: 'Why do you want to dismember the country? Swallow us too.'

Nehru said it would be an immoral position. No one had the right to make an offering of thirty crores of people. The first condition of the Constituent Assembly should be that the British must withdraw their army.

Gandhiji: "I am asking you, what will you do if the Muslims want partition?"



Nehru: "I cannot conceive that they will make such a demand. It is so fantastic. We must have no British army, no division of India. It is impossible for the British to concede to India a Constituent Assembly easily. We may sooner expect a tiger to turn vegetarian. They are trying to have the Muslims on their side. If there is civil disobedience, they will try to crush it. There may also be sporadic violence. But I am not afraid."

Bhulabhai Desai expressed the view that all that civil disobedience could secure was Dominion Status. Full independence and Constituent Assembly could only be secured through violence.

H. K. Mahtab said the minority could not be given a *carte blanche*, in which case the Constituent Assembly would have to function under protection. If he were the general, he said, he would not start civil disobedience.

Pattabhi Sitaramayya painted a gloomy picture of the chances of success of civil disobedience. The Muslim mass mind was anti-Hindu, he said. In the U.P., which had a little over 14 per cent Muslim population, 65 per cent of the police was Muslim. Civil disobedience in Bengal, Bihar and Sind would have little chance of success. If started, it would be put down in three months and the hands of the clock would be turned back for ever.

Abdul Ghaffar Khan said he had no doubt that if the call came people in large numbers would be ready to go to jail. His fear was that even if they succeeded in gaining their end through civil disobedience, they would not be able to handle what they gained. They would not be able to preserve it. Many who had been considered selfless had turned out to be extremely selfish. Those who had appeared to be angels were no angels at all. Ghaffar Khan expressed the view that civil disobedience should be started only when the country had a minimum number of people who were honest and who could take the reins of Government.

Azad: "Even the best of ages cannot create a paradise. Men are fallible. The question is only of degree. Now we know that our gold had contained a lot of base metal."

Gandhiji: "Khan Saheb, what would you say if all the Muslims in the Constituent Assembly said that they wanted Pakistan?"

Abdul Ghaffar Khan: "The demand should be conceded."



Rajagopalachari said the Constituent Assembly that the Congress demanded was only conceivable under British aegis. It was impossible to conceive of a revolutionary foundation for a Constituent Assembly to be convened under the existing conditions. The British would have to convene the Assembly. As regards the demand for separation, should the Muslims make it, the majority would not be able to decide the question on the basis of non-violence. It would not have the authority to do so. As for civil disobedience, he agreed with Nehru that it would be crushed, with no favourable follow-up. The Congress had not the strength.

Shankarrao Dev, speaking for Maharashtra said that he saw no preparation for civil disobedience in that Province. There was no progress in the constructive programme. People were prepared to go to jail, but it would solve no problem.

Vallabhbhai Patel: "In the Constituent Assembly if the Muslims of certain Provinces ask for division, speaking for myself, I would let them have it."

Nehru: "I would not let them have it. I consider it violent and immoral."
[The Diary of Mahadev Dasai (unpublished) Book No. 40, pp. 295-324]

* On 5 March Gandhiji had notified that Segaoon had been renamed Sevagram to avoid confusion with another village and railway station Shegaon, 132 miles away.

6

The Working Committee met again on 17 March. Mahadev Desai has faithfully recorded the proceedings.

Maulana Azad began the discussion by putting forward the proposition that rights could be gained either by the sword or by agreement. It was not correct to say that a Constituent Assembly could result only from a revolution, as happened in the French Revolution. There could be a Constituent Assembly as a result of a negotiated settlement with the British. It was not necessary for the British to leave. All that was required was for them to stop opposing India's right. If the country showed the requisite faith in civil disobedience, such a settlement was possible through civil disobedience.



The Congress must stick to its resolve that India would not support the war with a single man, with a single pice. Having taken the decision at Patna the Congress must adhere to it and not go back.

Possible Muslim demand for separation came up again. Nehru said it would be immoral to impose on a majority something to which it was opposed. But he would not use the British military to enforce the will of the majority. Should it become necessary he would use the police.

Adverting to the question of India's participation in the war Nehru said : "Do we seek to gain any advantage by lining up with them [the British] ? They are today massing troops in Syria, Transjordan and Iran. It is dangerous even unconsciously to support them. Bhulabhai said that we could not achieve independence through non-violence. I do not agree. I do not think force has greater sanction than non-violence. Even as it is Jinnah has been saying that we wish to gain power and then suppress the Muslims. We must clarify our position. Having passed the Patna resolution, we must be prepared for its consequences."

Rajaji expressed himself both against the demand for a Constituent Assembly and against civil disobedience. The Constituent Assembly, as soon as it was convened, would break up on the question of withdrawal of British Army, which would be a contentious issue, while civil disobedience would be seen as a move aimed at grabbing power. Both moves would worsen the communal situation. There had been existing a feeling of separateness in the communities and the Muslims feared that as soon as power was secured it would be used against them.

Nehru said even so the Congress would be able to win a few Muslim seats at least in the U.P., if not in Bihar, as Rajendra Babu feared.

Gandhiji said he would like to address the subjects Committee after the Patna resolution had been voted on.

Gandhiji referred to the view expressed by Nehru that as soon as the Constituent Assembly was convened, or soon after, he would bring in a motion that the British Army be withdrawn, and it was possible that the motion might be carried. But supposing they were in a minority in the Constituent Assembly and



the majority voted for the retention of the British Army for, say, four years. They would then have to accept that position.

Gandhiji said he himself did not favour raising the question right away. What happened after the constitution had been framed was a different matter. If the Constituent Assembly should emerge as a result of negotiations he did not think the other side would behave badly. Jawaharlal's view was thus not his view, and yet it was their duty to fight for the Constituent Assembly.

It was clear from all that they at the Working Committee had said that the country was not ready for civil disobedience. Jawaharlal had done a great thing. He had roused millions of people to great enthusiasm. But, Gandhiji said, he could not create a non-violent army out of that. He felt incapable of taking the reins in his hands. He might even land them in difficulty. He wanted to sit down in Sevagram and work from there. After the Bombay session he had left the Congress legally, but morally he was not out of the Congress.

He had become an enemy to the Muslims. He did not know why. Why did his ahimsa bring that result? Gandhiji went on:

I can remain your general. But I think I can serve you better by leaving the generalship. If you have faith in my judgment, you should listen to me. What does it matter if the world misinterprets the move? I have no other weapon except that of non-violence. If I leave, you will be left free to decide your course.

Gandhiji was asked what his leaving would mean in practical terms. Would the Congress President still be able to go to him for advice? No, Gandhiji said, the Congress President should not come to him for advice.

Pattabhi Sitaramayya thought it might be a good idea. The presence of Gandhiji, he said, did not allow play to the sense of responsibility of the members.

Nehru expressed the view that it would not be easy for Gandhiji wholly to keep away from Congress affairs. The Congress was his creation. The important thing was not what impression might be created in Europe by this move. The important thing was what impression might be created in India. Gandhiji could not keep himself aloof from the happenings in the country. He would have to continue to write, to give interviews and so on. He could not break the organic



bond by which he was tied to the Congress. In his absence all the suppressed energy of the country would take to wrong paths and the ideal of freedom would be harmed. All the work done during the preceding fifteen or twenty years would be washed away. [Ibid, pp. 335-45]

Gandhiji did not insist and the matter was talked away.

7

The open session of the Congress had been scheduled for 19 and 20 March 1940, and the Subjects Committee met to finalize the resolutions for the Congress on 18 March. After the main political resolution, passed by the Working Committee earlier at Patna, had been debated, voted and carried by an overwhelming majority – all the amendments having been rejected – Gandhiji rose to address the Committee. He said:

You have adopted the resolution practically unanimously as there were only seven or eight dissentients. That adds to my responsibility.... Let me then tell you that I do not see at the present moment conditions propitious for an immediate launching of the campaign. We are hemmed in with difficulties greater than those we had to face in the past. They are external and internal. The external difficulties are due to the fact that we have declared unmistakably what we want and the Government have also declared their intentions as clearly as possible.... What however appals me is our internal difficulties.... Our Congress registers are full of bogus members who have swelled them because they know that getting into the Congress means getting to power. Those therefore who never before thought of entering the Congress have come into it and corrupted it.

...There is no discipline in our ranks, they have been divided up into groups which strive to gain more and more power. Non-violence as between ourselves does not seem to us to be necessary. Wherever I go I hear the same complaint. My conception of democracy is not the formation of groups quarrelling with one another to such an extent as to destroy the organization itself.

...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, 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.

...When you appoint me as your general, you obey my command.

There can be no argument about it.... I will insist on my conditions. They are inexorable, and if you do not observe them, I will automatically withdraw.

Gandhiji regretted that he had forfeited the confidence of Muslims and that the Urdu Press poured abuse on him. Yet, he reiterated his belief that there could be no swaraj without Hindu-Muslim unity. His fight was for the Constituent Assembly, which meant agreement and settlement. If the Muslims would have nothing to do with it then he would understand that there was no settlement. Though he wanted to destroy British imperialism, he had only goodwill for Englishmen. If non-violence had the power he attributed to it, it was sure to react on the opponent. If it did not, the fault would be his, not of non-violence.

Compromise, Gandhiji said, was part of his nature and he would go to the Viceroy fifty times if needed, even uninvited. Reverting to the question of mass civil disobedience, Gandhiji said:

Therefore let me tell you that there is no civil disobedience until I feel that you are ready. You have therefore to purify every Congress Committee and make it a satyagraha unit. To that extent it will have to cease to be a democracy, because my word will be law. But if it does not become such a unit, millions of our dumb countrymen will be sacrificed.... There was in earlier campaigns enough of violence of thought and word, but there was non-violence in action and therefore the masses were saved. I would not light-heartedly imperil those masses today, and that is why I insist on the strictest non-violence and the fulfilment of my conditions...

If I am your general, your pulse should be in my hand. Otherwise I cannot fight through you. I can fight single-handed, but for that fight I need not come and argue with you. [C.W.M.G., LXXI, pp. 348-54]



Speaking later in the evening at the Khadi and Gramodyog exhibition arranged at the Congress venue, Gandhiji reiterated his conditions. He said:

There is the talk of civil disobedience in the air. But who is fit to practise civil disobedience? Not those who will not spin, who will not wear khadi, who do not care for the handicrafts. They will do some other kind of disobedience, but it will be anything but civil. That is not the disobedience I would like to teach or would care to live for. I want to turn the quiet and living strength that spinning gives you into the channel of civil disobedience. [Ibid, p. 356]

8

The open session of the Congress duly opened at Mazharpuri – so named after Mazharul Haq – at Ramgarh. But the day turned out to be unpropitious. Hardly had the delegates and visitors settled themselves in their seats when there was a sudden downpour of rain. It was so torrential that, as Pattabhi Sitaramayya described it,

in a moment the sea of men and women with children in their arms, dressed in their best attire, became converted into a village of huts which were made up for the nonce by the mats below their feet serving as roofs over their heads. But the storm blew with such ferocity that delegates and visitors, mats and umbrellas, thousands of them, began to move in a stream, with children soaked to the bone clasped to their bosoms.

Since the venue was open-air, the proceedings had to be curtailed. The addresses of the Chairman of the Reception Committee, Dr. Rajendra Prasad and the President, Maulana Azad, were taken as read. Jawaharlal Nehru introduced the main political resolution and the debate on it was postponed to the following day. [Pattabhi Sitaramayya, *The History of the Indian National Congress*, Padma Publications Ltd., Bombay, 1947, Vol. II, p. 166]

In an interview to the Associated Press on 19 March Gandhiji commented:

It was a soul-stirring sight to see people standing knee-deep in water awaiting instructions to disperse. I feel God ranged Himself on the side of the people and gave them a foretaste of the suffering to be voluntarily undergone as the price of freedom. [C.W.M.G., LXXI, p. 356]



The address of President Maulana Azad, written in Urdu, was translated into English by Jawaharlal Nehru. The quality of the translation drew unstinted praise from Azad, who said it read like the original.

Azad drew the attention of the delegates to the fact that he had been elected President of the Congress for a second term after seventeen years. The first time he had served as President had been in 1923. The destination of the Congress had even in 1923 been the same as it was now. Only in 1923 it had looked distant, and even the milestones had not been visible. Now in 1940, not only the milestones were visible but the goal itself did not look so distant.

Maulana Azad reviewed the changes in the international situation since 1936 when at Lucknow the Congress for the first time took note of the deteriorating situation in Europe and the rise of reactionary movements like Fascism and Nazism, which were directed against democracy and individual and national freedom. All the resolutions since passed by the Congress in this connection, known as the "war resolutions", had reiterated the Congress opposition to Nazism and Fascism. But they had also emphasized the danger that British Imperialism represented, which indeed had been largely to blame for the rise of Fascism. Abyssinia, Spain, Austria, Czechoslovakia and Albania had been allowed to disappear as free countries. When Nazi Germany continued its march of conquest the British Government had been finally compelled to go to war against it.

In the First World War the cry had been one of saving smaller nations. Now the cry was freedom, world peace and democracy. No one could be taken in. The war was being fought by Britain to save British Imperialism.

When the war had been declared on 3 September 1939 all the Empire countries had been given freedom of decision: Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Ireland had made their own decision in regard to participation in the war. Indeed Ireland had decided to remain neutral, for the question of Ulster had yet to be solved to its satisfaction. India, on the other hand, had been pushed into the war even without her realizing that she was doing so.

The series of statements made by the spokesmen of the British Government in answer to the Congress demand for declaration of the war aims



and of their intentions with regard to India, had only showed that the British did not want to part with power. All that they said was that Britain would confer upon India the precious gift of Dominion Status in the near but unknown future. The straight and simple question the Congress had raised was the question of India's right: whether she was entitled to decide her own fate or not.

India had been awakened and was impatient for freedom. None could oppose that demand. Even those classes in India which clung to their special interests dared not oppose the freedom of India.

By their policy of divide and rule the British had been trying to confuse the issue. The communal question certainly existed and was important. But the question could be solved on the lines proposed by the Congress. The Congress had proposed that:

(1) Whatever constitution was adopted for India, there must be the fullest guarantees in it for the rights and interests of minorities.

(2) The minorities should judge for themselves what safeguards were necessary for the protection of their rights and interests. Therefore the decision in this respect must depend upon the consent of the minorities and not on a majority vote.

The Muslims, the President went on, could hardly be described as a political minority. The appellation "political minority" was applied to a group that was so small numerically and so lacking in strength that it could not protect itself from the much larger group that surrounded it. The Muslims numbered in India between 80 and 90 millions. In five provinces of India they were in majority. The future constitution of India was bound to be federal in nature with full autonomy to federating units in regard to internal matters. The centre would be concerned only with foreign relations, defence, customs, etc. Where was therefore the need for any misgivings?

Being a Muslim did not come in the way of being an Indian. It had been India's historic destiny, Azad asserted, that many human races and cultures should flow to her. From before the dawn of history wave after wave of people had trekked into India and made a home here. The coming of the Muslims a thousand years earlier had resulted in a fusion of two cultural currents. A new



India had taken shape. If Hinduism was a religion of India, so was Islam and so was Christianity. Azad concluded:

Whether we like it or not, we have now become an Indian nation, united and indivisible. No fantasy or artificial scheming to separate and divide can break this unity. We must accept the logic of facts and history and engage ourselves in fashioning our future destiny.

Azad reminded the delegates again that success depended upon three factors: unity, discipline and full confidence in Gandhiji's leadership. It was only under Gandhiji's leadership that the Congress could look forward to a future of successful achievement. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1940, Vol. I, pp. 290-300]

On the morning of 20 March the Congress assembled at 9.30 sharp. The political resolution introduced by Jawaharlal Nehru the preceding day and seconded by J. B. Kripalani, was debated by the Congress and passed again by an overwhelming majority. Gandhiji then addressed the Congress. Gandhiji referred to the delegates who had spoken earlier during the debate on the resolution and noted that civil disobedience had been on the tongues of all. He told the assembly that "real civil disobedience makes it binding on those who join it to do what they are enjoined to do and avoid what is prohibited" and that civil disobedience properly launched and conducted was bound to lead to freedom.

But he knew that though they said they were ready for civil disobedience, they were in fact not ready. They did not know what preparation for civil disobedience meant. Dwelling on the importance of spinning in the context of civil disobedience, he said:

Some people have been asserting [Subhas Bose in fact had been asserting] that it is not necessary for us to concentrate on the charkha before launching a fight. I do not doubt their sincerity and bravery, but ...they betray a certain weakness of mind. Well, I tell you, as I have been telling you these 20 years, that there is a vital connection between satyagraha and charkha, and the more I find that belief challenged the more I am confirmed in it.... No one who does not believe in the charkha can be a soldier under me.



Those who clamour for immediate launching of civil disobedience want to have me with them. Why? Because they are conscious that the masses are with me. I unhesitatingly say that I am a people's man. Every moment of my life I feel for the starving millions. I live and I am prepared to lay down my life to relieve their sufferings and mitigate their miseries. I claim to have some influence with the millions because I have been a faithful servant of theirs. My loyalty to them is greater than any other loyalty, and it is for them that I would not give up the charkha even if you were to forsake me or kill me.... If therefore you do not believe in the charkha in the sense I believe in it, I implore you to leave me. Without the charkha I cannot lead you to jail in the course of the fight for freedom. I will not have anyone under me who does not believe in the charkha.

Free India, Gandhiji declared, would bear no malice towards anyone or seek to subjugate any people. Would-be satyagrahis must fulfil all the external and internal conditions. They would then cease to hate their opponent, they would not seek or work for his destruction but pray to God to have mercy on him. They must not concentrate on the misdeeds of the Government, for they must befriend those running it. Gandhiji concluded:

Satyagraha is the path of truth at all costs.... Truth and ahimsa are the essence of satyagraha, and the charkha is their symbol. Just as the general of any army insists that his soldiers should wear a particular uniform, I, as your general, must insist on your taking to the charkha which will be your uniform.... And I repeat again that if you do not believe in this, you must leave me alone and you can try your own methods. [C.W.M.G., LXXI, pp. 357-60]

Thus ended the Ramgarh Congress. The programme it placed before Congressmen was the programme shaped by the Working Committee at its Patna meeting on 1 March. This laid down that the withdrawal of Congress Ministries from the Provinces, effected more than four months earlier, to dissociate India from the war and to enforce the Congress determination to free India from foreign domination, "must naturally be followed by civil disobedience, to which the Congress will unhesitatingly resort 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". It was left wholly to Gandhiji to decide whether or when the Congress was fit enough to undertake the fight. Congressmen meanwhile must strive to acquire the fitness by engaging themselves in the constructive programme as prescribed in the Independence Pledge.

9

Parallel to the Congress session, and in opposition to it, Subhas Bose and Sahajanand, the Bihar kisan leader, organized their own show at Ramgarh on 19 and 20 March. The gathering was described as the All India Anti-Compromise Conference. The venue was named Kisan Nagar.

Subhas Bose in his presidential address described the object of the Conference as mobilization of all the anti-Imperialist forces in the country that were determined to resist a compromise with Imperialism. He came down heavily on the section of leftists – meaning of course the Congress Socialist Party – who had been playing the role of apologists of the rightists.

The Patna resolution of the Working Committee, he declared, contained loopholes which detracted from the intrinsic value of the resolution. No sooner had the resolution been passed than Gandhiji had come out with the statement that the door on negotiations for a settlement had not been banged. Gandhiji's later remarks on civil disobedience contained no assurance that the struggle had commenced. In fact all the red-hot resolutions passed by the Congress during the preceding year and a half were accompanied by other statements by Gandhiji or other rightist leaders which created a totally different impression on the average mind. The country was waiting for a declaration from the Working Committee that the door had finally been banged on all talks of a compromise with Imperialism.

Notwithstanding all the anti-war resolutions of the Congress, Bose continued, as soon as the war was declared, Gandhiji, without consulting the Working Committee, proceeded to Simla to assure the Viceroy that he personally was for rendering unconditional help to Great Britain in the prosecution of the war. Since Gandhiji was the dictator of the Congress, his personal views carried far-reaching implications.



Even the demand for full independence had been side-tracked and substituted by a demand for a fake Constituent Assembly. Some prominent rightist leaders, including members of the Working Committee, had been continuously whittling down the implications of the Constituent Assembly, expressing their willingness to accept separate electorates and the existing franchise for it. Behind the smokescreen of hot phrases attempts had been going on for a compromise with the British Government.

Since the war began India had been passing through a crisis. Confusion had seized men's minds, above all, the minds of the leaders. It was not surprising, with the old structure crashing under its own weight and the new structure yet to rise. In the existing crisis, what distressed him most, Subhas said, was the role of the leftists. They talked of unity. But unity that meant being tied to the apron-strings of the rightists was not a blessing. What was leftism? – Bose asked, and answered: "In the next phase of our movement leftism will be synonymous with socialism, but in the present phase, the words 'leftist' and 'anti-Imperialist' should be interchangeable." In the event of a compromise with Imperialism being effected, leftists would have to fight not only Imperialism but its Indian allies as well.

Sahajanand, who introduced the main resolution of the conference, also described the Congress demand for a Constituent Assembly as false and hypocritical. He lambasted Gandhiji for his "pilgrimages" to Simla and New Delhi. The attack on Gandhiji was resented by many among the audience, who shouted "*Mahatma Gandhiki Jai!*" and left the meeting.

The resolution requested Subhas Bose to bring into existence an All India Council of Action to launch and direct a struggle. It called for intensification of local struggles with effect from 6 April and commencement of an all-India struggle, which would be continued without any rest or break. The resolution warned the Indian people "not to be misled or confused by the demand for a Constituent Assembly". [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1940, Vol. I, pp. 342-46]

The charges labelled against the Congress and Gandhiji by Subhas Bose and Sahajanand did not of course hold water. The Congress had not side tracked the issue of complete independence, nor was it over-eager to arrive at a compromise with Britain at whatever cost. Gandhiji later clarified in *Harijan*:



All compromise is based on give and take, but there can be no give and take on fundamentals. Any compromise on fundamentals is a surrender.... The time for compromise can only come when both are of one mind on fundamentals, i.e., when the British Government have made up their mind that not they but Indians will determine the constitution under which the latter will be governed. There will be no compromise until [Britain] has sincerely come to the conclusion that it cannot or does not want to rule [India]. [C.W.M.G., LXXI, p. 366]

Returning to Sevagram after the conclusion of the Congress session Gandhiji issued his instructions to Congressmen through the columns of *Harijan*. He wrote:

Every Congress Committee should become a Satyagraha Committee and register such Congressmen who believe in the cultivation of the spirit of goodwill towards all, who have no untouchability in them in any shape or form, who would spin regularly, and who habitually use khadi to the exclusion of all other cloth.... If the response is sincere these Satyagraha Committees would become busy spinning depots....

Needless to say that names should be registered only of those who are willing and able to suffer imprisonment. No financial assistance is to be expected by satyagrahi prisoners whether for themselves or their dependents.

Gandhiji expressed the hope that in a world being ruled by the forces of violence, it would be possible to say of India that she fought and won the battle of freedom by purely peaceful means. Given the cooperation of politically-minded India the attainment of India's freedom was perfectly possible through non-violence. [ibid, pp. 369-70]

A pledge form was accordingly prescribed, which aspirant satyagrahis must sign and submit to the local Congress Committee. The pledge was in the following form:

I solemnly declare that

(1) So long as I remain an active satyagrahi, I shall remain non-violent in word and deed and shall earnestly endeavour to be non-violent



in intent, since I believe that ...non-violence alone can help and result in the attainment of Purna Swaraj and consolidation of unity among all the races and communities of India....

(2) I believe and shall endeavour always to promote such unity.

(3) I believe in the justice and necessity of removing the evil of untouchability and shall on all occasions seek personal contacts with, and endeavour to render service to, the submerged classes.

(4) I believe in swadeshi as essential for India's economic, political and moral salvation and shall use hand-spun and hand-woven khaddar to the exclusion of every other cloth. I shall so far as possible use the produce of hand and village industries.

(5) I shall spin regularly.

(6) I shall carry out the instructions of my superior officers....

(7) I am prepared to suffer imprisonment and even death for the sake of the cause and my country without resentment.

(8) In the event of my imprisonment I shall not claim from the Congress any support for myself, my family and dependents.

The Congress office immediately sent out circulars to Congress Committees at all levels conveying Gandhiji's directive that all Congress Committees be transformed into Satyagraha Committees. The Congress Working Committee, meeting at Wardha from 15 to 19 April, by a resolution directed all Congress Committees throughout the country to pursue the programme with all earnestness and thoroughness. The Committee recommended that those members of Congress executives who were unable to take the prescribed pledge should withdraw from their executive positions. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1940, Vol. I, pp. 240-44]

Before April ended most Provincial and District Congress Committees had turned themselves into Satyagraha Committees and set up separate sub-committees to deal with (1) the charkha, (2) Harijans, (3) minorities, (4) publicity and (5) women.

The preparations for mass civil disobedience were on.



CHAPTER II: JINNAH RAISES THE BANNER OF SEPARATISM

1

It was in March 1940, when the country waited impatiently for a word from Gandhiji to launch a campaign of mass civil disobedience to vindicate India's right to full independence, that Muslim separatism made its emphatic entry on the political stage. The entry was not sudden. Indeed the build-up for it had started way back in 1937, soon after the Congress assumed office in the Provinces where it enjoyed majorities. On 15 October 1937, at the Lucknow session of the All-India Muslim League, Jinnah had first sounded the bugle of war against Indian nationalism, denouncing it as "exclusively Hindu". The Congress then had been, in Jinnah's own words, "on the very threshold of what little power and responsibility is given". It had been in the saddle for no more than three months. Yet in his "declaration of war", as Gandhiji called his statement, Jinnah saw fit to condemn it for all the sins that two years later the Muslim League's Pirpur report imputed to it. He took exception to the Congress Governments adhering to the national flag, the national song and the national language, and declared: "Mussalmans cannot expect any justice or fair play at their hands." [C.W.M.G., LXVI, pp. 257, 468-69]

The Congress leadership, alarmed at the drift, did all it could to propitiate the League and to arrive at a settlement of the communal question. Gandhiji, Rajendra Prasad, Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Bose in turn engaged Jinnah in prolonged negotiations carried on through talks and correspondence over long periods. But Jinnah firmly set his face against any compromise or ccommodation with the Congress. As days went by the campaign of hate carried on from the Muslim League platform and press continued to rise in volume till it reached a crescendo and found expression in the Lahore resolution of March 1940. Henceforth, so far as the League was concerned, there would be no such thing as a common national purpose, a united national demand. There would be two nations, with two sets of different national aspirations, contending with each other and with the British in pursuit of their separate, even antagonistic, objectives.



Muslim separatism, carefully nursed and actively encouraged by India's British rulers, had first made its presence known in the body politic of India in 1909 when the Indian Councils Act provided for separate electorates for Muslims. The demand for separate electorates had been made largely at British instigation. Soon it was found that this device by itself did not satisfy the Muslims and they started pressing for weightage in the provinces where they were in minorities. The Congress-League Reforms Scheme of 1916 conceded this. Seats in provincial legislatures were conceded to them much in excess of their population. In the U.P., where Muslims formed 14 per cent of the population, they were given 30 per cent of the seats, in Bihar 25 per cent of the seats, and so on. In the Central Legislature, it was stipulated that they would have one-third of the total number of seats. In the Punjab and Bengal, however, where Muslims formed majorities, they got slightly fewer seats than would have been their due on the population basis. In the Punjab they were given 50 per cent of the seats, in Bengal 40 per cent.

The Government of India Act of 1919 put the seal on the doctrine of separate electorates and weightage.

Soon the cry was raised that injustice was being done to the Muslims of Bengal and the Punjab, and that in these provinces Muslim majorities should be protected by statute. The Communal Award of MacDonalld in 1932 to a large extent conceded this demand too. In the Punjab Muslims were given statutory majority. In Bengal though they still had fewer seats than their population would entitle them to, the weightage given to other communities and interests was at the expense of the Hindus who in the legislature became a still smaller minority than their population warranted.[Rajendra Prasad, *Pakistan*, Allied Publishers, Bombay, 1940, pp. 3-4]

Communal representation, based on separate electorates, came to be recognized quite early, by enlightened political opinion, as an unmitigated evil, doing no good to those it was designed to serve and widening the breach between Hindus and Muslims. Even the British did not have a good word to say about it. Olivier, one-time Secretary of State for India, for instance, told the Simon Commission:



It is an obvious and admitted fact that the existence of the communal electoral system now aggravates and exacerbates communal rivalries and hostilities between Indians whose political interests in all matters falling within the sphere of the mechanism of government are independent of creed. Moreover the expedient is in itself ineffective.

The Simon Commission nevertheless was "unanimous in holding that communal representation for the Mohammedans of a Province must be continued, and that Mohammedan voters could not be deprived of this protection." [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1927, Vol. II, p. 74]

The Muslim leadership said it was prepared to give up separate electorates provided certain conditions were fulfilled, the chief among them being the separation of Sind from Bombay and extension of the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms to the North-West Frontier Province, which had been kept out of the operation of the Reforms Act of 1919.

The Congress readily agreed to both. When in 1937 provincial elections were held under the Government of India Act of 1935, both Sind and the NWFP were Governors' Provinces. But the Muslim leadership continued to cling tenaciously to separate electorates. Indeed it declared that separate electorates, weightages and various other safeguards that the Muslims enjoyed would no longer suffice. What would now satisfy them was the recognition of Muslims as a separate nation.

2

The idea of "the formation of a consolidated Muslim State" had been mooted as early as in 1930 by poet Mohammed Iqbal, pan-Islamic theoretician *par excellence*. But Iqbal had stopped short of conceiving a division of India. What he had envisaged was a federation of Muslim Provinces within a larger federation. Shortly afterwards, in 1933, Rahmat Ali, a Cambridge student, published a pamphlet *Now or Never* in which he elaborated a scheme of Pakistan, a separate state comprising the North Western Provinces of India, including Kashmir. The scheme even drew the notice of the Joint Parliamentary Committee and it figured in its deliberations. But Muslim leaders present in London in connection with the work of the JPC dismissed the scheme as "puerile



and chimerical". There is considerable evidence to suggest that the idea was supported, if not wholly inspired, by the die-hard section of Tory leadership headed by Churchill and assisted by a number of old India hands and of course British intelligence. [Tara Chand, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Vol. IV, pp.262, 318]

What had appeared chimerical in 1933-34, became, in 1938-39, the chief item on the agenda of the Muslim League. On the very morrow of the Congress forming Ministries in the Provinces, Jinnah and the Muslim League firmly turned their back on the national movement led by the Congress, disowned the tradition of a united political effort and proclaimed that Muslims were not a national minority but a nation entitled to a separate sovereign state. At the behest of the League various Muslim luminaries set to work devising various constitutional schemes of separation. Among such schemes were those of Sikandar Hyat Khan, Premier of the Punjab, which envisaged dividing India into various zones under a weak federal centre, of Abdul Latif of Hyderabad (of which mention has been made in Vol. VII of the present series), of Syed Zafarul Hasan and Mohammed Afzal Hussain Qadri of Aligarh Muslim University, and of the Khan of Mamdot and others. [Ibid, pp. 318-19]

These schemes differed in the degree of separation that each advocated, but they all agreed in affirming that Hindus and Muslims were two nations and had nothing in common. In a pamphlet *Confederacy of India*, which advocated an Indusstan scheme, the author, "Punjabee", wrote:

Much stress is laid by the nationalists when preaching Hindu-Muslim unity on the necessity of separating religion from politics Hindus may be able to accept this advice, for already their religious belief is isolated from their social system. The Muslims cannot divorce their religion from their politics. In Islam religious and political beliefs are not separated from each other.... The mosque not only constitutes the place of worship but also the Assembly Hall....Hence Hindu-Muslim unity or nationalism, signifying homogeneity between them in all non-religious matters, is unimaginable....The idea of a common State with heterogeneous membership is alien to Islam and can never be fruitful...



Hindus and Muslims are two absolutely different entities.... Their habits and customs, social systems, moral codes, religious, political and cultural ideas, traditions, languages, literature, architecture, art and outlook on life are absolutely different from, nay, hostile to, one another.... The basic difference between the communities, the memories of their past and present rivalries, and the wrongs they registered against each other during the last one thousand years form an unbridgeable gulf between them.

The author used the above arguments to elaborate a scheme of a Confederacy of India made up of a number of 'Federations, viz., (1) The Indus Regions' Federation, (2) the Hindu India Federation, (3) the Rajasthan Federation, (4) the Deccan States Federation, and (5) the Bengal Federation. The author envisaged this "binational, trilingual and quinquepartite Confederation" functioning under the British Viceroy. [Rajendra Prasad, *Pakistan*, p. 4]

The scheme devised by the Aligarh professors envisaged several wholly independent and sovereign States to be carved out of India, viz., Pakistan, Bengal, Hindustan, Hyderabad, Delhi and Malabar. [Ibid, pp. 35-37]

On 13 February 1940 Jinnah, in an article written for *Time and Tide*, arguing from the premise that Hindus and Muslims were two separate nations, asserted that democracy of the Western type was not suited to India. He wrote:

Democratic systems based on the concept of a homogeneous nation such as England are definitely not applicable to heterogeneous countries such as India and this simple fact is the root cause of all India's constitutional ills.

He quoted from the Report of the Joint Parliamentary Committee the following paragraph:

India is inhabited by many races often as distinct from one another in origin, tradition and manner of life as are the nations of Europe. Two-thirds of its inhabitants profess Hinduism in one form or another as their religion, over 77 millions are followers of Islam; and the difference between the two is not only of religion in the stricter sense, but also of law



and culture. They may be said, indeed, to represent two distinct separate civilizations. Hinduism is distinguished by the phenomenon of its caste which is the basis of its religious and social system and save in a very restricted field remains unaffected by contact with philosophies of the West; the religion of Islam on the other hand is based upon the conception of the equality of man.

The sweeping statements contained in the above paragraph could hardly be treated as anything more than the expression of the prejudice and bias – and indeed of the ignorance – of the members of the JPC. But they had placed in Jinnah's hands a tool which he would use for his own purposes. Further elaborating the thesis, he wrote:

The British people, being Christians, sometimes forget the religious wars of their own history and today consider religion as a private and personal matter between man and God. This can never be the case in Hinduism and Islam, for both these religions are definite social codes which govern not so much man's relation with his God as man's relation with his neighbour. They govern not only his law and culture but every aspect of his social life and such religions, essentially exclusive, completely preclude that merging of identity and unity of thought on which the Western democracy is based....

Gandhiji and the Congress, Jinnah went on to assert, had long foreseen that their hopes of a permanent all-India dominance lay in the Western form of democracy, so they had been bending their energies to secure "a completely democratic form of Government". The experiment of the working of Provincial autonomy under the Government of India Act had brought out "the completely Hindu composition of the Congress". He warned the British that if the Congress demand for a Constituent Assembly was conceded, India would become a totalitarian Hindu State with the Central and Provincial Governments responsible not to their legislatures or to the electorate but to a caucus, the Working Committee of the Congress.

And what sort of a Constituent Assembly would it be? – he asked, and answered:



There are in India roughly four hundred million souls who, through no fault of their own, are hopelessly illiterate and consequently priest and caste-ridden ...it is proposed that to the elected representatives of such, India's future constitution should be entrusted. Is it too much to say that since the vast majority of the elected representatives will be illiterate Hindus, the Constituent Assembly will be under the influence of Mr. Gandhi and the Congress leaders and the constitution that will emerge will be as the Working Committee direct?

Jinnah's solution to the problem was: (1) that the entire problem of India's future constitution should be considered in the light of experience gained from the working of the Provincial constitution, (2) that the Muslim League was irrevocably opposed to any federal objective resulting in majority community rule, (3) that no declaration regarding constitutional advance be made without the consent and approval of the Muslim League. A constitution must be evolved, Jinnah concluded, that recognized that there were in India two nations which must share in the governance of India. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1940, Vol. I, pp. 302-5]

3

The bellicosity of attitude towards Hindus in general and the Congress and Gandhiji in particular, deliberately fostered by Jinnah as a strategy, manifested itself in the streets of cities in heightened communal tension and clashes with the authority.

In the Punjab and the U.P. it was the Khaksars that became the spearhead of Muslim communal militancy. Led by an ambitious one-time Government official Inayatullah, now known as Allama Mashriqi, bands of lumpens calling themselves Khaksars, carrying shovels as weapons, went rampaging through the streets, terrorizing Hindus. They became such a menace to law and order that the Khaksar organization had to be banned in the Punjab and the U.P.

On 19 March 1940 in Lahore, marauding bands of these hooligans attacked the police, seriously injuring two senior police officers. The police thereupon opened fire on the Khaksars, killing 32 of them. On 26 March the Muslim League group in the Punjab Assembly tabled an adjournment motion demanding enquiry



into the firing and lifting of the ban on the Khaksars. Sikandar Hyat Khan, the Premier, in his statement reminded the House that there were no less than 18 semi-military organizations in the Punjab and letting them operate would pose a serious danger to peace. No Government, he declared, could allow private armies to function. [Ibid, p. 189]

There were apprehensions among Hindus and Sikhs that under the pressure of the Muslim League the ban on the Khaksars might be lifted, in which case Hindu and Sikh private organizations might come up to counter the threat. Already, a correspondent wrote to Gandhiji early in April, the Akalis had resolved at a meeting to enlist one lakh men in their Dal. If the plan materialized there might be bloodshed in the land.

Gandhiji counselled non-violence as a remedy. He wrote:

The Khaksar menace is no menace in itself. As a symptom of a deeper disease it is a portent. To bring into being rival organizations is a simple thing, but it is no remedy. It merely multiplies the evil. If I had my way I would ask the people to meet the Khaksar violence with non-violence. But from the papers and the correspondence before me, I observe that the people seek outside protection against the danger, real or imaginary. That means consolidation of the existing authority, supplemented perhaps by private defensive preparations. I am interested in neither. [C.W.M.G., LXXI, pp. 405-6]

In Sind, another Muslim-majority Province, where a popular Ministry continued to function, the communal situation remained on the boil and in one area, Sukkur, there had been widespread violence against Hindus, mention of which has been made in Volume VII of this series. Gandhiji counselled the Hindus that if the Government failed to protect them and if they could not protect themselves they should migrate.

In Sukkur district rioting had erupted over a complex of buildings described as Manzilgah. A section of Muslims claimed that one or more of the buildings were mosques. The Muslim League, which fanned the flames of hatred over the issue, organized a Restoration Committee and occupied the premises in the name of satyagraha, which led to police action. Allah Baksh, the Premier,



making a statement in the Assembly, laid the responsibility for the disorders on the Muslim League, which was out to gain power at whatever cost. It may be recalled that the Muslim League had not secured a single seat in the Sind Assembly in the 1937 elections.

The Hindus throughout the Province remained at the receiving end. Gandhiji was receiving reports that Sind Hindus, not finding themselves strong enough to face criminals, had taken to migrating from smaller villages to bigger villages and from bigger villages to urban areas. In Hyderabad taluka alone out of the 42 villages 17 villages had migrated. Of the rest some villages had only one family left, while in all the others more than 50 per cent of the families had left. Hindu peasants spent the days in toil and the nights keeping vigil. The economic life in the villages had been totally ruined as the year wore on. [C.W.M.G., LXXII, p. 460]

4

The Congress session concluded at Ramgarh on 20 March, with its call to Congressmen to prepare themselves for a possible mass civil disobedience to be launched whenever Gandhiji considered the organization fit enough to undertake the campaign. Two days later on 22 March the All India Muslim League assembled at Lahore for its annual session. It was to be a fateful session for the unity and integrity of India and its identity as a nation.

Delivering his presidential address at the session Jinnah began by attacking the Government of India Act of 1935, not because it had been conceived as a device to withhold independence from India but because it was an attempt to foist on India a democratic constitution based on the "unnatural and artificial methods of British Parliamentary statutes". The problem of India was not of an inter-communal character, but an international one. Hinduism and Islam were not religions in the strict sense of the word; they were distinct social orders and it was only a dream that they could ever evolve a common nationality. They were different civilizations, deriving inspiration from different sources of history. They could not be yoked together in a single state.

The "artificial unity of India", Jinnah continued, dated back only to British conquest and was maintained by the British bayonet. A democratic constitution,



which must bring in Hindu majority rule, would mean complete destruction of what was most precious in Islam. Repetition of Congress rule, such as had been experienced in the Provinces during the preceding two and a half years, must lead to civil war.

Muslims were a nation according to any definition of a nation, Jinnah asserted, and they must have their homeland, their territory and their state.

Before the war had started Muslims had been apprehensive, Jinnah said, that the British Government might introduce the Federal Scheme, and they resisted it. After the war started the British wanted help from the Muslim League. Therefore,

suddenly there came a change in the attitude of the Viceroy towards me. I was treated on the same basis as Mr. Gandhi. This was the severest blow to the Congress High Command. It was wonder-struck. Why was I all of a sudden promoted and given a place side by side with Mr. Gandhi? ...I believe that was the first shock that the Congress High Command got and I tell you that they have not recovered from it yet.

In ascribing the change in British attitude towards him to the British need of help from the Indian Muslims in the war, Jinnah was either being dishonest or overrating his own importance and that of the Muslim League. In the two Provinces of the Punjab and Bengal, which had the greatest concentration of Muslims, the Governments of Sikandar Hyat Khan and Fazlul Haq had from the very beginning been totally committed to supporting the war effort, from which course it was not in Jinnah's power to deflect them or even to dilute their commitment. The reason why the British now treated him on a par with Gandhiji was, as Jinnah well knew, that the Muslim League's obduracy and its open and total opposition to India being given its independence, suited their designs.

On 23 March, when the session again began in the afternoon, Fazlul Haq moved the resolution on partition. It ran:

(1) While approving and endorsing the action taken by the Council and the Working Committee of the All-India Muslim League, as indicated in their resolution dated the 27th of August and 18th of September and 22nd of October 1939, and 3rd of February 1940 on the constitutional



issue, this session of the All-India Muslim League emphatically reiterates that the scheme of Federation embodied in the Government of India Act, 1935, is totally unsuited to and unworkable in the peculiar conditions of this country and is altogether unacceptable to Muslim India.

(2) It further records its emphatic view that while the declaration dated the 18th of October 1939, made by the Viceroy on behalf of His Majesty's Government, is reassuring in so far as it declares that the policy and plan on which the Government of India Act 1935 is based will be reconsidered in consultation with the various parties, interests and communities in India, Muslim India will not be satisfied unless the whole constitutional plan is reconsidered *de novo* and that no revised plan would be acceptable to the Muslims unless it is framed with their approval and consent.

(3) Resolved that it is the considered view of this session of the All India Muslim League that no constitutional plan will be workable in this country or acceptable to the Muslims unless it is designed on the following basic principle, viz., that *geographically contiguous units are demarcated into regions which should be so constituted with such territorial adjustments as may be necessary 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.* [Emphasis added.]

That adequate, effective and mandatory safeguards should be specifically provided in the constitution for minorities in the units and in the regions for the protection of their religious, cultural, economic, political, administrative and other rights and interests in consultation with them and in other parts of India where the Musalmans are in a minority adequate, effective and mandatory safeguards shall be specifically provided in the constitution for them and other minorities for the protection of their religious, cultural, economic, political, administrative and other rights and interests in consultation with them.

This session further authorizes the Working Committee to frame a scheme of constitution in accordance with these basic principles providing



for the assumption finally by the respective regions of all powers, such as defence, external affairs, communications, customs and such other matters as may be necessary.

Khaliquzzaman of the U.P., who seconded the motion, said it was first of all the British Government which was to blame for the Muslim demand for separation. In order to exploit India, the British had declared that India was one nation and its problem was communal, whereas India had been made up of two nations. The other party to blame for the demand was the Congress which in the course of working the Provincial part of the constitution during the preceding three years, so ill-treated the minorities in the Congress-governed Provinces that the Muslims had come to realize that their very existence was in danger.

The resolution was supported by Zafar Ali Khan, MLA (Central), Aurangzeb Khan, leader of Opposition in the Frontier Assembly, Abdulla Haroon, MLA (Central), Mohammed Ismail Khan of Bihar, Mohammed Isa Khan of Baluchistan, Abdul Hamid Khan of Madras, Ismail Chundrigar of Bombay, Abdul Rouf Shah of C.P. and Mohammed Alam of the Punjab.

The resolution was put to vote on 24 March and passed by a show of hands. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1940, Vol. I, pp. 307-14]

5

The passing of the Pakistan resolution, reprehensible as it was, was also a surprising development in Muslim politics. The Governments and public opinion, as also Muslim leadership, in areas which were contemplated to constitute a separate Muslim state, or states, did not really seek separation from India.

The Constitutional scheme devised earlier by Sikandar Hyat Khan had envisaged autonomous Provinces, grouped into zones and a Centre responsible for foreign affairs, defence, tariffs and currency. Indeed he dreaded Pakistan, which he called Jinnistan (land of demons). Penderal Moon, a British official, has recorded how angry Sikandar Hyat Khan was when Moon brought up the subject in conversation. "Surely," the Unionist leader had said, "you can see that Pakistan would be an invitation to them to cut the throat of every Hindu Bania.... I do hope I won't hear you talk like this again. Pakistan would mean a massacre." According to Moon probably in March 1940 a majority of Sir



Sikandar's Muslim followers shared his antipathy to the idea of Pakistan. The reason he did not publicly dissociate himself from the resolution – which he said he had himself drafted but which had been drastically altered by the Working Committee – was that he did not openly want to oppose Jinnah, fearing that thereby the Punjab Muslims might be divided and he might lose his hold over them. [Tara Chand, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Vol. IV, pp. 330-31]

On 1 April, only a week after the passing of the partition resolution, Sir Chhotu Ram, Jat leader and a minister in the Punjab Cabinet, referring to the position of Sikandar Hyat Khan on the question of partition, assured a Jat Conference at Sonipat:

I can assure you that Sir Sikandar Hyat Khan is not going to accept the Premiership in any purely Islamic Government. In fact he would, I am sure, refuse to accept Ministership or any position of responsibility in such a Government. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1940, Vol. I, p. 57]

In Sind the Muslim League had virtually no presence. Until 18 March 1940 the Province had been under the Premiership of Allah Baksh, a nationalist Muslim totally committed to the unity of India.

In the North-West Frontier Province, where Muslims were in an overwhelming majority, the writ of the League did not run. The Province was totally under the sway of Abdul Ghaffar Khan and Dr. Khan Saheb, to whom the very idea of a separate Muslim state was anathema.

Fazlul Haq, leader of the Krishak Proja Party and Premier of Bengal, was equally opposed to the partitioning of the country. Indeed he had never had any faith in Jinnah's leadership and went along with him more or less for the same reasons as Sikandar Hyat Khan did. In fact shortly afterwards he fell foul of the Muslim League and resigned from it a year later.

On 29 April 1940, a month after the passing of the Pakistan resolution, in an interview in Madras Fazlul Haq declared:

Let me give an assurance to all communities here – Hindus, Muslims, Christians and others – that the best way in which I can repay the kindness which they have shown me is by striving for complete unity



between the various sections of the people so as to pave the way for a united India.

On 30 April, presiding at the Malabar Muslim Conference at Calicut, Fazlul Haq called for a conference of Provincial Premiers, "past and present", to solve the Hindu-Muslim question. [Ibid, p. 65]

Clearly he did not share the official Muslim League view that Hindu-Muslim unity was in the very nature of things an impossibility.

Thus the Muslim majority Provinces of the Punjab, Sind, the NWFP and Bengal were all without exception at this point of time against the partition of India. So were a variety of Muslim sects and organizations in areas where the Muslims were in minority: the Ahrars, Jamiet-ul-Ulema, the Shia Political Conference, the Momins.

These organizations held an Independent Muslim Conference in Delhi between 27 and 30 April.

Khan Bahadur Shaikh Mohammed Jan, Chairman of the Reception Committee, welcoming the delegates, said that though he was "a great supporter of the All-India Muslim League", he had to admit that both Gandhiji and Jawaharlal Nehru had made unprecedented and earnest efforts during the preceding two years to smoothe Hindu-Muslim relations by direct correspondence and personal contacts with Jinnah on his own terms. If they had not been successful it had been because Jinnah had not responded to them in the right spirit. He asked:

Should not the Musalmans make their due contribution to the coming changes? Will it be honourable for them to do nothing but put forward their claim as full partners in the spoils after the battle is fought and won by others?

Clearly the Khan Bahadur here was alluding to a peculiar characteristic of the Muslim League, namely, that it had never at any stage participated in any national agitation and never made any sacrifices. Even during the Khilafat struggle, which had shaken up Muslim India and brought the Muslim masses in conflict with the authority, Jinnah and the Muslim League had sedulously kept away. In the struggles that followed, viz., the Non-cooperation movement, the



agitation against the Simon Commission, the Civil Disobedience movement of 1930-31 and 1932-34 the Muslim League had not lifted a finger to help. Nay, it had opposed the movement. And yet when, under the pressure of these movements the British offered concessions, whatever their worth, the Muslim League and Jinnah were not behindhand in pressing their claims. They only came forward to reap the harvest which others had sown and got ready.

Allah Baksh, too, referred to this phenomenon in his presidential address at the Conference. He pointed out that the Muslims of India were seen by the world as the main obstacle in the way of India's progress. He questioned the credentials of the League as the sole representative organization of Indian Muslims. While the Congress had won elections in seven Provinces and had been the controlling power in the eighth, the Muslim League had done nothing beyond holding public meetings.

Denouncing Jinnah's two-nation's theory, Allah Baksh pointed out that a majority of the ninety million Muslims of India were descendants of the earlier inhabitants of India and were as much sons of the soil as the Dravidians and the Aryans. Their nationality could not be changed merely by their having embraced Islam.

Allah Baksh expressed satisfaction that responsible British statesmen had scotched the scheme of Pakistan. He expressed the hope that "the indirect and subtle encouragement some influential individual Englishmen have so far given to the sponsors of the scheme, for obvious reasons, will not continue to vitiate a perfectly straight issue."

A resolution on the role of Indian Muslims in India's freedom struggle, moved by Mufti Kifayatulla, President of the Jamiat-ul-Ulema-i-Hind, and passed unanimously by the Conference, said:

India, with its geographical and political boundaries, is an indivisible whole and as such it is the common homeland of all citizens, irrespective of race or religion, who are joint owners of its resources, All nooks and corners of the country contain the hearths and homes of the Muslims and the cherished historic monuments of their religion and culture which are dearer to them than their lives. From the national point of view every



Muslim is an Indian.... For that very reason Muslims owe equal responsibility with other Indians for striving and making sacrifices to achieve the country's independence....

Another resolution, passed by an overwhelming majority, repudiated the Pakistan scheme and declared that "any scheme which divided India into Hindu India and Muslim India is impractical and harmful to the country's interests generally and those of Muslims in particular." [Ibid, pp. 323-32]

6

Gandhiji reacted to the Lahore resolution of the Muslim League in his own way. If the Muslims should really be bent on division, he felt, there was no way it could be prevented. In an article in *Harijan* of 6 April he wrote:

I know no non-violent method of compelling the obedience of eight crores of Muslims to the will of the rest of India, however powerful a majority the rest may represent. The Muslims must have the same right of self-determination that the rest of India has.

But in his heart of hearts Gandhiji continued to nurse the hope that when the chips were down the Muslims would not really insist on division. He went on:

But I do not believe that Muslims, when it comes to a matter of actual decision, will ever want vivisection. Their good sense will prevent them. Their self-interest will deter them. Their religion will forbid the obvious suicide which the partition would mean. The "two nations" theory is an untruth. The vast majority of Muslims of India are converts to Islam or are descendants of converts. They did not become a separate nation as soon as they became converts.

Gandhiji debunked Jinnah's thesis that Hinduism and Islam were not so much different religions as different social orders which could never be united in one single nation. Those who thought like Jinnah, Gandhiji wrote, were doing no service to Islam. They were misinterpreting the message of Islam. Gandhiji warned the Muslims that untruth was being propagated amongst them. [C.W.M.G., LXXI, pp. 388-90]

Gandhiji suggested, in another article in *Harijan* of 30 March 1940, that the only way of ascertaining the wishes of Muslim masses in the matter lay through a Constituent Assembly as demanded by the Congress.



He wrote:

The Congress representative capacity has been and can be questioned. But who can question the sole representative capacity of the elected delegates to the Constituent Assembly? ...Are the opponents afraid that the Muslim League will not be elected by Muslim voters? Do they not realize that any Muslim demand made by the Muslim delegates will be irresistible? If the vast majority of Indian Muslims feels that they are not one nation with their Hindu and other brethren, who will be able to resist them? But surely it is permissible to dispute the authority of the 50,000 Muslims who listened to Quaid-e-Azam to represent the feelings of eight crores of Indian Muslims. [Ibid, pp. 371-72]

Liaquat Ali Khan, General Secretary of the Muslim League, in a polemic against Gandhiji, refused to entertain the proposal of a Constituent Assembly. There could be other ways of ascertaining the wishes of the Muslims, he contended. Answering him, Gandhiji wrote:

I refuse ...to believe that the eight crores of Muslims will say that they have nothing in common with their Hindu and other brethren. Their mind can only be known by a referendum duly made to them on that clear issue. The contemplated Constituent Assembly can easily decide the question. Naturally on an issue such as this there can be no arbitration. It is purely and simply a matter of self-determination. I know of no other conclusive method of ascertaining the mind of the eight crores of Muslims. [Ibid, pp. 412-13]

7

In such atmosphere, darkened by the gathering cloud of separatism threatening India's national unity, the Congress Working Committee met at Wardha from 15 to 19 April 1940 to consider the possibilities of mass civil disobedience as contemplated by the Ramgarh Congress resolution.

Gandhiji told the meeting that the letters he had been receiving from everywhere were concerned either with the Khaksar question or Jinnah's scheme of partition or the starting of civil disobedience. Many asked him if notwithstanding the challenge from the Khaksars and from Jinnah he still



contemplated starting the movement, and if so with what justification. Gandhiji alluded to the factional feud going on in the Nagpur City Congress Committee and said that it showed that at least in the C.P. there could be no civil disobedience. There was indiscipline and corruption in the ranks. From Kerala too the message was that though there was no atmosphere for civil disobedience, people would be ready to follow him. Reports from other provinces too did not inspire hope. Gandhiji said he did not think that the question of civil disobedience was in any way directly related to the international situation.

Jawaharlal Nehru pointed out that indiscipline and corruption were no new developments. As for developments in Muslim politics, he considered them a facet of the policy of British Imperialism. The attacks on the liberties of the people had been increasing. In Bengal it was impossible to carry on any work. The same situation had been developing in other Provinces. It appeared as though the Government was goading the Congress to start civil disobedience.

Gandhiji did not feel that there was any goading from the Government. If he felt there was goading he would start a movement without consulting anybody, whether he had one person or a thousand persons with him. Would 50,000 persons signing the satyagraha register make civil disobedience a mass movement? When he had set out on the Dandi March, he reminded the members, he had only 78 persons with him.

Sardar Patel said, "If a struggle is launched it is bound to be opposed by the Muslims. On the other hand, if the Government goes on the offensive and even then we do not fight it would cause demoralization. But it is clear that the fight cannot be of the nature of a mass civil disobedience."

Jawaharlal: "But even if only a handful offer civil disobedience and are sent to jail, the masses are bound to take up the movement. How could we prevent them?"

Gandhiji: "Jinnah and Liaqat Ali say that I want to start civil disobedience to gain power and that I represent only the Hindus. I am asked if I would still start the movement if the Muslims decide to keep away. If it appears certain that once civil disobedience is started there will be Hindu-Muslim riots what should then be done? The Khaksars are not under ban everywhere. In many places they are



functioning. In Bidar (Hyderabad state) there was rioting. The looting of Hindu shops went on for ten days and the police did not intervene. There is even a demand to remove the word 'India' from the 'All India Muslim League'. Could civil disobedience be undertaken in such conditions? Do we have the requisite non-violence?"

Jawaharlal: "Well, if we cannot deal with them non-violently, we can deal with them violently. We shall never bow our heads to Jinnah and the Khaksars. To hell with these fellows."

Asaf Ali told the meeting about the mood among the Muslim masses. People he met asked him what the Congress had done for the Muslims. They asked why the Ali Brothers parted from the Congress and why it was that while formerly Iqbal's composition "*Sare Jahan se Achchha*" was sung along with "*Bande Mataram*" at Congress gatherings it was not sung any more. Congress had done much for the Harijans. It had done nothing for the Muslims. *Suraj* (Sun) had now become *surya*, *raat* (night) had become *ratri*. They did not wish to exchange British Imperialism for Hindu imperialism. The Muslim League did not wish to have anything to do with the Congress. The Congress must decide what it wanted to do with the Muslims.

Jawaharlal said that the question had nothing to do with *Bande Mataram*. It must not be forgotten that the British wanted to use the Muslim League. The League represented the feudal and reactionary forces among the Muslims.

Azad referred to the Muslim League charge that Congress Governments had committed atrocities against Muslims and said he could not admit the charge. Whenever specific cases came up they were enquired into. The charge was a lie of monumental proportions. The Congress Governments had not been guilty of a single act against the interests of Muslims.

Azad refused to admit that the majority of Muslims wanted division of India. At Lahore they were persuaded that in order to get what they wanted they must pitch their demand higher. Muslims in the minority provinces were wholly against partition.

Rajendra Babu said before the Lahore resolution Congressmen had thought that their fight would be against the Government. But now it appeared



that what they were confronted with was a civil war. Before the Ramgarh Congress he had not fully comprehended the danger. Khaksars were the military arm of the League.

P. C. Ghosh, speaking for Bengal, thought that any mass civil disobedience in the Province was out of the question. The Khaksar movement, he reminded the meeting, had started in Bengal. In North Bengal Muslims were in a majority. They would certainly oppose the movement. They considered the Congress their enemy. Even in Midnapore district, where the population had no more than 8 per cent Muslims, there would be opposition to the movement. Even an individual civil disobedience movement would face communal opposition.

Shankarrao Dev said in Maharashtra no more than 1,000 persons could be mobilized, that too after a certain time.

Vallabhbhai Patel: "Of course a mass civil disobedience movement is out of the question. But individual civil disobedience ought to be undertaken, or there would be demoralization."

Rajaji also expressed himself against mass civil disobedience. There was no native urge for it. Muslim passion was rising. Every Musalman was either with the League or did not dare to oppose it. Sacrifice had never appealed to the Muslims much, but formerly there had not been in them the feeling that the Congress was doing them in the eye. The trust of the Muslims had to be gained.

Sarojini Naidu expressed the view that mass civil disobedience in the prevailing circumstances would be disastrous.

Achyut Patwardhan, on the other hand, thought that if the Congress did not take an initiative, the masses would either turn to the Hindu Mahasabha or class struggle. The Congress, he said, had never been as strong before. If the struggle was launched, he had no doubt the masses would cooperate.

Bhulabhai Desai opposed the idea of any aggressive civil disobedience. He agreed with C.R. and Rajendra Babu that Muslim opposition in that case would be aggressive. Fighting in itself was not a necessary obligation. In Bombay the Congress had no control over labour.

Kripalani was of the view that revolutions were not made through cool calculation. They were a leap in the dark. It was clear that the Congress could



neither bring about strikes, nor organize mass meetings and processions. In the Punjab, Bengal, Assam and Sind there could be no civil disobedience. Signing of the Satyagraha Pledge had not eliminated the people that it was expected to eliminate. Even Communists were signing the Pledge. Jawaharlal thought that the picture painted by Rajendra Babu and others was exaggerated. What was the purpose of launching a movement – to gain an objective or to check demoralization? The riot situation had improved. The Congress had considerable support in the rural areas. Satyagraha pledges were being signed. Those who undertook to spin would certainly spin.

Azad said they were overrating the Khaksars. He knew Inayatulla. He was given to lying. His statistics were false. Azad suggested that the importance of such people should not be exaggerated.

Gandhiji did not agree with the Maulana's assessment of the Khaksars. They had become important by their activities in the Punjab, the NWFP and Sind, he said. They had put the Ministries in those Provinces on notice. As for Jinnah, one must not forget that he was a brave and incorruptible man. He did not agree, Gandhiji said, that the Muslim League did not represent the Muslim mind. Supposing a Constituent Assembly should come into being and Jinnah should sweep the board. If then the Muslims should ask for partition, it would not be possible to resist the demand. He could not answer *belcha* (shovel) with *belcha*, and if people did not listen to him there would be civil war. Gandhiji said if what Kripalani had said was true, viz., that the Nationalist Muslims and the Jamiet-ul-Ulema had lost faith in him (Gandhiji), and that they saw him as one promoting Hindu culture, what work could they possibly take from him?

Azad pointed out that during the Khilafat even the most conservative among the maulanas had been with Gandhiji. From the religious point of view they were not intolerant of the British, who were Christians, and so people of the Book. But they knew that if there was anyone among the Hindus who understood their demand it was Gandhiji and no one else.

Rajaji said that if they wanted to launch a movement they must be clear as to the objective and it should be acceptable to the vast majority of people. They must be sure of the "better mind of the Muslims" before undertaking a fight.



Gandhiji: "There is not only the Muslim League. There are the Princes, the Depressed Classes, etc. The Congress is not putting forward a preposterous claim. It simply says we are one of the parties, we want something on which all the parties are represented." Gandhiji said they should not press for a declaration of independence. They should only insist on the demand for a Constituent Assembly.

Jawaharlal did not agree. The declaration was necessary, he said. Supposing someone in the Constituent Assembly sought perpetuation of the British Empire, what then? The British must make the declaration that they recognized Indian independence. "I will be a rebel against the Constituent Assembly. I want independence now," he declared.

Gandhiji said there was no difference between them as to the object. But they could not ask for a declaration of complete independence because they must represent the whole of India – of course he did not count the Princes. If the League won all the Muslim seats in the Constituent Assembly and then asked for partition, the Congress would not be able to resist the demand. Therefore in the satyagraha campaign a declaration by the British Government could not be made an issue. Of course the Constituent Assembly would have no other programme but that of independence. It would frame the charter of independence. The demand for independence was opposed by the Muslims. Gandhiji went on:

We must tell the British to forget about the parties. Let them declare that they would give up the Empire and concede the Constituent Assembly. If Muslims and Sikhs want separate electorates, give them that. Give them the constitution that they want. I have also said that if all the Muslims want partition they would have it. I have not given up the hope that the Muslim League will change its position. If all the Hindus could be converted to the view that Muslims were their brothers there would be no need for satyagraha.

Further elaborating his idea Gandhiji said he was simply thinking of what non-violence demanded. Compromise was of essence. It might be necessary to make a statement that there could be no civil disobedience until Muslims were placated.



Opinions in the Working Committee remained divided and the Committee passed "no startling resolution" on the subject. [The Diary of Mahadev Desai (unpublished), Book No. 40, pp. 369-416]

8

Those were agonizing days for Gandhiji. The deliberations at the Working Committee only showed that Congressmen were not wholly with him on the attitude to be adopted towards the Khaksars and the Muslim League and the best way to tackle communal militancy. Unadulterated non-violence, the non-violence of the strong, as Gandhiji described it, was not a thing the Congress and the country at large were in a frame of mind to try in dealing with the threat that had developed. If killing or getting killed were the alternatives when faced with the Khaksar menace, as Nehru put it, people would not willingly get killed and Gandhiji would never advise them to kill.

In conversations with Rajaji and others following the Working Committee's meeting Gandhiji expressed the view that in resisting Pakistan non-violence would be the most effective weapon. The dumb millions would cooperate. All that was required was a determination on the part of Congressmen to say to the Muslims: take your partition, but you do not get our loyal consent. Pakistan would then be rendered impossible.

Violent bluster, Gandhiji was certain, would not do. If the Congress thought of going back to office it would be a dismal failure. There would be riots. Without an understanding with the League that could not be done.

Gandhiji was again gripped by a desire to retire from the Congress. Let it fight without him, he thought. He would settle down in Sevagram and carry on his experiment in non-violence. Perhaps in that eventuality the Muslim League would look at the Congress with kindlier eyes. Gandhiji told C.R., "My life will close with the experiment of non-violence as a weapon of the weak."

When Gandhiji broached the subject with Azad, the latter said, "The Congress cannot come to any decision without you. It has become so used to following you that your leaving it would be like a mother leaving her child. Please chalk out your programme in your own way. If the way of compromise can get us somewhere let us try it, though Jawaharlal does not agree."



Gandhiji said he did not attach any importance to the fact that people did not agree with him. What distressed him was that there was no unity of views in the working Committee.

If the Khaksars should conquer the Muslim mind, if the Muslims should come to feel that the Khaksars were their defenders, it would be disastrous. Inayatulla was not a dishonest man, he was a fanatic and a clever man. He talked of Islam and the Prophet. [Ibid, pp. 417-26]

Writing in *Harijan* of 27 April 1940, Gandhiji summed up the position after the CWC meeting. The CWC, he wrote, had passed no startling resolution, for the only programme that it had before it was that of civil disobedience and it was a programme that he had to evolve.

But in the face of the lawlessness that prevailed in the country civil disobedience must pass for lawlessness unless it was beyond doubt recognized as something different in kind. The average Englishman thought that civil disobedience was merely a cloak. The Muslim Leaguers thought it was aimed at them more than at the British. Gandhiji assured the British, with all the strength at his command, that he did not want to embarrass the British people. Still less did he wish to embarrass the Muslim League. He wrote further:

Working in the midst of suspicion and terrible misrepresentation on the one hand and the prevailing lawlessness outside and inside the Congress on the other, I have to think a thousand times before embarking on civil disobedience.

So far as I can see at present mass civil disobedience is most unlikely. The choice lies between individual civil disobedience – on a large scale, very restricted, or confined only to me. In every case there must be the backing of the whole of the official Congress organization and the millions who, though not on the Congress register, have also supported the organization with their mute but most effective cooperation.

To ensure such cooperation Gandhiji called upon the people to spin and use only khadi cloth. "Those who will do this," he wrote, "are as much satyagrahis as those who will be singled out for civil disobedience." [C.W.M.G., LXXII, pp. 19-21]



On 18 April, while the CWC was in session, Secretary of State Zetland made a statement on India in the House of Lords. Reiterating the British position he said:

A substantial measure of agreement among the communities of India is essential if the vision of united India is to become a reality.... But the fact of the matter is that the Congress party has raised in the minds of many Muslims apprehensions which only they themselves can allay. Will the Congress refrain from closing the door upon unity in India? Upon their answer hangs the future fate of the country. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1940, Vol. I., p. 62]

This homily from the British Government was dishonest and hypocritical, for the Muslim League, through open and secret encouragement from the British themselves, had taken up the position that there could be no agreement on the basis of a united India.

Gandhiji, in a "complaining letter" wrote to Linlithgow on 24 April:

I was tempted to write to the Press on Lord Zetland's speech. But I restrained myself.... There is a ring of reluctance to do the right thing by India.... Why does he bring up against the Congress things which are common ground? Hindu-Muslim question, minorities and the like are common ground. The Congress claims that they can be truly settled only by a Constituent Assembly or its equivalent. On British admissions Princes are your creation.

In yet another letter to the Viceroy on the same subject later on 9 May Gandhiji wrote:

My position is that Great Britain, to put herself right morally, should make requisite declaration unconditionally about India's right of self-determination. If you say that right will be recognized when she fulfils the conditions you lay down, self-determination may be indefinitely postponed, for the conditions may never be fulfilled. [*C.W.M.G.*, LXXII, pp. 21-22, 54]



A proposal continuously being pressed on Gandhiji from various quarters, to which British spokesmen had been giving support, was that a small, informal conference of Englishmen and Indians should be convened, which should try and arrive at an agreement on problems that came in the way of a constitutional settlement acceptable to all the parties. *News Chronicle* of London specifically asked Gandhiji to explain his stand in the matter. A British M.P., Hugh O'Neill spoke about it and *The Times of India* interviewed Gandhiji on the question.

Replying to the *News Chronicle*, Gandhiji said the proposal could be considered, provided the personnel of the conference were elected, not nominated. Besides, Gandhiji wrote,

The only authority that can possibly convene a preliminary conference of elected leaders is the British Government, and they will do so and find out the ways and means when they have made up their mind to part with power and recognize the right of India to frame the charter of her own freedom. [Ibid, pp. 19, 38]

On 9 May 1940, in an interview to the correspondent of *The Times of India*, Gandhiji explained his position on the question in greater detail. He said:

If the Viceroy is authorized to declare that His Majesty's Government have definitely come to the conclusion that it is the sole right of India to determine the form of Government under which she will live and if to that end he summons a conference of the best Englishmen and Indians, the latter elected according to acceptable procedure, and this conference devises methods whereby a Constituent Assembly can be summoned for the purpose and for solving all the problems that may arise, I should accept the proposal.

Gandhiji was prepared to concede that such a conference might well feel that a Constituent Assembly was not possible and suggest an equivalent. But the decision would have to be by agreement and not by vote, after it had been established that a Constituent Assembly was not a practical proposition. The Indian component of such a conference would have to be elected.

Gandhiji was asked if, in the event of the Government agreeing to this course, he would persuade the Congress Ministries to return to office. Gandhiji said:



Not until there is an agreement between Hindus and Muslims. I should wait. [The Diary of Mahadev Desai (unpublished), Book No. 40, pp. 456-57; *C.W.M.G.*, LXXII, pp. 57-58]

Jinnah, as was only to be expected, evinced no interest in the matter. In an interview on 18 May in Bombay he observed. "Mr. Gandhi's proposal for a preliminary conference of Indians and Englishmen contains nothing concrete or practical. It is enigmatical." [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1940, Vol. I, p. 70]

10

Meanwhile the forces of Muslim separatism led by the Muslim League continued with their mission of spreading communal poison and vitiating peace between communities.

In the streets of the Punjab the Khaksar bands, in defiance of the ban, continued with their marches. On 23 April in Lahore a group of Khaksar women, some of them carrying shovels, took out a procession, followed by a large crowd. On 5 May, a large number of Khaksars took refuge in three different mosques in Lahore and refused to surrender, necessitating police siege of the mosques. Leading citizens of Lahore, presumably Muslim Leaguers, thereupon made a representation to the Premier, assuring him that they would persuade the Khaksars to give up unlawful activities. On 9 May the police lifted the siege of the three mosques. On 29 May there was again trouble near the Golden Mosque at Lahore, when the police had to open fire, killing a Khaksar and a passer-by and wounding three others. On the following day, troops had to be called out in anticipation of disturbances. On 2 June there was again a clash between the police and the Khaksars, as a result of which one Khaksar lost his life and a number of policemen were injured. On 11 June the police carried out raids on nine mosques in Lahore to clear out the Khaksars holed up in them. At some places Khaksars offered resistance, resulting in injuries to a number of policemen. [Ibid, pp. 63-64, 68, 74, 78]

The Muslim League's hate propaganda was directed at Hindus in general and the Congress, but Gandhiji and the Nationalist Muslims were its special target. Gandhiji, answering a Muslim Leaguer Khan Bahadur, in *Harijan* of 8 June 1940, wrote:



Just now I am inundated with letters of protest from Muslim friends. Most writers do not argue. They give themselves satisfaction by abusing.... The correspondence in my possession and the Urdu press cuttings and even some English cuttings ...show that I am believed to be the arch enemy of Islam and Indian Muslims. [C.W.M.G., LXXII, pp. 132-33]

On 15 and 16 June 1940 the Working Committee of the All-India Muslim League met in Bombay and decided to organize Muslim National Guards. The resolution passed in this regard said:

In view of the grave world situation and its possible repercussions on India, when every community is organizing its volunteer organizations for the protection of its life and property, the Working Committee of the All-India Muslim League is of the opinion that the time has come when the Provincial Muslim Leagues should exert every nerve to start, organize and strengthen the Muslim National Guard Corps.... The Committee earnestly appeals to the Muslims to join the National Guard in large numbers under the banner of the Muslim League.

The resolution directed the Provincial Muslim Leagues to submit monthly reports about the progress of the training of Muslim National Guards. The organization of the Guards would be at three levels: Active Corps, Reservist Corps and Juvenile Corps. A recruit to the National Guards was required to sign a pledge in the name of Allah, the Koran and the faith to surrender himself to the Muslim National Guards organization. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1940, Vol. I, p. 318]

In the months and years to come the Muslim National Guards would act as the storm troopers of the League, an effective weapon for the spread of communal terror and waging of psychological warfare in pursuit of its aim to vivisect India. Over the years they grew into such a menace that in 1947, when the campaign of murder, arson and loot against the Hindus was at its peak in the Muslim-majority provinces, Gandhiji was obliged to ask that "private armies under the guise of National Guards, secretly or openly armed, should cease." [C.W.M.G., LXXXVII, p. 247]

In the immediate context the depredations of the Khaksars had been further reinforced.



Gandhiji summed up the position taken up by the Muslim League in the following words:

At the bottom of the cry for partition is the belief that Islam is an exclusive brotherhood, and anti-Hindu. Whether it is against other religions is not stated. The newspaper cuttings in which partition is preached describe Hindus as practically untouchables. Nothing good can come out of Hindus or Hinduism. To live under Hindu rule is sin. Even joint Hindu-Muslim rule is not to be thought of. The cuttings show that Hindus and Muslims are already at war.... Religion binds man to God and man to man. Does Islam bind Muslim only to Muslim and antagonize the Hindu? ...Are eight crores of Muslims to be fed with this which I can only describe as poison? Those who are instilling this poison into the Muslim mind are rendering the greatest disservice to Islam. [C.W.M.G., LXXII, pp. 27-28]



CHAPTER III: LIMITS OF CONGRESS COMMITMENT TO AHIMSA

1

In April 1940 the war in Europe entered a new and, for the British, an ominous phase. For seven long months since the war had begun, while the Nazi war machine had been operating in the east, razing cities and annihilating populations, there had been all quiet on the Western Front. France, which had been committed to open hostilities against Germany immediately in the event of the latter country invading Poland, held back when the crunch came, even though Germany had no forces left in the West to withstand a French assault. Britain had found herself wholly unprepared. She had been content to send a force of 1,58,000 men across the Channel to keep the French army company as it dug itself in behind the Maginot Line.

Hitler's generals were quick to take note of the defeatism that had paralyzed the French and the hesitation of the British and to profit from the situation. Hitler had long decided to occupy Norway and Denmark, although Germany had vowed "perpetually" to respect the neutrality of the two Scandinavian countries. In fact the invasion had first been planned for as early as November 1939, but there were a series of postponements. Finally the action was fixed for 9 April 1940.

Early on that day, well before dawn broke, Nazi destroyers and cruisers steamed towards the harbours in Denmark and Norway, Nazi planes flew overhead carrying paratroopers, and the Nazi diplomats in Copenhagen and Oslo demanded of the two Governments that they place their countries under Nazi protection.

The Danish Government surrendered. The Norwegian Government, headed by the King, refused to be cowed down by the Nazi threat and chose to resist. And although by the end of the month most of the harbours and important towns of Norway were in German hands, the small but valiant Norwegian army continued to harass the Germans from the hills in the north for almost two months vainly expecting the British to come to their help. On 12 June the Norwegian troops surrendered to the enemy. The King and the Government departed for London. Such little help as Britain had made available to Norway



had not been much use. [William L. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, Fawcett Crest, New York, 1983, pp. 889-935]

The conquest of Denmark and Norway – two inoffensive and small countries (Norway had a population of three million and Denmark only slightly more) — was only incidental to Hitler's purpose. They only served as a springboard for the invasion of the Benelux countries and France, on which the Nazi warlord, emboldened by the weakness so far shown by the British, now embarked.

On 10 May 1940, the day on which in London the weak and wobbly Chamberlain was replaced by Churchill as Prime Minister, Germany launched its most massive invasion of the war till then. Along a front that stretched 175 miles from the North Sea to the Maginot Line, the Nazi engines of war hurtled across the borders of Holland, Belgium and Luxemburg, three small states whose neutrality Hitler had solemnly pledged himself to respect.

The Dutch fought desperately. But their situation was hopeless. On 14 May Goering subjected the city of Rotterdam to a savage bombing, killing 800, wounding several thousands and leaving 78,000 homeless. The Dutch army finally capitulated, but only after the Queen and the members of the Government had fled to London.

In Luxemburg, which had a population of only a few hundred thousands, understandably the German army was met only by road blocks. In a few hours the country had been overrun.

The British and the French had planned to oppose the Nazis in strength in Belgium. Three French armies along with the British Expeditionary Force, nine divisions strong, took up positions in Belgium. German forces, consisting chiefly of armoured divisions unprecedented in size and mobility, made a detour and, crossing French territory, raced North to the beaches on the Channel, cutting off the Anglo-French forces. Towards the end of May at great risk the British navy came to the rescue of the men of the trapped British Expeditionary Force and evacuated them to England, minus their equipment. Some 2,33,000 British and 1,12,000 Allied troops, mainly French, were thus taken across the Channel from Dunkirk.



The German armies, heavily armoured and in great numbers now raced towards Paris. Resistance was stiff but was overcome and on 14 June German troops had entered Paris. Two days later they were in the Rhone Valley. Reynaud resigned as French Prime Minister and the collaborator Petain replaced him. Petain's first act was to request the Germans for an armistice. The request was sent on 16 June. But the Nazis took their time and the armistice was finally signed on 25 June. The terms were extremely humiliating for France. Two days later armistice had also been signed by France and Italy, which, too, had declared war against France on 10 June.

In just six weeks from 10 May to 25 June Belgium, Holland, Luxemburg and finally France had ceased to be free countries. The turn of England had come. [Ibid, pp. 948-82; *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1965, Vol. 23, pp. 791H-791K]

2

The news of the inexorable advance of the Nazi forces in the West sent shock waves across India. Cities and towns came to be gripped by the feeling that it was only a matter of time before Britain and British Empire would succumb to the irresistible might of Germany. The prospect of disintegration of the edifice of the Empire gave rise to panic and fear of possible civil disorder.

Congress leaders, too, were much shaken. They were apprehensive, first, that Hitler might conquer the world and destroy democracy and civilization, and, secondly, that as British rule disintegrated, chaos might overtake the country. Rajendra Prasad, for instance, was much disturbed by the thought of impending calamity. Soon after Hitler's hordes overran Belgium he came out with a statement calling on the country to help the British in defeating Germany. He also wrote to Gandhiji to similar effect. Gandhiji saw no ground for a change of policy on the part of the Congress. He wrote in answer:

For us it is a moral question. And when the Government obstinately refuses to do justice, how can we help? If slavery is bad, where is the question of choosing masters? ...They are getting money whether we like it or not. As long as they are the lords they will obtain the funds.... It is no small thing that we are not resorting to civil disobedience. [C.W.M.G., LXXII, pp. 50-51]



K. N. Katju was also of the view that in the crisis that faced the world the Congress should reconsider its stand and offer help to the British.

Gandhiji answered that the Congress, consistently with its policy, could only give moral help, which was at the disposal of the British people the moment they acted morally. As for material help, Britain was getting it whether the Congress liked it or not. All that the Congress could do was not to embarrass Britain by any precipitate action. He could therefore not resort to civil disobedience unless the way was absolutely clear. [Ibid, p. 51]

Gandhiji was inundated with letters pressing the view advanced by Rajendra Prasad and Katju. The correspondents argued that when Britain was faced by an aggressor who was definitely pursuing barbarous methods, the Congress should make a gesture towards the British which would win their hearts. That would be the way of non-violence. Gandhiji gave his answer in an article in *Harijan* of 25 May 1940, under the caption "Our Duty". He wrote:

British people stand in no need of sympathy from a subject people. For they can command all they want from them. They are a brave and proud people. They are not going to be demoralized by even half a dozen such set-backs. They are well able to cope with any difficulty that may face them. India has no say whatsoever in the manner in which she is to take part in the war.... What gesture has the Congress to make in such circumstances? The greatest gesture in its power the Congress is already making. It creates no trouble in the country. It refrains in pursuance of its own policy.... Beyond this it is not in the power of the Congress to go. [Ibid, p81]

There were also voices calling for immediate launching of civil disobedience. Gandhiji refused to give them ear. He had overwhelming evidence to show, he wrote, that there was much violence in the hearts of many Congressmen and much selfishness. A successful demonstration of non-violence was not possible in such conditions. [Ibid, p. 82]

Commenting on the view expressed by Ram Manohar Lohia that in order to ensure world peace immediate civil disobedience was called for, Gandhiji wrote that civil disobedience could only be successful if the country was



demonstrably non-violent and disciplined. Many groups outside the Congress did not believe either in non-violence or civil disobedience. In the Congress itself there were very few who believed in non-violence for the defence of India.

Further, unless the British *suo motu* declared India as a free country, it would be better to wait till the heat of the battle in Europe subsided and the future could be seen more clearly. India did not seek her independence out of Britain's ruin. That was not the way of non-violence. [Ibid, pp. 103-4]

But what should be done if violence broke out as a result of panic? Gandhiji was asked the question again and again. Gandhiji advised one and all to fend for themselves. He wrote:

The worst happening, there will be no central leadership, if the Congress disappears as it well may.... My own position is, I shall die in the attempt to preserve peace through non-violence.... We need not look to the existing Government to protect anybody if chaos overtakes us. [Ibid, p. 113]

To Sampurnanand, Gandhiji wrote in this connection:

I have a fear that if there is disorder I may prove ineffective.... I tell those who ask me that everyone should be at his post – using the lathi if they must but with non-violence if they have the faith.

Sampurnanand had asked if the Congress ministries going back to office might help. What good would the office be if there was disorder? — Gandhiji wrote. And the Congress could not take office like that. [Ibid, p. 119]

In an article in *Harijan* of 8 June, 1940, under the caption "Panic", Gandhiji wrote:

I would say to those who would lend a listening ear to me: Go on with your work or business in the usual way. Do not withdraw your deposits or make haste to turn your paper into cash.... There is undoubtedly fear of goondism in such times. You must be prepared to cope with it yourselves. Goondas flourish only in the midst of timid people. They will have no quarter from people who can defend themselves violently or non-violently.... If you do not know how to defend yourselves either way, the Government will not be able to save you in spite of its best effort.... You



can be the Government now, and you certainly will be in the contingency you contemplate or you will perish. [Ibid, p. 135]

3

As danger to England grew there were frantic appeals to Gandhiji from Britain and friends of Britain in India to forget the past and extend support to Britain in her need. Among those who thus approached Gandhiji were Samuel Hoare, British Tory politician and one-time Secretary of State for India, and Sikandar Hyat Khan, Unionist Premier of the Punjab and an ardent votary of the British cause. Gandhiji remained unmoved. As long as Britain refused to make an unequivocal declaration that India was a free country with full right to shape her destiny without British interference, the Congress could not lend Britain its moral support in the war. All that it could do, and was doing, was not to obstruct British war effort. [Ibid, pp. 96, 100, 172]

Nevertheless it was an agonizing time for Gandhiji. The calls on his time and energy were incessant and heavy. The country looked to him for guidance in a situation where no light was to be seen in any direction. The responsibility was weighing him down. The mood is brought out in a letter he wrote to Amrit Kaur on 15 May 1940. He said:

I cannot say I miss you. I am daily getting more and more detached. I seem to miss nobody and nothing. I have no time to think of these things. The burden I carry occupies the whole of my time.... There is an inner longing for loneliness. If *Harijan* was stopped today I should not feel the deprivation. [Ibid; p. 69]

On 24 May Gandhiji announced to the Ashram inmates at Sevagram that he was entering on an indefinite period of silence to cope with "irritations big and small". The silence would be broken for the Working Committee meeting or for similar emergencies. In the note announcing the silence he also added: "I do not want to insist on anything any more and so beyond expressing my views on essential matters, I do not want to argue." [Ibid, p. 91]

On 26 May, when wave after wave of German panzers were rolling over the plains of France, Gandhiji, notwithstanding his stand that, on moral grounds,



British war effort could not be supported, was so stirred by the peril faced by England that he wrote to Linlithgow:

The latest development seems to be most serious. Want of truthful news is tantalizing... But assuming that things are as black as they appear to be for the Allied cause, is it not time to sue for peace for the sake of humanity?...It is due to suffering humanity that this mad slaughter should stop.

Gandhiji offered, should the British Cabinet so desire, "to go to Germany or anywhere required to plead for peace, not for this interest or that but for the good of mankind".

But the British were in no need of such intercession. On 3 June the Viceroy answered him:

His Majesty's Government ...are clear in their own resolution that the war must be pursued until the objects for which they are fighting have been achieved.... There is nothing for it ...but to go on until victory is won. [ibid, pp. 100-101]

On 23 May 1940, Leopold S. Amery, who had in April replaced Lord Zetland as Secretary of State for India, replying to a question in the House of Commons declared:

The attainment by India of full and equal partnership in the British Commonwealth is the goal of our policy. We recognize ...that it is for Indians themselves to play a vital part in devising a form of constitution best adapted to India's conditions and India's outlook. The promise already given that the present scheme of the Act of 1935 and the policy and plans on which it is based are to be open for re-examination at the end of the war necessarily implies discussion and negotiation and not dictation. We have no desire to delay any of the steps that may pave the way towards an agreed settlement that will take account of the legitimate interests of all communities and interests.

Jawaharlal Nehru quickly rejected the statement, which, though conciliatory in tone, bore "no relation to facts in India or Europe". The British Government, Nehru declared, must give up completely its conception of being



the patronizing overlord of India, generously allowing us to have a say every now and then."

Gandhiji, however, withheld comment. He said:

While hourly butchery is going on in the West and peaceful homes are being destroyed, I have no heart to say anything publicly in regard to Mr. Amery's statement.... Suffice it to say that I would leave no stone unturned to bring about a peaceful and honourable settlement of the present deadlock. [Ibid, p. 95; *The Indian Annual Register*, 1940, Vol. I, p. 72]

The sombreness of mood that had gripped Gandhiji and the nervous strain under which he laboured was not improved by the various happenings in the Ashram, in themselves trifling in nature.

On 2 June a case of petty theft was discovered. A pen belonging to Radha Gandhi (who was later to marry Sarala Devi Choudharani's son Deepak) along with a letter written by her, was stolen from her cupboard. Direct enquiries elicited no confession from anyone. This increased Gandhiji's distress. In a note addressed to the inmates of the Ashram he wrote:

It is said that violence is subdued in the presence of non-violence, untruth in the presence of truth and stealing in the presence of non-stealing. What is my worth if untruth, violence and stealing survive in my presence? How can I give battle? ...The answer I get is that if the theft is not traced I should fast.... If the theft is not traced by Friday, the fast will commence from Saturday. I hope the culprit will bring me peace by making a clean breast of it and save me from having to fast in these critical days.

Gandhiji strongly suspected that it was the work of Amtussalam. But she swore that she did not do it. On Friday 7 June Gandhiji in another note declared that he suspected Amtussalam and since the suspicion had neither been dispelled nor confirmed, he would fast for self-purification from the following day. He also gave instructions that no work was to be taken from Amtussalam.

Gandhiji did not undertake the fast, however, since everyone at the Ashram was against it. Such was the extent of his distraction. [C.W.M.G., LXXII, pp. 122-28, 140, 142-44, 147; 151-53, 155, 157]



On 17 June 1940, the date on which, following the rout of the French armies, the French collaborator Petain had made his submission to the Nazis, the Congress Working Committee met at Wardha to ponder over the situation that had arisen as a consequence of the latest developments in the war and to chart a course of action. The sittings of the Committee continued for five days, concluding on 21 June.

The danger that the events held for India was many-dimensional. There could be aggression from without; there could be anarchy, disorders and power vacuum within the country as a result of breakdown of administration. What must the Congress do? It did not have the State power, while the British who had it, were seen more and more to be losing their hold over it. As might be imagined, therefore, members as well as special invitees to the meeting, were all highly exercised. But they differed widely in their assessment of the situation and as regards the most suitable course of action to be adopted. Mahadev Desai has faithfully recorded the deliberations.

Maulana Azad, the President, opening the debate, mentioned the Congress demand for a declaration from the British Government recognizing India as a free country and the British Government's refusal to make such a declaration, and asserted that the British were no longer in a position to take any decision in regard to India's demand. Moreover, even if they were to take a decision it would have no practical value. He mentioned the steps being taken by the Government, such as organization of civic guards and setting up of war committees in the districts. The Congress had not been consulted. People had been led to believe that there would be a struggle. But the Congress now said that it did not want to embarrass the Government.

Jawaharlal Nehru referred to the rapidly changing conditions in the country. He expressed the opinion that though one could not expect the Government to collapse overnight, in the event of Germany invading England widespread rioting was a possibility. England had lost the power to retain India. The Congress for its part was not in a position to tell the Government: 'you do such and such a thing and we will support you.' The Congress would not be able to do what it said. The question before the Congress was how to stem the anarchy



that must follow when the Government tottered and fell. A Provisional Government would have to be set up. He did not see any danger of external aggression.

Narendra Dev expressed the view that the Congress should stick to the position adopted at Ramgarh. The sooner there was settlement the sooner the British Government would go. If the struggle was prolonged and if in the meanwhile the British won the war, they were likely to refuse to part with anything.

Rajaji said the time had come when the Congress should suspend its demand for a declaration from the British Government. They had refused to make the declaration and it was evident that they would not make the desired declaration even in their extremity. A new situation had arisen. The Congress must make use of the advantage the elections had given it and take over as much of the machinery of the Government as possible.

Vallabhbhai Patel was of the view that no amount of help that the Congress could give would make the British win the war. The longer they continued the conflict the greater would be the disaster that must befall them. He did not fear foreign aggression. Internal chaos was a possibility. When a mighty Government crashed there would be a loud report. Many structures would collapse and many people would get buried under the debris.

Bhulabhai Desai counselled caution. They must not build any hopes on the British Government being so weakened in the war as to give up its hold on India. Should the war end soon, the Congress should undertake satyagraha; should it be prolonged, there should be no satyagraha. Also the Congress must not leave it to other people to provide help in the war. It must itself offer help to the British on its own conditions. Otherwise it would find itself at a disadvantage when the war ended.

Syed Mahmood expressed himself against the policy of inaction. He said: "Either launch civil disobedience or take over Ministries."

Achyut Patwardhan: "We have been wise in not launching satyagraha. But we have lost our grip on the situation. The confusion has been increased by the voices of 'back to office'. The Congress talks with the voice of Jawaharlal but walks



in step with Satyamurti." Maintenance of internal peace, Patwardhan said, was a difficult business. The Congress should organize citizen guards, a sort of peace brigade.

Kripalani mentioned the possibility of foreign aggression. Should Afghanistan launch an invasion against India, he said, Germany and Italy would help her and they would come with tanks. It would take India fifty years to become a first-class military power.

Asaf Ali dwelt on the question of violent and non-violent defence. He said he was not enamoured of non-violence. Seriously speaking, none of the members present could say he was really non-violent.

Jawaharlal: "All life, all activity is violence. Death only is non-violence."

Vallabhbhai: "The Congress must say to the British: 'In your 150 years rule you have rendered us incapable of defending ourselves. Now we have to defend ourselves. We are prepared to participate in coalition ministries, provided the defence policy is in our hands.' Why should we not do decently what we have to do willy-nilly?"

Maulana Azad mentioned the Ramgarh decision to start civil disobedience and the policy of non-embarrassment and the consequent dilemma that the Congress thus faced.

Gandhiji, volunteering to speak in English, for the benefit of C.R., with whom he said he had profound differences, said it was right for the Congress to have taken office and it was right for it to have resigned office when it did, for internal dissensions would have in any case obliged the Congress to give up office. The Ramgarh resolution was also the right step. Gandhiji continued:

I don't feel the strength of the Congress, but I do feel almost every day the weakness of the Congress, and our inaction has resulted not in making a weak organization weaker but it has on the contrary given it some strength.

The Congress, Gandhiji said, was not organized for a non-violent fight. The country had developed the art of non-violent resistance to British rule because of the conviction that nothing untoward would happen and the Government would go on surrendering from time to time. That non-violence had come to stay,



but it was not the non-violence which he had placed before the country and for which he wanted to live. That non-violence, the non-violence of the strong, had not been built up either in the Congress or among the masses.

That being so, Gandhiji continued, it might be as well for the Congress to give it up and boldly declare that non-violence having served its purpose, from now on it would resort to all means, violent or non-violent.

Rajaji had argued, Gandhiji said, that when British authority crumbled the reins of office should be in the hands of the Congress. But how would the Congress subdue anarchy? When the Congress had assumed power it had been hoped that it would never have to use the police and the military. But it had to. It was a demonstration of its failure. Gandhiji asked C.R. to believe that the Civilians would never do what he wanted them to do. He would have to resort to naked violence. The best course for the Congress was to remain where it was: on the watch tower. Mass organization was not mob organization of the kind that Mashriqui had developed.

It was not a favourable moment for accepting office, Gandhiji argued. The Congress should wait and develop non-violent strength through the charkha. Time was in its favour. Where the violent bravery of the Belgians, the Norwegians, the Poles and the French had failed non-violence of India would succeed. There was no need for tanks and aeroplanes to resist Hitler.

The Hindu-Muslim question was the greatest stumbling-block before the country. The Congress had not been able to draw Muslim masses to its fold. Here too the reason was that Congressmen were not saturated with non-violence. Gandhiji concluded:

Today a big crisis has come and if you do not come out with a fearless statement regarding our attitude to non-violence you cannot guide people. Congress will not anticipate social disorder because we resort to non-violence.

Jawaharlal Nehru argued for industrialization and militarization. He would have, he said, highly mechanized tanks. Violence ought to be ended, but it could not be ended merely by preaching non-violence. It was better to sin than to have complexes. It was a large order to presume that the country could evolve the kind



of non-violence that could withstand a foreign invasion. Supposing British administration disappeared, all manner of adventurers could spring up. The army might join in the loot. It was for the Congress to take the army into confidence.

Asaf Ali and Rajaji expressed themselves in favour of the Congress taking power in its hands. A certain amount of violence would have to be retained to defend liberty and non-violence itself.

Gandhiji said they had a right to work in the way they wanted. As for himself, he had wanted to mould the Congress to his view, but he had failed. The Congress now had the choice of either accepting his remedy or letting him go.

Rajaji said: "Why should you dilute your principle or mission? We examined our minds. Almost all of us are agreed that it will not be possible for us to accept your position and that we should not entangle you. A few of us find it difficult to visualize a Working Committee without you. I think you should be free to work out your ideal. The question is not your liberty, but the capacity of the Congress. And why should we accept a position merely to retain your connection? It is a fraud on ourselves and others. On the other hand your position is wrong and untenable."

Maulana Azad: "It is a grievous situation. The world can see a star, but it cannot reach it."

Jawaharlal: "Our hearts are full of violence. We do not have the arms. But we shall fight with our teeth. We shall hurl obscenities at the enemy and resort to various other things. We are filled with violence."

Rajaji said Gandhiji was being guilty of impatience. Why should he be? He could come again and work.

Syed Mahmood said Gandhiji was doing a disservice to non-violence.

Gandhiji answered that he was not being unduly impatient. He had first said in 1909 what he was saying now. All through the intervening years he had waited and he would continue to wait. He did not wish the Congress to adopt the ideal of philosophical anarchy. But he was certain that in the existing circumstances the Congress should not seek power. For it was the way to losing power.



Bhulabhai Desai gave expression to the feeling that lay behind the members rejecting non-violence except in the fight against the British. Supposing, he said, the British made the offer: 'you give us help and we make you free', what then? Supposing the Viceroy said: 'you form an army which will be part of the Empire defence and we give you freedom', what would the Congress say? Consistently with the position that Gandhiji wanted the Congress to take, the Congress could not accept the offer.

Jawaharlal declared that non-violence could not be the basis of administration. Communal violence could not be controlled through non-violence. External aggression and internal disorder could not be tackled through non-violence. Violence would have to be met by violence. [The Diary of Mahadev Desai (unpublished), Book No. 41, pp. 1-48]

5

The majority of members of the Congress Working Committee, of whom Jawaharlal Nehru and Rajagopalachari were the most articulate and uninhibited in the expression of their views, rejected non-violence as possible State policy or for meeting external aggression or internal disorder. The Working Committee thus rejected the lead that Gandhiji could give it. The statement that the Working Committee issued in the matter on 21 June 1940, ran:

The problem of the achievement of national freedom has now to be considered along with the allied one of its maintenance and the defence of the country against possible external aggression and internal disorder... Mahatma Gandhi had presented to the peoples of the world...a weapon in the shape of organized non-violence designed to take the place of war for the defence of a people's rights and freedom against armed aggression. He feels that at this critical phase of the history of man, the Congress should enforce this ideal by itself declaring that it does not want that India should maintain armed forces to defend her freedom against external aggression or internal disorder.

While the Working Committee hold that the Congress must continue to adhere strictly to the principles of non-violence in their struggle for independence, the Committee cannot ignore the present



imperfections and failings in this respect of the human elements that they have to deal with, and the possible dangers in a period of transition and dynamic change....The Committee have deliberated over the problem that has thus arisen and have come to the conclusion that they are unable to go the full length with Gandhiji. But they recognize that he should be free to pursue his great ideal in his own way and therefore absolve him from responsibility for the programme and activity which the Congress has to pursue under conditions prevailing in India and the world in regard to external aggression and internal disorder.

The Committee advised Congress Committees to encourage recruitment and training of peaceful volunteers for national service and to organize people in villages and other areas for self-defence. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1940, Vol. II, p. 175]

Commenting on the statement Gandhiji wrote that he was both happy and unhappy at the development, happy only because he had been able to bear the strain of the break. He was unhappy because his word could no longer carry with him his colleagues. But he was sure that if he could demonstrate the efficacy of the non-violence of the strong they would return to him. [*C.W.M.G.*, LXXII, p. 195]

Gandhiji urged members of the Gandhi Seva Sangh and the Charkha Sangh that though the Working Committee had been weighed and found wanting, they must hold fast to the creed. In any case, Gandhiji declared, even if none went with him, he must tread his path alone. He knew he could never be alone, for God was always with him. [*Ibid*, pp. 191-93]

What did Gandhiji mean by non-violence of the strong? It meant readiness to be killed rather than to kill. Such non-violence alone, he was convinced, could provide the answer in the situation that the country and the world faced. There was all-pervasive fear of the consequences of the possible collapse of Britain. There was apprehension of civil war, communal riots, looting, arson, plunder and goondaism. Even Congressmen were gripped by the fear. Gandhiji was being inundated with letters seeking advice and guidance. He wrote:

Let all Congressmen ask themselves whether they have the courage to take up non-violence of the strong. Nothing is needed to reach that



much-to-be-desired state beyond the will to risk all for the sake of one's cause. The non-violence of the person who went to jail to avoid a worse fate harmed him and disgraced the cause which he used as a shelter to escape death. Swaraj-makers are made of sterner stuff. And surely it is simple enough to see that if we can bravely face death without killing or even wishing to kill we have achieved the ability to win and keep swaraj. [Ibid, p. 224]

6

Towards the end of June Lord Linlithgow made yet another attempt to break the deadlock in the political situation in the country without resiling in any significant way from the declared proposals of the British Government as contained in his speech of 10 January 1940, at the Orient Club, Bombay. The impression was created that with the British fortunes in the war fast declining the British were desperately seeking to enlist voluntary cooperation of India in the war effort. The exercise ended in failure, as it had in February.

Gandhiji saw the Viceroy at Simla by special invitation on 29 June. Gandhiji at the outset made it clear that after the Wardha resolution of the Working Committee he could not speak as a representative of the Congress and that he could talk only in his individual capacity.

The Viceroy put forward for the consideration of the Congress the following proposal:

That His Majesty's Government would authorize an announcement that they would "spare no effort to bring about Dominion Status within a year after the conclusion of the war, and to set up whatever machinery those concerned agreed as appropriate to work out the new constitution". This would be subject to an agreed understanding about British commercial interests, defence, external affairs, rights of minorities and the position of the Princes – regard being had to treaty relations with them.

That granted these reservations, not a Constituent Assembly, as Gandhiji had suggested, but "a smaller and rather different body" on which "the various political parties were agreed", would consider the future constitution. This body would be in the nature of a "preliminary enquiry group of persons competent



...to tender advice and guidance to their principals ...without the parties being in any way committed to their conclusion".

Gandhiji informed the Viceroy that he personally and, so far as he knew, the Congress could never agree to the proposal. He stressed that nothing short of an "immediate unequivocal declaration of independence, free of all control by the British Government" would be accepted by the Congress. There would of course be a treaty of partnership with Britain and there would be provision for protection of legitimate foreign interests, guarantee of full rights to the minorities and adequate arrangements with the Princes consistently with the protection of the people living within their jurisdiction. The question of drawing up of the constitution by a Constituent Assembly, Gandhiji conceded, could be postponed to a future date.

The second part of the Viceroy's proposal was that subject to the acceptance of the announcement pending the war he would enlarge his Executive Council by taking into it a small number of people from political parties.

Gandhiji told the Viceroy that the Congress would not consider the proposal unless there was first the vital declaration of independence from the British Government. [Ibid, pp. 212-14]

The emphasis on the demand for an immediate declaration of India's independence had lately been missing in the councils of the Congress. Gandhiji reminded Congressmen and the British Government that even if India was to render effective help to Britain, it could only come from a free India. The Congress could not countenance the proposal for joining the Viceroy's Executive Council as long as it swore by independence and non-violence. If it sidetracked them it would be logically driven to reconstructing Congress Ministries in the Provinces and becoming part of the Government's war machine.

As for raising a volunteer corps to provide for internal disorder and external invasion, it would never be allowed. No Government could tolerate private armies. The Working Committee's decision on the point, if persisted in, would sooner or later result in the Congressmen being advised to enlist in the army in the usual way. For the sake of themselves, India, Britain and humanity,



Gandhiji hoped that Congressmen would resolutely decline to have anything to do with the use of arms for either of the two purposes.

The Congress, he wrote, had to make a choice. Congressmen could become Ministers or Members of the Executive Council at the centre and become part of the Government's war machine or they could resist the temptation, let others fill those posts and themselves hold fast to the objective and the means. His advice to Congressmen was to hold fast to its colours. It was then sure to fight its way to the goal. [Ibid, pp. 220-21]

Congress leaders, however, lent Gandhiji only half an ear. They had persuaded themselves that at the juncture at which the country found itself the best solution lay in the Congress assuming Governmental power. The Wardha statement of the Working Committee, diluting the commitment of the Congress to non-violence had set the tone. The Congress Working Committee met again in Delhi from 3 to 7 July 1940, to consider the next step.

Gandhiji gave the Committee a resume of his talks with the Viceroy and communicated to the members the latest offer of the Viceroy. Could the Congress consider the offer? If not, could it formulate counter-proposals for the consideration of the Viceroy?

It was the view of Rajaji that British collapse was only a matter of time and that the British were bound to try and come to an understanding with the Congress before they were "smashed". The situation had worsened during the preceding twenty days since the Wardha meeting of the Working Committee. It would be a breach of faith, C.R. argued, for the Congress to wait till the British disappeared from the scene. The Congress must step in or it would be squeezed out of existence. The demand for a declaration of independence had lost its importance and the Congress must not insist on it. If the Congress came to power at the centre, it should not be difficult to have a Constituent Assembly. He was clear that the existing British Government should be displaced and a National Government set up.

Gandhiji made a strong case for keeping out of power and pursuing undiluted non-violence for tackling internal chaos if it should result. The draft



resolution which he submitted on 5 July for the consideration of the Working Committee sums up his views. His draft said:

The Working Committee have come to the conclusion that they should exclusively rely upon Congress volunteers pledged to non-violence and the Congress discipline to deal with internal disorders to the extent it is possible. The volunteers will cooperate in a non-violent way with similar organizations in their non-violent activities....

The Working Committee never had occasion to determine whether India can be defended non-violently.... But so far as the present is concerned, the Working Committee are firmly of opinion that in pursuance of their non-violent policy Congressmen must not have anything to do with military training or activities calculated to make India military-minded. Therefore it cannot but view with grave alarm the attempt made in an organized manner to prepare India for military defence. In the opinion of the Working Committee if India were free and independent without an army she would have no fear of external aggression.... To invest crores of rupees in armaments, fortresses and the like would be to invite foreign attack. The Working Committee believe that India is too poor to invest money in costly defence forces and modern equipment....

In spite of the repeated and firm declaration of the Congress to the contrary, there seems to be a belief among the public, including even some Congressmen, that the Congress will be satisfied with Dominion Status. The Working Committee warn all concerned that they will accept no status lower than complete independence and that that declaration should be made now and given effect to immediately so far as may be. The legal formality may await a suitable future period. Only India free and independent in action can decide upon the part she should play in the present war.

There is talk among some Congressmen that the Congress may countenance resumption of Ministerial offices. The Working Committee wish to make it clear that there is no prospect of the Congress countenancing such a step without a satisfactory settlement with the Government.... In view of the foregoing it is superfluous to say that the



Working Committee cannot associate themselves with any Government proposals to expand the Central executive.

Speaking on his draft resolution Gandhiji said the Congress had to make a choice. Let them say goodbye to non-violence, if they must. The existing attitude was: today non-violence, tomorrow violence. They did not know what they would be doing in future. If they lacked faith in non-violence let them organize for violence, but for India, not for the Empire, which was tottering, on which the sun was fast setting. [Ibid, pp. 240-45]

No member of the Working Committee could accept Gandhiji's resolution as phrased. It would need to be revised. Rajaji said he differed from the whole plan. The resolution could play no actual part in the solution of the problem before the country.

He argued for a demand for a National Government without giving up the claim for independence. Gandhiji pointed out that Rajaji might not get the National Government of his conception. The question of the Princes, for one, could not be dismissed. Did Rajaji visualize complete disappearance of the Viceroy in the actual conduct of the administration? Would the civil service pass completely into the hands of the National Government with full power of dismissal and fixing of salaries, etc.? Would such a Government control national defence?

Rajaji said if the Viceroy interfered he would be fought. A draft resolution prepared by Rajaji was found to be unsatisfactory. Another was prepared, which was to the following effect:

The Working Committee have noted the serious happenings which have called forth fresh appeals to bring about a solution of the deadlock in the Indian political situation; and in view of the desirability of clarifying the Congress position they have earnestly examined the whole situation once again in the light of developments in world affairs.

The Working Committee are more than ever convinced that the acknowledgment by Great Britain of the complete independence of India is the only solution of the problems facing both India and Britain and are,



therefore, of opinion that such an unequivocal declaration should be immediately made and that as an immediate step in giving effect to it a provisional National Government should be constituted at the Centre which, though formed as a transitory measure, should be such as to command the confidence of all the elected elements in the Central Legislature and secure the closest cooperation of the Responsible Governments in the provinces.

The Working Committee are of opinion that unless the aforesaid declaration is made, and a National Government accordingly formed at the Centre without delay, all efforts at organizing the material and moral resources of the country for defence cannot in any sense be voluntary or as from a free country, and will, therefore, be ineffective. The Working Committee declare that if these measures are adopted, it will enable the Congress to throw its full weight in the efforts for the effective organization of the defence of the country.

The resolution was passed by seven votes against four, five members remaining neutral. [Ibid, pp. 245-47, 467; The Diary of Mahadev Desai (unpublished), Book No. 41, pp. 73-150; *The Indian Annual Register*, 1940, Vol. II, pp. 176-77]

Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, unable to compromise with his faith in unalloyed non-violence, resigned from the Working Committee. [*C.W.M.G.*, LXXII, pp. 255-56, 277-79]

Rajendra Prasad, another devoted follower of Gandhiji, also wanted to resign, but was prevailed upon not to do so. [Rajendra Prasad, *At the Feet of Mahatma Gandhi*, Hind Kitabs Ltd., Bombay, 1955, p. 296]

7

Commenting on the resolution in *Harijan* of 13 July, Gandhiji wrote:

Rajaji was the framer of the resolution. He was as certain of his position as I was of mine. His persistence, courage and utter humility brought him converts. Sardar Patel was his greatest prize.... I at once saw as clear as daylight that, if my position was not acceptable, Rajaji's was the only real alternative.



...Those Congressmen who have a living faith in the non-violence of the strong will naturally abstain. For the moment, however, what they can do is wholly irrelevant.... Non-Congressmen, who were eager for the Congress to be free of my religious bias to adopt a purely political attitude, should welcome the resolution and support it whole-heartedly. So should the Muslim League, and even the Princes who think of India more than their principalities.

The British Government have to make their choice. Independence they cannot withhold unless their wisdom is as much blurred as Rajaji claims that mine is.... I advise, as a disinterested but staunch friend, that the British Government should not reject the hand of friendship offered by the Congress. [C.W.M.G., LXXII, pp. 256-57]

On 10 July, Rajaji met Gandhiji at Sevagram and the two had an exchange of views on the implications of the resolution. Gandhiji explained to Rajaji the various pitfalls he saw in the working out of the proposed course. He told Rajaji that though there were violent people in India, there was no sense in exposing the whole country to violence. If the whole of India should be non-violent there would be no inducement to the enemy to come. Or he might come and eat up the whole continent. Let him.

C.R.: "The logical conclusion of your argument is that we should not care for existence. The Germans won't mind exterminating a race that they think is inferior. They think that we are such an effete race that we are a burden."*

Gandhiji told C.R. that if he thought non-violence was good he should try it to the extent he could. If he was a Congressman, he should run the risk, or he should retire and fight but not in the name of the Congress.

Rajaji said Congressmen offered *pooja* to non-violence because they wanted Gandhiji's leadership. Of course they all preferred non-violence to violence. They were for peace and amity and tolerance. But to expect people to remain non-violent and let the country be overrun by all and sundry was no good.

Gandhiji persisted. The Congress, he said, had to be non-violent in whatever hopeless minority it might be. In fact all who had been nursing non-violence should hold on to it for all they were worth. [The Diary of Mahadev Desai



(unpublished), Book No. 41, pp. 152-58]

* It may be noted that this was a very accurate representation of the Nazi view of India and Indians. On 23 March 1945, when the armed might of the German Reich was being ground down to dust by the blows from the East and the West, an army general, at a conference with Hitler, had raised the question of the Indian Legion. Hitler had said: "The Indian Legion is a joke. There are Indians who can't kill a louse, who would rather let themselves be eaten up. They won't kill an Englishman either. I consider it nonsense to put them opposite the English... If we used Indians to turn prayer mills, or something like that, they would be the most indefatigable soldiers in the world." [William L. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, p. 1430]

8

Gandhiji's commitment to non-violence in all human situations was total and unqualified. It was innate, instinctive and transcended all rules of logic and experience. Thus, while he wanted India to eschew armed resistance against external aggression and let the enemy take over homes and hearths, fields and factories, if he was so inclined, but not to extend to him any cooperation, he similarly wanted Britain to employ the weapon of non-violence against the Nazis. When he saw the Viceroy on 29 June, he placed the idea before him with a request that it be conveyed to the Government in London. He also drafted an appeal "To Every Briton", which, with the approval of the Viceroy, was carried in *Harijan* of 6 July 1940. In the appeal Gandhiji wrote:

This war has descended upon mankind as a curse and a warning. It is a curse inasmuch as it is brutalizing man on a scale hitherto unknown. All distinctions between combatants and non-combatants have been abolished. No one and nothing is to be spared. Lying has been reduced to an art. Britain was to defend small nationalities. One by one they have vanished, at least for the time being. It is also a warning. It is a warning that if nobody reads the writing on the wall, man will be reduced to the state of the beast, whom he is shaming by his manners....

I appeal for the cessation of the hostilities, not because you are too exhausted to fight, but because war is bad in essence.... I suggest that



a cause that demands the inhumanities that are being perpetrated today, cannot be called just.

...I want you to fight Nazism without arms or, if I am to retain the military terminology, with non-violent arms. I would like you to lay down the arms you have as being useless for saving you or humanity. You will invite Herr Hitler and Signor Mussolini to take what they want of the countries you call your possessions. Let them take possession of your beautiful island, with your many beautiful buildings. You will give all these, but neither your souls nor your minds. If these gentlemen choose to occupy your homes, you will vacate them. If they do not give you free passage out, you will allow yourselves – man, woman and child – to be slaughtered, but you will refuse to owe allegiance to them. [*C.W.M.G.*, LXXII, pp. 229-31]

The Viceroy duly conveyed Gandhiji's appeal to the British Government in London and was told by them to reply to Gandhiji "that with every appreciation of your motives they do not feel that the policy which you advocate is one which it is possible for them to consider, since in common with the whole Empire they are firmly resolved to prosecute the war to a victorious conclusion." [*Ibid*, p. 232]

Such a response from the British Government was only to be expected. Nevertheless the appeal had to be made. The awful slaughter needed to be stopped and a search induced for a better and a braver way to achieve the end. The appeal had come from an anguished heart and he could not have suppressed it, Gandhiji wrote. [*Ibid*, pp. 285-87]

The appeal was not a result of wishful thinking. It arose out of a firm conviction that non-violent action, if it was adequate, must influence Hitler and the Germans. No man, Gandhiji wrote, could be turned into a permanent machine. Immediately the dead weight of authority was lifted from his head, he began to function normally. If ever the opportunity was given to him, Gandhiji asserted, in spite of his physical limitations, he would not hesitate to try what appeared to be impossible. In ahimsa it was not the votary who acted in his own strength. The strength came from God. [*Ibid*, p. 361]

Gandhiji's appeal "To Every Briton", his call for a non-violent war to the finish against the whole structure of man's inhumanity to man, elicited wide



response from men and women whose hearts cried for a cessation to the indiscriminate slaughter that was going on. Gandhiji was inundated with letters, inviting upon his head, as he wrote, an extra load of work which, without God's help he would have been unable to bear. Ralph T. Templeton from England wrote:

I pray that God may lead you in His own way. You have countless friends encircling our earth. Through the instrumentality of non-violent resistance to the mountainous lovelessness and stupidity of our age, the way may yet open into the new day and a peace of full justice prevail among the nations. [Ibid, pp. 312-13]

9

The Viceroy had all through the period since October 1939 kept pushing the British Government's proposals intended to associate leaders of Indian political opinion with British war effort. The proposals, dealt with in Volume VII of the present series, comprised setting up of a War Consultative Committee, enlargement of the Viceroy's Executive Council by inclusion of a small number of political leaders and consultations after the war leading to the framing of an agreed constitution for India as a Dominion. The Congress continuing to refuse to countenance the proposals, Jinnah and the Muslim League sought to profit from the opportunity to drive with the Viceroy as hard a bargain as possible for promise of Muslim support. For many months Jinnah carried on an unbroken correspondence with the Viceroy in an attempt to dictate terms to the Government.

Before Linlithgow saw Gandhiji on 29 June he had called Jinnah, who saw the Viceroy on 27 June. On 1 July he sent the Viceroy a note on the proposals he had made to him at the interview. The note said:

That no pronouncement or statement should be made by His Majesty's Government which would in any way militate against the basic and fundamental principles laid down by the Lahore resolution of division of India and creating Muslim States in the north-west and eastern zones.

That His Majesty's Government must give a definite and categorical assurance to the Musalmans of India that no interim or final scheme of



constitution would be adopted by the British Government without the previous approval of the Muslim India....

Provisionally and during the period of the war, the following steps should be taken....

(a) That the Executive Council of the Viceroy should be enlarged, within the framework of the present constitutional law, ...it being understood that the Muslim representation must be equal to that of the Hindus if the Congress comes in, otherwise they should have the majority of the additional members, as it is obvious that the main burden and responsibility will be borne by the Musalmans in that case.

(b) In the Provinces where Section 93 of the Act has to operate, non-official Advisers should be appointed ...and the majority of the non-official Advisers should be the representatives of Musalmans

(c) There should be a War Council....Here again the representation of Muslim India must be equal to that of the Hindus, if the Congress comes in, otherwise they should have the majority.

The Viceroy found this a rather large order. The expansion of the Executive Council, he wrote, had to be within the framework of the existing constitutional scheme [the Government of India Act of 1919], so that the Council as a whole would function as the Government of India. There was, therefore, no question of the responsibility falling in greater or less degree on any particular section. There was no question of striking a balance between different interests and political parties. There were parties besides the Congress and the League who might fairly claim to be considered for inclusion.

As to whether non-official Advisers should be appointed in the Provinces where Section 93 operated, it was a matter for the Governors to decide.

As regards the War Council, the same considerations would apply. The Viceroy declined to accede to Jinnah's demand that Muslims to be appointed to the Executive Council or the War Council should be the nominees of the Muslim League. Of course, the Viceroy assured Jinnah, he need not fear that any suggestion he might put forward would not receive full consideration. [*The Indian Annual Register*, Vol. II, pp. 252-54]



Jinnah did not take kindly to the Delhi resolution of the Congress Working Committee demanding the setting up of a Provisional National Government. In a statement on 9 July he said:

Mr. Gandhi came to Simla to dictate and not to negotiate, and so is the Congress attitude as is demonstrated by the Delhi resolution.

Their demand for a so-called National Government indicated in the resolution means a Congress Raj.... A nation does not exist in India any more than in Europe or America. If their demand is met it will mean a Hindu majority Government – a permanent Hindu majority Government – a position which will never be accepted by Muslims.

The Muslim League now firmly stands convinced that the only solution is a division of India. [Ibid, p. 4]

Maulana Azad, the President of the Congress, tried to reassure Jinnah. In a telegram to him shortly afterwards he said:

The Delhi resolution of the Congress definitely means by National Government a composite cabinet not limited to any single party. But is it the position of the League that it cannot agree to any provisional arrangement not based on two-nation scheme? If so please clarify by wire. Azad requested Jinnah to treat the communication as confidential.

Jinnah's answer to this communication is typical of the man. He wired to Azad:

I have received your telegram. I cannot reciprocate confidence. I refuse to discuss with you by correspondence or otherwise as you have completely forfeited the confidence of Muslim India. Can't you realize you are made a Muslim show boy Congress President to give it colour that it is national and deceive foreign countries? You represent neither Muslims nor Hindus. The Congress is a Hindu body. If you have self-respect resign at once. [Pattabhi Sitaramayya, *The History of the Indian National Congress*, Vol. II, p. 202]



The All-India Congress Committee met at Poona on 27 and 28 July 1940 to consider the Wardha and Delhi resolutions of the Working Committee.

The President, Maulana Azad, explained the circumstances under which the Congress had to part company with Gandhiji. He referred to Gandhiji's insistence on a declaration by the Congress that free India would eschew all violence and would maintain no army to defend the country from external aggression. Gandhiji, he said, had first raised the question two years earlier, in September 1938, at the meeting of the Congress Working Committee held in Delhi. The Working Committee had found itself unable to extend non-violence, which it had been following in the struggle for freedom, to the problem of resistance to foreign invasion. The matter was not brought to a decision because the Munich Pact had come and the danger of war had for the time being receded.

In November 1939, following the outbreak of the war and his interview with the Viceroy, Gandhiji had again expressed the wish to be relieved of leadership if the Congress could not see its way to accepting non-violence for meeting external aggression and dealing with internal disorder. The Working Committee then had persuaded Gandhiji to postpone the decision.

On the occasion of the Ramgarh Congress session, Azad continued, Gandhiji had raised the question for a third time, advancing as one of the reasons the internal weaknesses in the Congress organization.

In June 1940 at Wardha Gandhiji had asked the Working Committee to make up its mind once for all and define its position on the question of non-violence. There was not a soul in the Congress, Azad asserted, who would not want to go the whole length with Gandhiji if he could. But they could not shut their eyes to hard facts. Human nature was not prepared to give up the use of force. The Congress had not the courage to declare that free India as a State would have no armed force. The Indian National Congress was a political organization pledged to win the political independence of the country; it was not an institution for organizing world peace.

The Congress could not go the whole length with Gandhiji on the path of non-violence. It was a weakness, no doubt. But it was a weakness it shared with



the entire humanity. Four members of the Working Committee, viz., Rajendra Prasad, P. C. Ghosh, J. B. Kripalani and Shankarrao Dev, said the Maulana, had declared that they could go the whole length with Gandhiji and had voted against the resolution on the subject. Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan had gone so far as to resign from the Working Committee.

The hard fact of Gandhiji's separation from the Congress had to be recognized and Congressmen must bravely put up with it. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1940, Vol. II, pp. 194-95]

Jawaharlal Nehru explained to the members how impractical it was to attempt to resist foreign invasion through non-violence. If he were an Englishman, said Nehru, he would not accept Gandhiji's advice contained in his appeal "To Every Briton", knowing that the people were not ready to adopt complete non-violence and that the alternative would be slavery, which was certainly worse than violence.

C. Rajagopalachari, moving the Delhi resolution for ratification, said that if the demand for National Government was met, the Congress should help Britain in the prosecution of the war.

Sardar Patel declared that what Britain wanted was more than moral support. He said: "We have made it quite clear that if our demands are accepted, our full and hearty cooperation will be at the disposal of Great Britain."

The AICC approved the Delhi resolution by a vote of 95 to 47. [*Ibid*, pp. 10-11]

Thus the demand for an "immediate declaration of Independence" was put on the back burner, so was the demand for a Constituent Assembly. The Ramgarh resolution remained in abeyance. It was no doubt no more than a change of tactics, designed to end the deadlock and arrive at a *modus vivendi* with the British Government for the troubled period of the war.

The ball was now in the British Government's court.



CHAPTER IV: TOWARDS INDIVIDUAL CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

1

The British Government turned down the overture contained in the Poona resolution of the A.I.C.C. In a statement issued on 7 August 1940, Lord Linlithgow, the Viceroy, referred to the conversations he had had with "prominent political personages in British India and the Chancellor of the Chamber of Princes", and the resolutions passed by the Congress, the Muslim League and the Hindu Mahasabha, and declared that "the earlier differences which had prevented the achievement of national unity" had remained unbridged.

However, regardless of the differences, Linlithgow said, the British Government had authorized him "to invite a certain number of representative Indians" to join his Executive Council. They had further authorized him to establish a War Advisory Council, which would meet at regular intervals, and which would contain representatives of the Indian States, and of other interests in the national life of India as a whole.

The Viceroy mentioned two points that had emerged from his consultations and the resolutions of the various parties. These were: doubts as to the intentions of the British Government as regards the constitutional future of India and doubts as regards the safeguards for the minorities, whether political or religious.

The Viceroy expressed the British Government's sympathy for the demand that the framing of a scheme of constitution for India "should be primarily the responsibility of Indians themselves" and said that he had been authorized to declare that His Majesty's Government "will most readily assent to the setting up after the conclusion of the war with the least possible delay of a body representative of the principal elements in India's national life in order to devise the framework of the new constitution".

The Viceroy assured the "minorities", (which meant primarily Jinnah and the Muslim League) of the British Government's "concern that full weight should be given to the views of the minorities" in any revision of the constitutional scheme. Lest these "minorities" should have any fear that the British Government might buckle under pressure of the Congress demand for a National



Government, the Viceroy hastened to assure them: "It goes without saying that they [the British Government] could not contemplate the transfer of their present responsibilities for the peace and welfare of India to any system of Government whose authority is directly denied by large and powerful elements in India's national life. Nor could they be parties to the coercion of such elements into submission to such a Government." [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1940, Vol. II, pp. 372-73; *C.W.M.G.*, LXXII, pp. 472-74]

Secretary of State L. S. Amery further elucidated the policy contained in the Viceroy's statement in the Commons debate on India on 14 August.

Amery argued that the deadlock in India was not so much between the British Government and "a consentient Indian opposition" as between the "main elements" in India's national life. The British Government was only one of the parties. The problem was not of a bilateral agreement but one of a multilateral agreement. The Congress professed to speak for all the main elements in India's national life, but its claim was utterly denied by very important elements in India's complex national life". The foremost of these "elements" were the Muslims. They differed from the Hindus "in religious and social outlook, in historic tradition and culture". As a body the Muslims had stood aloof from the Congress. The Muslims were opposed to the principle of majority rule at the Centre because it would give too great power to the Hindus. They were for that reason opposed to a Constituent Assembly elected by a majority vote.

Then there was the "great body of what are known as the Scheduled Castes", who stood outside the main body of the Hindu community represented by the Congress.

Lastly there were the Princes, who refused "to be assimilated to the simple democratic formula propounded by the Congress" and objected strongly to the proposed Constituent Assembly or to any constitution emerging from it.

The contemplated expansion of the Viceroy's Executive Council, Amery said, would be under the existing constitution. The Executive Council would have to be responsible to the Governor-General. It could not be made responsible to the "elected elements in the Central Legislature". The Congress demand for a National Government dependent on the support of the elected members of the



Legislature was in fact a demand "for changing the whole basis of the Indian Government in the middle of the war". Moreover, it would prejudge the whole issue in the sense favoured by the Congress and rejected by the minorities. There could be no agreement on a Government responsible to the Legislature until there was agreement "upon the nature of the Legislature and upon the whole structure of the Constitution".

As regards the future constitution, Amery said the British Government proposed that it should be framed by "a body representative of the principal elements in India's national life". That meant a body constituted in agreement between the representatives of those elements. That, Amery said, had been the policy followed in all the Dominions: agreement had been sought not only between geographical units but also between the main racial elements – English and French in Canada, British and Boer in South Africa. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1940, Vol. II, pp. 373-81]

2

The Viceroy's declaration, and Amery's elucidation of it, represented a summary rejection of the offer of the Congress for cooperation in the war effort, an offer made in opposition to the counsel of Gandhiji and at the cost of his leadership.

Asked to comment on the Viceregal declaration, Gandhiji in a cable to *The News Chronicle* on 13 August said:

The Viceregal pronouncement is deeply distressing. It widens the gulf between India, as represented by the Congress, and England.... My own fear is that democracy is being wrecked. Britain cannot claim to stand for justice if she fails to be just to India. [*C.W.M.G.*, LXXII, p. 385]

The Viceroy, in terms of the declaration, invited the Congress President to see him "with any friend whom you may care to bring with you", to pursue the matter of the Congress participation in the Central Government and in the War Advisory Council. Azad answered that in view of the fact that the declaration did not contain even a suggestion for a National Government, he saw no purpose in meeting the Viceroy. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1940, Vol. II, pp. 200-201]



The Congress Working Committee met at Wardha from 18 to 23 August to consider the situation created by the latest declaration of the British Government. Gandhiji was present throughout the deliberations.

The Working Committee had before it its Wardha resolution, which spelt out the limits to which the Congress was willing to commit itself to non-violence, and the Delhi and Poona resolutions, which offered to the British Government active cooperation in the war effort on conditions which the British had through the Viceregal pronouncement rejected. Clearly the offer of cooperation in the war effort no longer had force and the Working Committee must work out a new strategy to carry forward the fight for freedom. The question was whether and to what extent it could count upon Gandhiji to lead the Congress in prosecuting the new programme of struggle. Could an organization which had been prodded into adopting non-violence for its struggle against the British regime but refused to commit itself to non-violence for conducting national defence and for dealing with internal disorder, be led by one who insisted on total non-violence for dealing with all situations of friction, external or internal, and as State policy? A discussion of the applicability of non-violence in the new situation therefore took up a good deal of time of the Working Committee.

Indeed even before the Working Committee met, Gandhiji had been reverting again and again to the importance of non-violence in all human situations. On 15 August he spoke to a group of people from Poona, one of them being B. G. Kher, who said they were votaries of out-and-out non-violence.

Gandhiji was asked if the operation of non-violence should be limited to human individuals and groups alone.

Gandhiji answered that naturally for the Congress it was confined to the political field and therefore only to the human species. Hence out-and-out non-violence would mean every variety of non-violence in the political field. In concrete terms it covered family relations, relations with constituted authority, internal disorder and external aggression. In other words it covered all human relations.

Someone pointed out that Gandhiji had described the Polish resistance to the Germans as almost non-violent. How could he then object to the Wardha resolution of the Working Committee?



Gandhiji answered that the two situations were dissimilar. The Poles were faced with German hordes vastly superior in numbers, military equipment and strength. It was almost like a man fighting with his sword single-handed against a band of decoits armed to the teeth. He would call such resistance almost non-violent. But India had 400 million people. If they were to organize a big army and prepare themselves to fight foreign aggression how could they, by any stretch of imagination, be called almost non-violent, let alone non-violent? If India ever armed herself, she would constitute the greatest menace to world peace. If she took to that path, she would also have to choose the path of exploitation like the European nations. Having passed the Wardha resolution the Congress proclaimed to the world that the ahimsa it had subscribed to all those years had really not been ahimsa but a form of *himsa*.

How would he run the administration of the country non-violently? – Gandhiji was asked. How would he manage the police and the magistracy?

Gandhiji said if the assumption was that independence would be won by non-violent means, it would presuppose that the bulk of the country, the vast majority of its people, had become non-violent. In that case it would not be a difficult matter to carry on the administration without the military. The goondas, too, could then be controlled. For instance, Sevagram had a population of six or seven hundred. If they were non-violently organized, five or seven goondas in their midst would either have to live under the discipline of the rest or leave the village. A police force perhaps would be necessary, but it would not be after the British pattern. There would be adult suffrage and the voice of even the youngest would count. A non-violent State could only be an ordered anarchy. The police would be a body of reformers.

Gandhiji was asked how he visualized standing non-violently against foreign armed invasion.

Gandhiji said he would have to place himself and his small non-violent army between the two violent armies engaged in combat. The soldiers of the non-violent army need not have the resourcefulness and understanding of their general. The only thing required of them would be a perfect sense of discipline to carry out faithfully the orders of the general, who would command their unquestioning obedience. Gandhiji mentioned the Dandi March as an instance.



The thousands of men and women who had participated in the movement had been no more than average people, erring and sinful. Yet they, including even the women, had demonstrated matchless heroism. God had a way of making use even of the most fragile instrument, Himself remaining untouched by everything.

Gandhiji advised those who were votaries of out-and-out non-violence to leave the Congress, in the interest of the Congress itself. If the Congress did not retrace its steps from the Poona resolution, it would go to the dogs and he did not want to be witness to its disintegration. The Poona resolution was a mistake, irrespective of whether it remained operative or not. Gandhiji continued:

Besides there is an inherent flaw in the Poona resolution. It should be obvious to the meanest understanding that, if you think you cannot do without arms in meeting foreign aggression, they would a *fortiori* be needed in dealing with daily disturbances, internecine feuds, dacoities and riots. For organized unarmed resistance against an organized invasion is any day easier than deliberate ahimsa in face of a dacoit who breaks into your house at night. [C.W.M.G., LXXII, pp. 387-95; The Diary of Mahadev Desai (unpublished), Book No. 41, pp. 162-74]

3

When the deliberations of the Working Committee began, Gandhiji raised the question of the Delhi and Poona resolutions and asserted that the logical concomitant of those resolutions would be that the Congress would become part of the war machinery of the Government, that it would have to suck the poor and undertake extensive recruitment. India would become an armed camp. Some Congressmen might still go to jail, but it would be of no avail to the Congress. Creation of a national army within the foreseeable future was not a possibility, nor could violence lead to the strengthening of nationalism. Gandhiji in this connection read out a letter he had written to Master Tara Singh. The letter, dated 16 August, ran:

As I have told you, in my opinion you have nothing in common with the Congress nor the Congress with you. You believe in the rule of the sword; the Congress does not. You have all the time 'my community' in mind. The Congress has no community but the whole nation. Your civil



disobedience is purely a branch of violence. I am quite clear in my mind that being in the Congress you weaken 'your community' and weaken the Congress. With your mentality, you have to offer your services to the British Government unconditionally and look to it for the protection of the rights of 'your community'. You do not suppose for one moment that the British will take your recruits on your conditions. [C.W.M.G., LXXII, pp. 395-96]

Gandhiji said he must launch a struggle, but it would not be on the issue of independence. The Congress could not embark on civil disobedience for independence. There would be internecine strife if it did. His own struggle would be of no use to the Congress.

Maulana Azad said he did not see any differences between Gandhiji and the Congress in the matter.

Nehru disagreed. Differences were there, he said, right and left, before and behind. But even if Gandhiji and the Congress were to function separately, the struggle could be coordinated. Gandhiji could have his own army of non-violent satyagrahis and the Congress could have its own civil disobedience. Only, there should be no conflict between the two. India, Jawaharlal asserted, would not become non-violent until rivers of blood flowed. People nursed their hatreds and it came out in the most poisonous way. Changing the psychology of a nation was a tremendous task. Suppressing people's instincts, whether of sex or violence, was a dangerous thing.

Gandhiji said the Congress sought independence through non-violent means. It followed that independence, when achieved, would also have to be retained through non-violent means. Free India might or might not have an army, but so far as the Congress was concerned, it must not have an army.

Rajaji asked if it was Gandhiji's view that in the event of the Congress being in a majority in the new set-up, it should vote out the military budget.

Gandhiji said he was not denying the possibility that there might be an army. Only, the Congress itself must remain non-violent. In the struggle for freedom there would be participation of other elements besides the Congress, but the Congress would accept not their violence but their political association.



If there was an army in free India it would be used for those other elements, not for the Congress.

In a note to the Congress President Gandhiji asked him to rectify the mistake that he, Gandhiji, had committed in allowing Rajaji to move his resolution at Delhi. In permitting the resolution, Gandhiji wrote, he had abandoned his authority as a general. If the mistake was rectified, meaning that if the Congress rescinded the Delhi and Poona resolutions, Gandhiji said he had a plan for a struggle.

Maulana Azad was for Gandhiji being given a free hand. And since the majority of the existing Working Committee had been responsible for passing the offending resolutions, they must all resign and a new Working Committee should be formed. Remaining outside the Working Committee, the outgoing members would give their cent per cent loyalty to the new Committee.

But why not give cent per cent loyalty while remaining in the Working Committee? – Gandhiji asked. Why could not the Working Committee rescind the resolutions?

Rajaji said he continued to hold the views he held when the resolutions were passed. Now there was a new background, that of ahimsa. Let Gandhiji have a new team rather than a heterogeneous body. He could be Gandhiji's soldier, but he could not be his agent.

None of the leading members of the Committee — Rajaji, Nehru, Patel — would accept the view that, merely because the demand contained in the resolutions had not been met, the resolutions were intrinsically wrong and it annoyed them to be asked to retrace their steps. Gandhiji said they should consider his advice as coming from an expert.

Nehru was up in arms. He said he considered Gandhiji an expert in satyagraha, not an expert on external relations. And he did not accept Gandhiji's views on the Hindu-Muslim question or on the laws of inheritance or on how to administer a State. He would reject non-violence a hundred times if Gandhiji insisted on it in external relations or if he wanted him to go to heaven thereby. When Gandhiji talked of unquestioning obedience, Nehru continued, his whole soul revolted against it. Even in engineering he would not accept an expert's opinion unquestioningly. Gandhiji wanted to chop off their minds, if not heads.



Gandhiji reminded the Committee that it had the choice of carrying on the struggle by itself. He would keep himself aloof. He had been absolved of responsibility at Wardha and he would serve the Congress by remaining outside it.

But this was a prospect the leaders were not ready to face. Launching a struggle except under the leadership of Gandhiji, G. B. Pant said, would be meaningless. Neither the Government nor the world at large would be impressed. Nehru declared that the Congress would be doomed if it took any step independently of Gandhiji. Gandhiji could not shake off his responsibility.

Supposing, Gandhiji asked, he launched a struggle and as a result the British showed readiness to concede a National Government provided the Congress helped them with men, money and material, would the Congress consider itself honour bound to render them such help?

No, Jawaharlal assured him. The offer that had been made by the Congress was dead. Now the Congress would only deal with a non-Imperialist Britain.

But he would not go farther than that. He would not spell out whether free India would have an army. For purposes of the State the Congress leaders were not prepared to give up the use of violence. Gandhiji said this presented him with a difficulty. If he went to the Viceroy as a representative of the Congress, the Viceroy might say, 'hello, so you have become an army man'.

C.R.: "You have not told him that you will never work for the Congress because your theory of State is different from ours?... Suppose we were all fools and felt we could not keep a State without a certain amount of violence, would you refuse to emancipate us?"

Gandhiji said his anxiety to secure freedom for the country ought not to be questioned. [The Diary of Mahadev Desai (unpublished), Book No. 41, pp. 176-202]

On 21 August Gandhiji placed before the Working Committee a draft resolution for its consideration. The salient portions of the resolution ran:

Rejection by the British Government of the Congress resolution is proof of their determination to hold India by the sword against her



will... It is well known that the offer was made against Gandhiji's advice. He had warned the members of the Working Committee that the Congress was abdicating its moral position by promising to associate itself actively with the war... Events that have happened compel the Working Committee to recognize the soundness of Gandhiji's advice from the purely political platform if not from his ethical standpoint. The Congress which has inculcated non-violence for the past 20 years for ousting the British Power could not be turned into a war machine without losing its fibre and without doing violence to the dumb masses which have hitherto responded to the Congress call. The Working Committee therefore consider the British Government's rejection of the Congress resolution as a God-sent escape from a false and untenable position. The Working Committee therefore wish it to be known that the effect of the resolution must be regarded as exhausted. It has no further currency. The Working Committee must revert to Gandhiji's position and so far as the Congress is concerned it must strive to build up a non-violent society and believe with Gandhiji in the possibility of building up a State able to defend its liberty against the whole world by its own sheer goodwill towards the whole of mankind working under a democratic system which will eschew all violence and which by its simple code will afford no temptation to an invader....

The Working Committee cannot but put on record its deep sorrow that the desire of the Congress not to embarrass the British Government has been despised by them and they have thus driven the Congress to defend itself against political extinction. It therefore invites and appoints Gandhiji to devise such measures as he may think necessary for the protection of the Congress and national honour.... [C.W.M.G., LXXII, pp. 407-10]

Opening the discussion on the draft, Maulana Azad said he found it difficult to go along with it. He could not sincerely say that he had made a mistake. At the same time they must have the leadership of Gandhiji.

C.R., Bhulabhai Desai, Pattabhi Sitaramayya and Asaf Ali similarly expressed their misgivings. Jamnalal Bajaj, P. C. Ghosh and Syed Mahmud thought it could pass with some modifications. Rajendra Prasad was non-committal.



Nehru said putting out such a resolution would discredit the Congress in the eyes of the British public. They would think it was a trick on the part of the Congress, and that they were all one in perpetrating the trickery.

Gandhiji gave up. He told the Committee in effect: I withdraw my resolution. Just as you have a right to stick to your position, so I have a right to stick to mine. In any case a struggle is on the cards for the Congress, irrespective of whether I am with you or not. The situation seems to be such that whatever I say seem to harm the Congress. I love Jawaharlal and Vallabhbhai. But we have drifted so far apart that though we have been talking for the last three days we have not arrived anywhere.

Gandhiji having withdrawn his draft resolution, another resolution came up before the Working Committee for consideration. The resolution raised another debate. Syed Mahmud asked whether the Congress desired the defeat of the British and whether the defeat of the British would not clear the way for others to come in.

To hell with the British, said Vallabhbhai. They would themselves be responsible for their defeat, said Jawaharlal. Gandhiji said the point raised by Syed Mahmud was an important one. So far as he himself was concerned, he was not afraid of a German or Japanese invasion. He would face them non-violently. But the Congress had chosen a different path. It might be that the Congress leaders would be in jail and the Nizam, the Maharaja of Bikaner, the leaders of the Hindu Mahasabha, the Zamindars and others would go in deputation to welcome the Germans.

Gandhiji said he had been brooding over things for the preceding one month: in what form could he offer satyagraha? He was old, he was tired. That morning the answer had come: he must fast. He would serve a notice on the British to quit India. The Congress had become so rotten inside that it could not wrest independence for the country. And yet the things going on in the country could not be put up with. Masses were being looted through forced levies for the war. Millions of pounds every day went out from India to finance the war. He must tell the British to stop the loot. The immediate question was not of independence but of stopping the plunder.



But, Gandhiji went on, he wanted to put the issue before the country in such a way that everyone could understand. He must fast. He asked the members of the Working Committee not to come and plead with him to desist, not to be scared and not to be annoyed.

The announcement stunned the Working Committee. The moment for such a decision was not yet, said Maulana Azad. The time had not come for the sluice-gates to be opened. Did Gandhiji want to put an end to his life because he found himself unable to bring about a new transformation and create a new order? But the world was tired of the rivers of blood that had been flowing and the time might come for Gandhiji to lay the foundation of a new order. His decision to fast was a counsel of despair.

Gandhiji said he was prepared to wait even for six months. He would not take the step without taking the Working Committee into confidence. Then he must hear what Linlithgow had to say. Also he did not intend to fast unto death. He wished to survive the fast, which might be of 40 days duration. He had not decided whether he would take citrus fruit during the fast.

Azad argued that undertaking a fast to bring pressure on friends would be in order. The fast Gandhiji had undertaken to bring about Hindu-Muslim unity was meant to exert pressure both on Hindus and Muslims. The fast undertaken by him for the Harijan cause was intended to exert pressure on Hindus. But the British were not friends.

Gandhiji said he had always considered the British his friends. Even the Viceroy treated him as a friend. If he considered the British his enemies he would never think of undertaking a fast against them. He had risked his life in their war in South Africa.

Jawaharlal Nehru: "I would not draw back from the thought of your dying. I have the requisite strength. I am twenty years younger than you, but I have become hard-boiled. I have sustained shocks, personal and domestic. I have no false optimism.

"I do not challenge your right to take the supreme step you contemplate. In such matters others can have very little say. But you are not an individual. You represent India. It is for you to consider how such a step on your part is likely to



affect the country. For long I have had the feeling that you may take some such step. I have therefore not been surprised by your announcement. But I still say that before taking such a step you must make sure that it is a hundred per cent correct step. It is not as if India would be economically ruined by the war. India will suffer, certainly, but the whole world is faced with total destruction. Life and death have become cheap."

Rajaji said the British might say Gandhiji was embarrassing them by undertaking the fast when they were faced with peril. The minorities were sure to misunderstand the motive behind the fast. The gulf might be widened and there might even be bloodshed.

Gandhiji asked Rajaji if he would allow him the right of self-expression. Rajaji said, yes, certainly. In that case, said Gandhiji, if a fast was overruled would they agree to let him retire completely from politics? Rajaji said that would be as shattering to the organization as his fast.

On 23 August Gandhiji told the Working Committee that though the situation called for a fast, perhaps the time was not right. What he would do in days to come he could not say. [The Diary of Mahadev Desai (unpublished), Book No. 41, pp. 209-31]

The resolution of the Working Committee, as finally passed, *inter alia* said:

The Working Committee have read with deep pain and indignation the declaration and assumptions contained in the statements and speeches made on behalf of the British Government which seem to deny India her natural right of complete national freedom and reiterate the untenable claim that Britain should maintain herself in a dominant position in India in the discharge of the higher functions of the State... The Working Committee are of opinion that the assertion contained in the Statements... that... the present autocratic and irresponsible system of government must continue so long as any group of people or the Princes, as distinguished from the people of the States, or perhaps even foreign vested interests raise objections to any constitution framed by the elected representatives of the people of India, is a direct encouragement and incitement to civil discord and strife...



The Working Committee note with astonishment that the demand for the constitution of a Provisional National Government composed of persons commanding the confidence of the various elected groups in the present Central Legislature, formed under the 1919 Constitution of India, has been described by the Secretary of State for India as one that would raise the unsolved constitutional issue and prejudge it in favour of the majority and against the minorities. The Working Committee are of opinion that the rejection of this proposal unmistakably indicates that there is no willingness on the part of the British Government to part with any power and authority even for the immediate purpose of securing cooperation in war efforts....

For these reasons the Working Committee have come to the conclusion that ...they cannot be a party to accepting the proposals contained in the statements, or advising the country to accept them...

The Working Committee call upon the people to condemn the attitude adopted by the British Government by means of public meetings and otherwise as also through their elected representatives in the provincial legislatures. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1940, Vol. II, pp. 196-97]

5

After the fall of France there was a lull in the fighting in Europe. Hitler showed a marked and, for him, uncharacteristic disinclination to pursue the retreating British forces across the Channel. From the North Cape above the Arctic Circle to Bordeaux in the south, from the English Channel to eastern Poland, all of Europe was under the Nazi heel. Hitler was at the pinnacle of his power. Perhaps it was not necessary to risk an invasion of England. Germany, it seemed, was ready for a peace with England, guaranteeing the integrity of the British Empire.

Peace feelers came to England thick and fast. Through friendly contacts in America, through the King of Sweden, through the Pope and even through the Aga Khan messages were sought to be conveyed that Germany was



desirous of peace with England. But the British would have none of it. Churchill told the King of Sweden:

Before any such request or proposals could even be considered, it would be necessary that effective guarantees by deeds, not words, should be forthcoming from Germany which would ensure the restoration of the free and independent life of Czechoslovakia, Poland, Norway, Denmark, Holland, Belgium and above all, France.

On 19 July 1940 Hitler, speaking in the Reichstag, singled out Churchill for wanting to continue the war, a war which would destroy England. He said:

From Britain I now hear only a single cry – not of the people but of the politicians – that the war must go on! I do not know whether these politicians already have a correct idea of what the continuation of this struggle will be like.... Mr. Churchill ...no doubt will already be in Canada, where the money and children of those principally interested in the war have already been sent. For millions of other people, however, great suffering will begin.... I prophesy that a great Empire will be destroyed – an Empire which it was never my intention to destroy or even to harm.

He concluded by appealing "once more to reason and common sense in Great Britain". He saw no reason, he declared, why the war must go on.

Hitler's peace offer was turned down by the B.B.C. in a broadcast even without a reference to the British Government. Later, when the cool official rejection came, it produced consternation, shock and disbelief among the Nazi generals.

Hitler then issued directives for preparations to be stepped up for the invasion of England, code named "Operation Sea Lion", to be carried out on 21 September. But an invasion of the British Isles was not an easy matter. It was estimated that some 2,60,000 men with equipment and supplies would be needed for the job. Getting such a large force across the Channel was, the naval commanders said, beyond the capacity of the German navy. Even getting across 1,00,000 men, who would make up the first wave of invasion, would require thousands of barges, thousands of motor boats, and several hundred tugs and transports. Even if it were possible to assemble such a vast amount of shipping,



Hitler was told, it would paralyze the inland waterway transportation system of Germany. Besides, there was the English navy to reckon with, which was stronger than that of Germany, not to speak of the uncertainties of weather.

It was decided that before launching the invasion, Britain should be subjected to aerial warfare, with a view to destroying her air power and so crippling her armament production and economy in general that she would be forced to sue for peace even without an invasion. Goering, who headed the Luftwaffe, was confident that he could bring Britain to her knees because as against Britain's 700 to 800 fighter aircraft Germany had more than twice the number of fighters and bombers.

The Germans started the air attacks in the second week of August, 1940, sending wave after wave of bombers and fighters in their thousands. The targets were radar installations and air fields. Throughout August and the first week of September the battle in the skies continued, with huge losses on both sides.

Then Germany embarked on massive night bombings of civilian population in London. The first attack took place late in the afternoon of 7 September. The Germans threw into the attack 625 bombers and 648 fighters. Soon the whole dockside area of London was a mass of flames. The next evening they came again with 200 bombers and continued the attack throughout the night. In these first two attacks 842 Londoners were killed and 2,347 wounded. For fifty-seven nights from 7 September to 3 November London was mercilessly pounded by bombing raids, each raid being conducted by some two hundred bombers on an average.

But British morale did not collapse. Armament production did not slacken. Aircraft factories, which were one of the prime targets of German bombing attacks, outproduced the Germans in planes. Hitler's bomber losses over England were severe. In fact the Luftwaffe never fully recovered from the blow it suffered in the skies over Britain that summer and autumn.

Britain was saved and the British were justly proud of the heroism and daring of their airmen. Churchill on 24 August declared in British Parliament: "Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few." [William L. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, pp. 982-1026]



It was under the shadow of such sanguinary goings on in Europe that the leaders of the Congress assembled in Bombay for the meeting of the A.I.C.C. scheduled for 15 and 16 September 1940. The members of the Working Committee arrived in the city on 12 September. So did Gandhiji, accompanied by Syed Mahmud and Abdul Ghaffar Khan.

The question in each one's mind, as they gathered round Gandhiji in the evening, was what should be the issue for the launching of civil disobedience, once it was decided that there had to be some kind of civil disobedience under the guidance and leadership of Gandhiji. There was no dearth of issues, to be sure.

There was always the overriding issue of swaraj. The British Government having rejected the Poona offer of the Congress and declined to entertain the demand for a Provisional National Government, the Congress had the choice of resorting to civil disobedience to enforce the demand.

There were other, more specific, issues, such as that of the severe repression to which the Congress was being subjected. Congress workers and volunteers were steadily being arrested and imprisoned all across the country. By August 1940 there were already more than 2,000 Congressmen in various jails. Labour leaders were being rounded up and meetings and conferences prohibited. House internments were common. In the mofussil workers were being directed to report themselves regularly at police stations, not to take part in subversive movements, not to converse, communicate or associate with school or college students, not to attend meetings of any kind and to notify the police in person of departure from one place to another. [Pattabhi Sitaramayya, *The History of the Indian National Congress*, Vol. II, p.211]

Then there was the question of war levies. The British said the contributions to the war purposes fund being raised in the country were purely voluntary. The fact was that much coercion and high-handedness were used in levying money from the people, so much so that Gandhiji had to make personal representations to the Viceroy in the matter, warning him that such measures must result in "much silent discontent and ill will". [C.W.M.G., LXXII, pp. 323, 374, 398, 423, 426]



With the country categorically being denied its freedom, people being oppressed and squeezed to pay for a war which was not theirs and the Congress slowly being crushed out of existence, the situation called for action. But the members of the Working Committee were not agreed on the nature of the action, and the issue that must figure in the action, except that it should be under the leadership of Gandhiji.

The immediate issue, as Gandhiji saw it, was not that of independence for the country. It was that of stopping the bloodshed going on in the world. He again proposed to tell the Viceroy, he said, that they must stop the war.

Jawaharlal expressed the view that the choice before Britain was "the most hopeless slavery" or "violence unto death". To the ear of the British public the preaching of peace would sound like hypocrisy or cowardice. If non-violence should come in the end it would not come by Gandhiji's methods, Nehru asserted. Gandhiji's theory of trusteeship lent support to a violent structure. Was it not an anachronism that in England, where they did not talk of non-violence super tax was 100 per cent?

Gandhiji said: "Then why do you not put your non-violence into practice? We cannot participate in the war, for two reasons: we are not independent and we do not believe in war. Why does this question crop up again and again like King Charles's head?"

Azad said: "You oppose the war on ethical grounds. The Congress opposes the war on political grounds. If the Congress goes by what you say, it ceases to be a political organization. And it cannot ever come to power."

Gandhiji said he had strong views on how to approach civil disobedience. It could not be on the issue of independence. The issue for him was a narrow one: it was one of civil liberty. The Government was taking advantage of the Congress policy of non-embarrassment to crush the Congress. If the Viceroy were to tell him: 'All right, you may preach against war but there should be no violence in your methods', he personally would be satisfied.

This time, Gandhiji went on, he did not want to go to jail. The Government might not be able to accommodate him in prison.



The Poona resolution was dead, Gandhiji said, but only in the sense that the Government had rejected the offer contained in it. But the British, being in distress, might say yes to the offer; the Congress would then be bound to respond. They must consider that aspect too.

Jawaharlal said the question would not arise, because the Poona resolution was dead. The draft resolution being considered by the members also said that it no longer applied, it had lapsed.

Gandhiji said when in the course of the movement they would all have been jailed and he alone would be outside jail, he would have to speak in the name of the Congress. How would they feel then?

Azad answered that they would all have faith in Gandhiji's representative capacity.

Rajaji opposed the very idea of satyagraha at that juncture except as an escape or expression of resentment. There should be no satyagraha for reasons of prestige. There was danger of civil disorder and anarchy in the country. Congressmen should not shut themselves up when they could be of service. If satyagraha had to be launched the narrow ground suggested by Gandhiji was not a proper reason. It would make no impact on the people if the satyagraha was launched for the organizational existence of the Congress. Let the Congress non-cooperate and take the consequences.

Gandhiji said it was necessary to stem the growing demoralization among the people. Congressmen were being continuously arrested and jailed. Minimum necessary steps consistent with the policy of non-embarrassment must be taken. If the Congress let loose the power it had the consequences would be terrible.

Pattabhi Sitaramayya said that in the U.P. (where the largest number of arrests were taking place) the Congress contained a hundred or more Communists or Socialists who did not accept Congress discipline. In the South, too, most of the arrested persons were of that type. They wanted some kind of violence. It was perhaps not proper to embarrass Britain in the plight she was in, but something had to be done. He suggested that it should be left to Gandhiji as to when to begin a struggle and how.



Shankarrao Dev, P. C. Ghosh and Sarojini Naidu supported the idea of a struggle being launched.

Vallabhbhai Patel said the Viceroy's statement was malicious, mischievous and insulting in the highest degree. The communal question had been placed on the top. There was demoralization in the country.

Dr. Khan Saheb expressed himself in agreement with Vallabhbhai. Abdul Ghaffar Khan said the possibility of communal riots breaking out should not deter the Congress. Communal riots would always be there so long as the British remained in the country.

Jawaharlal discounted the possibility of Hitler attacking India or of Japan coming until she had a strong navy. America and Russia might unite and Britain might go with them. The coming two weeks or so would be an intensely critical period.

Gandhiji said he was not able to make up his mind. He himself could not move around much, nor did he read newspapers thoroughly. He had to go by what others told him. Many things had been said. Rajaji had opposed the idea of a struggle. Bhulabhai had said he could not make out a case that the Congress was under attack. Gandhiji was prepared to make an immediate declaration of direct action, but there had to be an immediate cause for it. In his view the very existence of the Congress was threatened and that was enough cause for launching a struggle. But if others felt that the Congress was not under attack, what other issue was left? In any case he did not wish to launch a struggle over the issue of independence.

In his draft resolution for the A.I.C.C. Gandhiji had used the expression: "The Congress does not for the moment want to mount to power if only not to participate in war." This was objected to by Nehru, Azad and Rajaji. Gandhiji explained his view that mounting to power meant sharing responsibility with an alien Government for the prosecution of the war. In place of "power" he could use some other expression, such as "association with the British Government". All he wanted to say was that he would not want to win swaraj through participation in the war. They must accept him with all his limitations. [The Diary of Mahadev Desai (unpublished), Book No. 41, pp. 235-69]



The resolution, as it finally emerged on 16 September after a thorough working over by Gandhiji and Nehru, who were joint authors of the draft, ran:

The All-India Congress Committee has given its careful attention to the events that have taken place since its last meeting held in Poona on July 27, 1940, and to the resolutions passed by the Working Committee at Wardha in August last. The Committee approves of and endorses these resolutions.

In order to end the deadlock in India and to promote the national cause, in cooperation with the British people, the Working Committee, even at the sacrifice of Mahatma Gandhi's cooperation, made a proposal to the British Government in their Delhi resolution of July 7, which was subsequently approved by the A.I.C.C. at Poona. The proposal was rejected by the British Government in a manner which left no doubt that they had no intention to recognize India's independence and would, if they could, continue to hold this country indefinitely in bondage for British exploitation. This decision of the British Government shows that they will impose their will upon India, and their recent policy has further shown that they will not even tolerate free expression of public opinion in condemnation of their associating India in the war against Germany, against the will of a vast body of the people of India, and of exploiting her national resources and manpower for this purpose.

The All-India Congress Committee cannot submit to a policy which is a denial of India's natural right to freedom, which suppresses the free expression of public opinion and which could lead to the degradation of her people and their continued enslavement... The Congress is pledged under Gandhiji's leadership to non-violence for the vindication of India's freedom. At this grave crisis in the movement for national freedom, the All-India Congress Committee, therefore, requests him to guide the Congress in the action that should be taken. The Delhi resolution, confirmed by the A.I.C.C. at Poona, which prevented him from doing so, no longer applies. It has lapsed.



The A.I.C.C. sympathizes with the British people as well as the peoples of all other countries involved in the war...They can have no ill will against them, and the spirit of satyagraha forbids the Congress from doing anything with a view to embarrass them. But this self-imposed restraint cannot be taken to the extent of self-extinction. The Congress must insist on the fullest freedom to pursue its policy based on non-violence...

In view of certain misapprehensions that have arisen in regard to the Congress policy of non-violence, the A.I.C.C. desires to state this afresh and to make it clear that this policy continues, notwithstanding anything contained in previous resolutions which may have led to these misapprehensions. This Committee firmly believes in the policy and practice of non-violence not only in the struggle for swaraj but also in so far as this may be possible of application in free India. The Committee is convinced, and recent world events have demonstrated, that complete world disarmament is necessary, and the establishment of a new and juster political and economic order... A free India will, therefore, throw all her weight in favour of world disarmament and should herself be prepared to give a lead in this to the world... *C.W.M.G.*, LXXIII, pp. 1-3]

Gandhiji spoke on the resolution twice on 15 September, first in Hindi and then in English, and again on the following day. He spoke at length.

He referred to the Wardha statement of the Working Committee of 21 June, the Delhi resolution of 7 July and the Poona resolution of the A.I.C.C. of 28 July, through all of which the Congress had limited its commitment to non-violence only to the sphere of the struggle for freedom, and offered to the British cooperation in the war effort if a Provisional National Government was conceded. The passing of those resolutions meant that the Congress would be prepared to sacrifice non-violence in order to secure freedom. The consequence was that he had to withdraw himself from the Congress.

But the Government had turned down the Congress offer. In a way, said Gandhiji, he was pleased. For he had trembled at the thought that the Congress, which had been wedded to non-violence ever since the days of the Khilafat movement, which had given the call of ahimsa from thousands of platforms to



the millions in the country, had taken it upon itself to make the people give up non-violence and cultivate warmindedness.

The resolution before them was a short one, said Gandhiji. One part of it said that the Congress believed in non-violence, not only for securing swaraj, but also for running the affairs of the country after swaraj had been won. Of course the swaraj Government would also have other elements besides the Congress, including elements opposed to the Congress. But in the swaraj Parliament those representing the Congress would vote for non-violence.

The other part of the resolution said that while the British were engaged in a life-and-death struggle, the Congress did not wish to harass them by asking for swaraj. It was not the way of satyagraha to take advantage of the opponent's weak position to wrest political power from him.

Gandhiji expressed shock and anguish at the incessant bombing to which London was being subjected. St. Paul's Cathedral had been bombed. At the same time he was full of admiration for the grit and determination shown by the Londoners in the face of the havoc. They danced and sang and made merry and went about their everyday business without showing signs of panic. The Congress could have no ill will against the British people.

Why then the resolution? – it might be asked. The answer was that the situation was such that if the Congress did nothing its very existence would be in peril. Even if the British Government did not seek to destroy it the result would be the same. The Working Committee, Gandhiji said, had placed things entirely in his hands. He had been made the sole leader. He had not decided what he would do. He would of course first go to the Viceroy with the resolution and ask him why the liberties of the people had been taken away. If the Viceroy said, 'No, that is not so; you have the liberty to say what you like, keeping within the bounds of non-violence', then there would be no fight. The Congress did not want to embarrass the Government.

But if the demand should not be met then some step would have to be taken to save the Congress. One after another Congressmen were being taken away to jail. If the liberty of the nation was likely to be choked, then the virtue of



self-restraint would become a vice. Self-restraint could not be carried to the extent of the extinction of the national spirit.

Gandhiji said he would ask the Government for the fullest possible freedom, consistently with the observance of non-violence, to tell the people of India not to join the war effort. People might express their opposition to the war on any grounds they preferred. Those who had conscientious objection to war, as Gandhiji said he had, could adopt his reasoning. Those who were tired of British Imperialism could adopt that reasoning. Others might have other arguments. All such should be covered under freedom of speech, provided all such expression of opinion was open and not secret and was consistent with non-violence.

"Freedom of speech and pen," Gandhiji concluded his speech on 15 September, "is the foundation of swaraj. If the foundation-stone is in danger, you have to exert the whole of your might in order to defend that single stone. May God help you."

On 16 September Gandhiji took up the theme again. He said: "Freedom of speech and civil liberty are the very roots of swaraj. Without these the foundations of swaraj will remain weak."

The resolution did not ask for independence. Freedom would come only when the British went bag and baggage and India was in a position to face external aggression. It was no good fighting for freedom against a country whose own freedom was in danger. Even if one nation could give freedom to another nation, the British at that juncture were not in a position to do so. But the people could certainly embark on a struggle to secure the right to free speech.

The condition of non-violence in the exercise of freedom of speech was necessary, Gandhiji said. A regime based on violence would not tolerate violence by others. Therefore even those who believe in violence would be better advised to stick to non-violence. After India was free they would have the right to preach and even to practise violence. Free India would not have an army, but if the Sikhs or the Khaksars wanted to carry weapons they could. When all the others believed in non-violence what harm could a few believers in violence do?

Gandhiji then referred to the communal problem, about which Dr. K. M.



Ashraf and Jawaharlal Nehru had spoken at the A.I.C.C. If the strife should occur, Gandhiji said, it had to be faced. Anarchy and disorder too had to be faced. It was in the nature of non-violence that it gained in strength as violence increased. India could not win independence if the eight crores of Muslims were opposed to independence. But he refused to believe that the Muslims were opposed to independence. He would believe it only if all the adult voters among them declared their opposition to independence. It was worse than anarchy to partition a poor country like India every corner of which was populated by Hindus and Muslims living side by side. He would rather let himself be cut in pieces than accept division of India, something which was not attempted even during the Muslim rule. [Ibid, pp. 4-26]

8

Six months after Ramgarh, the Congress again had a programme of action: The programme was to put up a fight, strictly keeping within the bounds of non-violence, for freedom of speech, especially the freedom to declare publicly opposition to the forcible participation of India in the war, the timing and the manner of the fight to be determined by Gandhiji.

Not all were happy with the plan of action decided upon. Some thought the demand for liberty to carry on anti-war propaganda was one which the Government would never accept, others regarded it as too trifling. Even among the members of the Working Committee there were misgivings. Gandhiji was bombarded with queries and doubts from various quarters. Patiently he tried to explain. Answering a question, he said:

I may confess that many of the members [of the Working Committee] have no faith in non-violence... But you must know that the Congress is not merely the Working Committee, nor the A.I.C.C., nor the members on the Congress registers, but the dumb millions... These millions, before the Congress identified itself with them in 1919, had taken no part in any violent or non-violent or even a so-called constitutional fight. But they rose like one man on the 6th of April 1919... The Bombay resolution had these masses in mind. [Ibid, p. 44]

Speaking to an Ashram inmate, who doubted if the cause of truth and non-



violence could be served or freedom attained through speeches and newspaper articles, Gandhiji pointed out that the right to preach truth and non-violence was threatened. It was not a trivial issue. It was a concrete and all important issue. Surrendering freedom of speech would mean surrendering all. [Ibid, pp. 45-46]

The Press too was critical, especially the Anglo-Indian press.

The Times of India in its issue of 17 September, while expressing relief that in the light of the resolution whatever action Gandhiji, "as dictator of Congress policy", might take, it would not involve mass lawlessness, nevertheless described the proposal contained in the resolution "amazing", "impractical and completely illogical". How could Gandhiji profess a desire not to embarrass the British Government and in the same breath ask for freedom to do something that was bound to hamper India's war effort? Promoting anti-war propaganda and non-cooperation with the war effort was tantamount to advocating support for the enemy, and would create in the country an army of fifth columnists, which was what Hitler desired.

The Statesman of the same date expressed its bafflement at the demand for liberty to voice opposition to the war. Conscientious objection to war was not penalized in India or England unless it was obviously calculated to help the enemy. Non-cooperation, the write-up went on, was an immoral doctrine. It was a method of war not peace. It was all the more reprehensible because it carried with it "a pretentious claim to spiritual value which involves sanctimonious insincerities and mass hypocrisy". Under Gandhiji's leadership, the writer concluded, the Congress had nothing to offer India. [Ibid, pp. 446-50]

Such comments in the Anglo-Indian Press reflected the thinking in the British official circles, with whom Gandhiji now had to come to grips.

On 18 September he approached Lord Linlithgow for an interview, which was granted. The two met at Simla first on 27 and again on 30 September. The result, which, as apprehended, was negative, is summed up in the exchange of letters between the Viceroy and Gandhiji which followed.

The Viceroy's letter of 30 September, referring to the two conversations they had had on 27 and 30 September, said:



In the course of these conversations the situation has been exhaustively discussed, with particular reference to the question of free speech in time of war. On that matter, while professing yourself most anxious to avoid in any way embarrassing His Majesty's Government in the prosecution of the war, you made it clear to me that you regarded it as essential that the Indian National Congress and other members of the public should be in a position to give full expression to their views in relation to the war effort, provided only that such expression was fully non-violent.... It emerged further from our conversation that ...you would regard it as essential that it should be open to Congressmen and non-Congressmen alike to deliver addresses and otherwise to call upon people throughout the country to refrain from assisting India's war effort in any way which would involve India's participation in bloodshed.

...I felt bound, however, ...to make it clear to you that action such as you suggest would certainly amount not only to the inhibition of India's war effort, but to that embarrassment of Great Britain in the prosecution of the war which the Congress state that they are anxious to avoid; and that it would clearly not be possible in the interests of India herself, more particularly at this most critical juncture in the war, to acquiesce in the interference with the war effort which would be involved in the freedom of speech so wide as that for which you had asked. [Ibid, pp. 450-51]

Answering the same day Gandhiji acknowledged that the Viceroy's summation of the talks was a fair one. He then wrote:

It is a matter of deep regret to me that the Government have not been able to appreciate the Congress position, meant just to satisfy the bare requirements of the people... who felt a conscientious objection to helping a war to which they were never invited and which they regard... as one for saving Imperialism, of which India is the greatest victim.... I wish to remind you that it was never contemplated to carry non-embarrassment to the point of self-extinction, or ...stopping all national activities which were designed to make India peace-minded... it is impossible for the Congress to make of the policy a fetish by denying its creed... If the Congress has to die, it should do so in the act of proclaiming its faith. It is



unfortunate that we have not been able to arrive at an agreement on the single issue of freedom of speech.

Gandhiji ended the letter by expressing the hope that though their ways seemed to diverge for the moment, the personal friendship between them would bear the strain of divergence. [Ibid, pp. 71-73]

Adverting to the talks in a note written for *Harijan* of 10 October 1940, Gandhiji regretted that British statesmen had failed to do the right thing when it was easy to do so. The British were showing extraordinary bravery on the battlefield but they lacked bravery to take risks in the moral domain.

For Linlithgow, as a person, Gandhiji had the highest praise. In a statement to the press he said of him:

He is straight in his talk, always deliberate, and economical in his language. He is never equivocal, never leaves you in doubt as to his meaning. He conveys the most unpalatable decisions with a calmness and courtesy which, for the moment, make you think that you have heard no harsh or hard decision. He listens to your argument with a patience and attention I have never known any other Viceroy or high functionary to show in an equal measure. He is never ruffled and never discourteous... He and I have become friends never to be parted, be the differences between us as great as they can be. [Ibid, pp. 77-78]

It was, of course, characteristic of Gandhiji to go to great lengths to be charitable to the antagonist. About Linlithgow in course of time he was undeceived. But Jawaharlal Nehru, too, was much struck by the straightness of the Viceroy, though he had to say some harsh things about him.

He wrote of Linlithgow:

Heavy of body and slow of mind, solid as a rock and with almost a rock's lack of awareness, possessing the qualities and failings of an old-fashioned British aristocrat, he sought with integrity and honesty of purpose to find a way out of the tangle. But his limitations were too many; his mind worked in the old groove and shrank back from any innovations; his vision was limited by the traditions of the ruling class out of which he came; he saw and heard through the eyes and ears of the Civil Service and



others who surrounded him... He disliked those who did not show a becoming appreciation of the high mission of the British Empire and its chief representative in India. [Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, New Delhi, 1995, pp. 437-38]

9

At the instance of Gandhiji the Congress Working Committee met at Wardha on 11, 12 and 13 October 1940 to consider the next step. Gandhiji gave a detailed report to the Committee of his conversations with the Viceroy and announced that in view of the Viceroy having turned down his demand for freedom of speech to oppose India's participation in the war, he proposed to start a satyagraha struggle. The satyagraha, Gandhiji explained, would be limited to individuals chosen by him. To begin with, he had chosen Vinoba Bhave to offer satyagraha. After Vinoba Bhave's arrest, Jawaharlal Nehru would take the field.

Members of the Working Committee were dismayed. Maulana Azad mentioned that committees had been formed everywhere in preparation for the struggle and that it was sure to cause widespread disappointment when people were told that Vinoba Bhave alone would be deputed to offer satyagraha.

Gandhiji said it had never been his intention that whole committees should offer satyagraha. What was required was education of the people. If one could get results by spending a rupee why should one spend Rs. 50,000? The Dandi March was a different matter. The situation now was not the same. He had a premonition that at some stage or other he might also have to fast. He had had the premonition for a long time. He had, at the close of the conversation, also mentioned it to the Viceroy. The Viceroy had answered: "This does not admit of argument. The greatest compliment I can pay to you is my silence."

As for the programme, Gandhiji said he was convinced that Vinoba should be the first satyagrahi. He represented to the fullest Gandhiji's conception of ahimsa; he was learned and endowed with the faculty of concentration, and he had a record of purity, so that he could account for every single minute of his life. The Viceroy had asked him, Gandhiji went on, how he could say that others had the same conscience as he had. Gandhiji then had mentioned Jawaharlal, with whom it was a matter of conscience not to participate in an imperialist war. He



would be guilty of disloyalty to the country if he placed Jawaharlal's conscience second to his own.

There was no going back upon the struggle. It would never exhaust itself. Only, the reliance must be not upon numbers but upon quality.

Azad asked what other Congressmen should do in the meanwhile. Would they be free to tell people not to participate in the war?

Before the satyagraha was started, they could, said Gandhiji. But once the satyagraha began, they must be silent.

In principle, Azad said, Gandhiji was right. At the Bombay A.I.C.C. the freedom given to him had been unqualified. Still, it had been thought that he would make a beginning with a group of people. A single matchstick could provide warmth, but it would not be in the quantity that would be considered enough.

Jawaharlal Nehru said he did not understand Gandhiji's plan. Vinoba Bhave was unknown to the country. And what were the others to do while he would be offering satyagraha in Nagpur and Wardha? He had told his sister Vijaya Lakshmi, he said, to go to the U.P. and speak to the people on the war issue, to vitalize the province. He had no objection to Vinoba offering satyagraha, but no one had heard of Vinoba and the effect on the people would be that the struggle was ending. If Gandhiji were to offer satyagraha it would electrify the country.

Was it the plan to announce Vinoba's name right away? — C.R. asked.

Yes, said Gandhiji, but not that of Jawaharlal.

Would the step have political consequences? Would the political cause be furthered by it? — C.R. asked again.

Yes, Gandhiji said. It was a big step forward towards the goal. The issue of freedom of speech was directly related to the issue of independence.

C.R. then expressed the view that it would fall flat. The political advantage was distant. He did not like the Bombay resolution, nor the proposed pacifist stand. The Congress had passed a resolution and then reversed it at Gandhiji's bidding and then Gandhiji had selected a man who held exclusively his own opinion.



Jawaharlal said the impression was that the question of independence had been put on the back burner. The objective of the Congress must not be veiled. Also the normal activities of the Congress must not be suspended while individuals offered satyagraha. He could not very well ask twenty thousand people assembled for a meeting to go home.

Azad said it was clear that the first satyagrahi chosen did not belong to the Congress. He still thought it would have been better to start satyagraha not with an individual but with a group. He supported the point made by Nehru that the Congress as an organization must not suspend its activities. It would be a dangerous thing to do so. Would holding meetings to explain the Bombay resolution be considered as offering passive resistance? As he saw it, Gandhiji might end up making the struggle a no-war struggle and the question of independence would be left behind.

Gandhiji told Azad that he was the President of the Congress. He had the responsibility to direct things, to guide the Working Committee. Gandhiji again offered to withdraw if they were unable to see eye to eye with him, because he could not afford not to speak out his deepest thoughts.

Azad assured Gandhiji that except perhaps for two or three persons the rest of the Working Committee were with him.

Jawaharlal said he was fed up with all the talks and discussions. He was attending the Working Committee for the last time. He would not even resign from the Congress. He would quietly consider his position and do whatever he had to do on his own individual initiative.

Gandhiji suggested that there was no need for Jawaharlal to leave the Working Committee. He could remain in the Committee and do whatever he wanted to do. The Committee would put up with it or if not, censure him. As for Azad, he too, need not resign from the Working Committee. The Committee could elect a Chairman to carry on the work.

Jawaharlal wanted to know what exactly Vinoba would be doing and when his own turn would come and what must he do in the meanwhile.

Gandhiji said he could have his meetings but talk only about constructive work.



That would not amount to fighting Imperialism, that would not be civil disobedience, Nehru said. He was distressed. He was receiving telegrams and letters, he said, and he must answer them. They could see the country heading towards ruin. He did not know how to help. [The Diary of Mahadev Desai (unpublished), Book No. 41, pp. 293-347]

Both Azad and Nehru were ultimately persuaded not to insist on resigning. The Working Committee then passed the following resolution:

The Working Committee met at Gandhiji's instance and listened to an account of his talks with the Viceroy and the plan of campaign in so far as he has been able to envisage it. The Working Committee approve of what he has done and repeat the instructions to Congressmen and Congress Committees by the A.I.C.C. at its last meeting in Bombay that they should give him the fullest cooperation possible in all he may require or expect them to do. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1940, Vol. II, p. 222]



PART II

SATYAGRAHA FOR FREEDOM OF SPEECH



CHAPTER V: INDIVIDUAL CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE - I

1

Gandhiji announced his plan of civil disobedience, as it had emerged in the course of his discussions with the Working Committee, in the *Harijan* of 20 October 1940. The plan, he wrote, was simply this: direct action would be commenced by Vinoba Bhave and for the time being would be confined to him only. Since it would be individual civil disobedience, it would be so conducted by him as to exclude others directly or indirectly. The public would however be involved to a certain extent, for it would be open to them either to hear Vinoba speak or not.

Gandhiji then introduced Vinoba to the readers. He wrote:

Who is Vinoba Bhave and why has he been selected? He is an undergraduate having left college after my return to India in 1915 [Vinoba had actually joined Gandhiji on 7 June 1916]. He is a Sanskrit scholar... In order to better qualify himself he took one year's leave to prosecute further studies in Sanskrit. And, practically at the same hour at which he had left the Ashram a year before, he walked into it without notice... He has taken part in every menial activity in the Ashram from scavenging to cooking. Though he has a marvellous memory and is a student by nature, he has devoted the largest part of his time to spinning in which he has specialized as very few have... He has revolutionized *takli* spinning and drawn out its hitherto unknown possibilities...

Vinoba is an out-and-out war resister. But he respects equally with his own the conscience of those who, while not being out-and-out war resisters; have yet strong conscientious objection to participation in the present war. Though Vinoba represents both the types, I may want to select another who will represent only one type, namely conscientious objection to participation in the present war.

Explaining the issue involved in the civil disobedience Gandhiji proceeded:

Let me repeat the issue: On the surface it is incredibly narrow – the right to preach against war as war or participation in the present war. Both



are matters of conscience for those who hold either view. Both are substantial rights. Their exercise can do no harm to the British if their pretension that to all intents and purposes India is an independent country is at all true. If India is very much a dependency in fact, as it is in law, whatever the British get from India can never be regarded as voluntary, it must be regarded as impressed.

Gandhiji made it clear that there would be no civil disobedience except what was sanctioned by him. This was a peremptory obligation binding on every Congressman. Of course all other activities of the Congress would continue as before unless the Government interfered with them. [CWMG, LXXIII, pp. 102-7]

On 17 October at Paunar Vinoba Bhave duly offered civil disobedience by declaring at a public meeting that the Congress could not on ethical grounds help Great Britain in her war effort. Great Britain, he said, could not claim to be fighting for democracy so long as democracy was denied to India. The meeting was attended by about 300 persons, including Jamnalal Bajaj, Mahadev Desai and ladies from the Mahila Ashram at Wardha. Gandhiji had prepared the draft for Vinoba's first speech. However he appeared to have made the speech *ex tempore*, so that he "put the worst construction" on the Government's position on the question of freedom of speech. Gandhiji promptly sent his instructions that "most favourable construction" must be put on the opponent's language. [The Indian Annual Register, 1940, Vol. I, p. 36; The Diary of Mahadev Desai (unpublished), Book No. 41, p. 350; C.W.M.G., LXXIII, p. 115]

Vinoba Bhave carried on his campaign against India's participation in Great Britain's war effort for another three or four days by addressing small gatherings here and there in the near-by areas. In the meantime notices were served on various newspapers and journals, including *Harijan*, warning them against publishing anything connected with Vinoba Bhave's satyagraha without previous reference to the Chief Press Adviser to the Government. Press statements of Gandhiji, too, began to be subjected to pre-censorship and sentences taken away from them. Gandhiji remonstrated with the Viceroy and was told that no orders had been issued regarding pre-censorship of his statements. So far as the notices served on the newspapers were concerned, they were not mandatory but advisory in nature, pointing out to them that printing prejudicial reports would



make them liable to prosecution under the Defence of India Rules. The Viceroy also made it clear that Gandhiji could not be given the freedom to conduct a civil disobedience movement and enjoy "unrestricted access to public through the ordinary channels of publicity". [C.W.M.G., LXXIII, pp. 114-15, 117, 456-57]

On 21 October Vinoba Bhave was arrested. He was charged under the Defence of India Rules and sentenced to three months in prison.

Gandhiji, announcing the arrest of Vinoba in a press statement, advised against any stoppage of work in protest except with the willing consent of the employers. But what next? Gandhiji asked Congressmen not to be impatient. The plan this time was not to have a continuous stream of civil resisters. The question before him, Gandhiji said, was not whom to send next, but to know how the millions would react to Vinoba's imprisonment and how many he represented. [Ibid, pp. 118-19]

2

On 24 October Gandhiji in a press statement announced that he was suspending the publication of *Harijan*, *Harijanbandhu* and *Harijan Sevak*. He said:

I cannot function freely if I have to send to the Press Adviser in New Delhi every line I write about satyagraha... Liberty of the Press is a dear privilege, apart from the advisability or otherwise of civil disobedience... I am unable to reconcile myself to the notice which, although in the nature of advice, is in reality an order whose infringement will carry its own consequences.

Gandhiji advised the readers to become their own walking newspapers and carry news from mouth to mouth. Only the news must be authentic and not idle gossip. [Ibid, pp. 124-26]

On the same day he wrote to Jawaharlal Nehru that he could "ceremonially" declare his civil disobedience as the next satyagrahi after Vinoba Bhave. He suggested he might choose a village for his audience and fix his own date and plan, which then could be announced. [Ibid, pp. 126-27]

Jawaharlal, who had remained sceptical about the line of approach behind the plan of individual civil disobedience as conceived by Gandhiji, but had



"generally" agreed to go along, decided to visit Gandhiji before formally declaring civil disobedience and the two had a seven-hour long discussion on 30 October. [Ibid, p. 476]

Jawaharlal was not destined to offer satyagraha. While returning from Wardha on 31 October he was nabbed by the police at a railwa station near Allahabad and taken to Gorakhpur to be tried for speeches he had made there earlier in the month.

The trial of Nehru began on 3 November before a magistrate in Gorakhpur jail. On 5 November he was convicted under three different counts under the Defence of India Rules and sentenced to an aggregate term of four years in prison. Making his statement before the magistrate Nehru said:

It is not me that you are seeking to judge and condemn, but rather the hundreds of millions of the people of India, and that is a large task even for a proud Empire. Perhaps it may be that though I am standing before you on trial," it is the British Empire itself that is on trial before the bar of the world... It is a small matter what happens to me in this trial or subsequently.

...But it is no small matter what happens to India and her millions of sons and daughters. That is the issue before me, and that ultimately is the issue before you, sir. [Jawaharlal Nehru, *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Trust, New Delhi, 1978, Vol. XI, pp. 486-90]

The arrest of Nehru, and the severity of the sentence on him, stunned the country. The reaction all over India was one of shock and anger expressed in spontaneous meetings and demonstrations. Especially vocal in their protests were the students. The authorities threatened reprisals and student leaders from Madras and the U.P. sought Gandhiji's advice as regards strikes in protest against the threat. In a message Gandhiji told them that though his sympathy was wholly with them he must adhere to the view that the students must not resort to the contemplated strike. [C.W.M.G., LXXIII, pp. 176-77]

Even British Prime Minister Churchill was taken aback by the severe sentence awarded to Nehru and had to be assured that Nehru would receive



specially considerate treatment. The motive of the Government in taking such a vindictive action against Nehru was brought out in a confidential account of the civil disobedience movement. "The immediate local effect," it said, "was good; it put an end to the sort of agrarian discontent that Nehru had been endeavouring to stir up... On the other hand, it gave a handle to those, both in India and also in England and the USA, who desired to accuse Government of repression and vindictiveness... It therefore caused some embarrassment in dealing with the less important people who followed in Nehru's footsteps." [Michael Brecher, *Nehru*, Oxford University Press, London, 1959, p. 272]

3

The sentence of four years imprisonment awarded to a leader of Nehru's eminence was a clear indication that Linlithgow's Government intended to continue pursuing vigorously the policy of ruthless repression against the nationalist forces and that it had no desire to end the deadlock by coming to any sort of accommodation with the Congress. The symbolic protest such as Gandhiji wished to register through the individual satyagraha clearly did not promise to bring about the result desired.

When therefore the Congress Working Committee met at Wardha on 5 November the mood was sombre. Gandhiji again, more forcefully, expressed his inclination to go on a fast. His argument was that the *impasse* in which the country found itself called for a more drastic action, such as a mass civil disobedience movement. Yet the grounds on which he had rejected that course remained. The situation was so volatile that any mass action, if launched, must quickly lead to mass violence. A mass revolt, violent or non-violent, might even be justified, but he could not be an instrument of direct violent revolt. Failing resort to mass action, the only course left to him, said Gandhiji, was fasting.

There were other grounds, too. The communal situation appeared to be on the boil. In Sind Hindus were being indiscriminately murdered. They had been so terrorized that they could not even think of defending themselves. People were murdered in broad daylight and the murderers were not caught. At Nadiad in Gujarat at a cricket match a Muslim goonda had stabbed four persons because the umpire had declared a Muslim batsman out – this happened even when both teams had been of mixed communal composition.



Rajaji argued that there was no guarantee that Gandhiji hastening his end through a fast would produce the effect desired. It might in fact lead to disorganization on a mass scale.

Maulana Azad, too, expressed his disagreement. He did not feel, he said, that resort to mass civil disobedience would necessarily lead to large-scale violence, provided it had Gandhiji's leadership. There was as much fear of violence as there had been in 1930. Indeed this time there was a greater possibility of the struggle remaining non-violent. In any case at the slightest manifestation of violence the movement could be stopped.

Gandhiji said he did not see things that way. Once the movement was launched it would be difficult to stop it. Doing so would lead to great demoralization among the people. Such being his view, could he risk resort to mass action? It was clear that sending people to jail in ones and twos was not going to be of much use. They had put away Jawaharlal and Achyut Patwardhan. Mass civil disobedience was the only course left, and the country was not ready for it.

Could not satyagrahis be sent in groups to offer civil disobedience? – Azad asked. This was a middle way. The enthusiasm among the people would be kept up. The flame would be kept burning.

What did he hope to achieve through the fast? – Rajendra Prasad asked Gandhiji.

Gandhiji said if he survived the fast, it might have the result of the Government conceding freedom of speech to the people. Or it might decide to let him die. After all, even the lives of the King and of Churchill were in jeopardy. What then did his life matter to the Government? In that case the country would in a way be freed of him. But the individual civil disobedience was like a slow coach, and the Congress did not have an eternity before it.

Govind Ballabh Pant and Rajendra Prasad feared that the fast might result in an outbreak of violence that Gandhiji wished to avert.

Gandhiji said the risk was there, but it was less than there was in starting a mass civil disobedience movement.



On 6 November, when the Working Committee assembled again, Gandhiji unfolded a new plan to extend the scope of individual civil disobedience. He said rather than control those wishing to offer civil disobedience he would put them on their honour. Everyone who believed in the constructive programme would be free to offer satyagraha after informing the District Magistrate. He would not now prevent anyone who was willing and anxious to go. It was not his intention, Gandhiji went on, to send a lakh of persons to jail, but he would not be frightened even if that number should be imprisoned. People would still be going individually and on his authority, not of the Working Committee, but the Working Committee would function as his post office.

It was suggested that those in charge of offices might be spared for some time.

Gandhiji said he had in mind members of the A.I.C.C. and members of Provincial legislatures. Care would have to be taken to see that there were no Hindu-Muslim clashes and that Muslims at large remained sympathetically neutral. Gandhiji said that though repression would be severe he did not share the apprehension, expressed by C.R., that the Government would be able to crush the Congress. The British might crush the Germans, but they could not crush the Congress. Even if those going to prison should be disqualified for contesting elections to legislatures he did not care. He did not regard parliamentary activity necessary for winning freedom.

On 7 November, the following day, the scope of the extension of civil disobedience continued to be debated by members of the Working Committee. Gandhiji was asked what the Congress should do in the event of its being declared illegal.

Gandhiji said the struggle should not be pursued in a manner so as to hasten the Congress being declared illegal. In view of Jawaharlal's imprisonment and the severe sentence awarded to him and in view of the Maulana's repeated suggestion he had felt that strong action should be taken and a fair number of people should be sent. [The Diary of Mahadev Desai (unpublished), Book No. 41, pp. 355-74]



On 8 November Gandhiji announced that, under the extraordinary situation created by the Government, he had, after consultation with the Working Committee, decided to extend the scope of civil disobedience and proposed to select, for the time being, resisters from among the members of the Working Committee, the Congress members in the Central and Provincial legislatures and the members of the A.I.C.C.

Satyagrahis would be selected by him from lists sent to him by the Working Committee, and no one whose name he had not passed was to offer civil disobedience.

No one was to offer civil disobedience without first informing the District Magistrate of his district of the time, place and manner of offering satyagraha.

Preferably civil disobedience should be offered in villages, not in cities. The best and the easiest way of offering C.D., Gandhiji advised, would be to make the following statement: "It is wrong to help the British war effort with men or money. Only worthy effort is to resist all war with non-violent resistance."

Civil disobedience should be offered singly. All demonstrations should be avoided when civil disobedience was offered.

There must be no secrecy. Cyclostyling should be done openly at the risk of cyclostyle machines being confiscated. The best method of course would be copying manuscripts in hand. Congress funds too should not be kept secretly. If the Government should confiscate the funds the Congress committees should be prepared to lose them.

Even if the Congress should be declared illegal, Gandhiji said, it should not matter. As long as he himself was not arrested he would conduct the movement. If he too should be arrested, Congressmen should remain unperturbed. Each one must act on his own initiative.

Gandhiji concluded:

Congressmen should make it clear in their speech and their action that they are neither pro-Fascists nor pro-Nazis, but that they are opposed either to all war or at least to the war conducted on behalf of British Imperialism. They sympathize with the British in their effort to live, but they want also to live themselves as members of a fully free nation. They



must not, therefore, be expected to help Britain at the cost of their own liberty. They bear ill will to no nation. They want to play their part in establishing lasting peace in the world. [C.W.M.G., LXXIII, pp. 157-59]

On 11 November Gandhiji also informed the Viceroy of the change in the plan of civil disobedience. He said he had hoped to be able to confine civil disobedience to two or three typical cases and supplement them if necessary, with a fast. But the members of the Working Committee and all sorts of men and associations had prevailed upon him not to undertake the fast. And yet he had in some way to answer the action of the Government in regard to Jawaharlal Nehru. He therefore proposed to extend civil disobedience to qualified persons selected from particular groups. The groups intended to be taken up were members of the A.I.C.C., the Working Committee, and the legislatures. [Ibid, pp. 162-63]

On 13 November Gandhiji passed a list of about 1,500 Congressmen drawn from the above categories to offer civil disobedience. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1940, Vol. II, p. 44]

Although, in view of the new dimension imparted to individual civil disobedience, Gandhiji had decided not to undertake a fast, he had not wholly given up the idea and it continued to remain an eventuality. In his statement issued on 7 November he said:

In view of the extension of civil disobedience, the idea of a fast naturally remains in abeyance. But I must say nothing that I have heard has dislodged me from the position I have consistently held about the relevance and propriety of fast in all walks of life including the political... I have mentioned the possibility of fasting because something within me is prompting me to it. I am myself fighting against it. [C.W.M.G., LXXIII, p. 156]

A few days later in a talk with Kishorelal Mashruwala, the substance of which Mashruwala circularized among the members of the Gandhi Seva Sangh, Gandhiji reverted to the theme. He told Mashruwala:

As I have mentioned in my writings, I have been feeling for a long time that a prolonged fast is yet to be my lot. The war that is raging, the country's slavery and the importance for the whole world of India attaining



its independence through non-violence are the considerations that make this supreme sacrifice on my part inevitable....

I cannot yet tell under what conditions the fast will come.

Gandhiji mentioned the suggestion made by some that in the eventuality of his fasting a certain number of co-workers should be permitted to share in the sacrifice. Gandhiji said he did not favour the idea. The sacrifice of fifty humble workers would not carry as much weight as his fast would. Workers could carry on with the thirteenfold constructive programme, even add to it.

The workers might be called upon to lay down their lives under certain set of conditions, he said. It was possible that the British, or, if they were defeated, the occupation forces, might resort to repression to cow down people, the machinery of the State might break down, villages might be surrounded and armed guards placed at public wells to prevent people from drawing water or crops might be destroyed. The people must not submit. Gandhiji concluded:

We shall have to give them courage; we shall have to undergo hunger and thirst to generate in the people the strength to bear these hardships and die rather than to collaborate with the occupation forces.
[Ibid, pp. 174-76]

5

The decks having thus been cleared for the extension of civil disobedience, leading workers figuring in the list drawn up started offering satyagraha. In most cases they were not allowed the opportunity. They were picked up immediately after they had intimated the authorities of their intention. Among the first to be picked up was Vallabhbhai Patel. On 16 November he notified the District Magistrate of Ahmedabad of his intention to offer satyagraha by delivering a speech in the compound of the District Board the next day. On 17 November, before he could do so, he was arrested and placed in detention under Section 129 of the Defence of India Act. In the days immediately following many more leading workers, having declared to the authorities their intention to offer civil disobedience, were arrested and sent to jail, in many cases before they had had an opportunity to carry out their intention to offer satyagraha. Before the month ended the following had either been detained without trial or convicted and



awarded terms of imprisonment: Brijlal Biyani, Presidept of the Vidarbha P.C.C., T.S.S. Rajan, a former Minister of Madras (he was awarded one year's rigorous imprisonment and a fine of Rs. 1,000), Morarji Desai, B. G. Kher, G. B. Pant (One year's simple imprisonment), T. Prakasam (One year's simple imprisonment) and Shrikrishna Sinha of Bihar (One year's simple imprisonment). [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1940, Vol. II, pp. 44-48]

The satyagraha, which consisted merely in individuals courting imprisonment without any fanfare in places away from the hub of political activity, caused no trouble to the administration. It did, however, cause bafflement in official circles. Home Member Reginald Maxwell, whom Mahadev Desai met in Delhi towards the end of November, sent Gandhiji a message that by far the best course for him to take would have been to address a manifesto to the people of India on the lines of his appeal to every Briton. Gandhiji answered:

You would be wholly right in the advice you have sent me if I was a preacher. But ...I am essentially a man of action and a reformer carrying on an experiment never before tried in the political field. Hence at the risk of making mistakes, even big, I must continue to tread the chosen path so long as I have no sense of mistake or distrust of my action. My desire is to cause the least embarrassment to the Government consistently with the prosecution of my mission. If it is successful it cannot fail to benefit the British side by side with India and ultimately the world. If it fails, the Government cannot be hurt.... 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....[C.W.M.G., LXXIII, pp. 208-9]

A representative of Chiang Kai-shek, Tai Chi-tao, who was President of the Examination Yuan of the Chinese Government, paid a visit to Gandhiji on 22 or 23 November. He had come all the way from China to reciprocate the visit of Jawaharlal Nehru to that country in 1939. Gandhiji expressed to the visitor the sympathy of the Congress for the Chinese people in their struggle and told him that India, too, was engaged in a life-and-death struggle to secure her freedom. The only difference was that the method being employed in India was not the same. Gandhiji said:



The remedy you employ in self-defence is an age-old one. I am employing a remedy which is unknown to the world in the political field...in a nutshell it is this, viz., to be prepared to die as bravely as the bravest Chinese soldier, but without trying to kill your opponent or do the slightest harm to him whether in offence or self-defence. If we succeed here in instilling into the mass mind bravery to die without killing, I think that not only shall we have regained our liberty without violence but we shall have presented to the world a remedy to do away with all wars.

Gandhiji asked Tai to watch this movement with interest and bless it on behalf of China. [Ibid, pp. 189-91]

On 26 November Gandhiji wrote to Chiang Kai-shek, expressing his gratitude for the goodwill visit of Tai and expressing the hope that the deliverance of China might take place sooner than expected. [Ibid, p. 198]

The extension of the individual civil disobedience campaign was bound to create a feeling among certain sections of political workers, especially those of leftist leanings, that it might in time grow into a mass movement. Gandhiji hastened to disabuse them of the idea. He wrote to Mukundilal Sircar, Acting General Secretary of the Forward Bloc:

The movement was limited, in its original conception, to two or three persons, and then extended to members selected by me belonging to the Working Committee, the A.I.C.C. and the Central and Provincial legislatures. And, according to the occasion and the reaction on me after each move, it is capable of infinite expansion, I have called for classified lists of members of Provincial Congress Committee Executives and similarly of District Congress Committees, Firka or Taluk Congress Committees, and lastly of village Congress Committees. But whatever the expansion may be, it will never be a mass movement. It will always remain, so far as I can see, individual disobedience and will be confined to those who believe in and fulfil my conditions. [Ibid, pp. 207-8]

Throughout December, in various parts of the country, members of the Working Committee, the A.I.C.C., and Congress legislators continued to offer



satyagraha. On the 3rd C. Rajagopalachari was arrested and sentenced to one year's simple imprisonment. On the 5th in the U.P. Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit offered satyagraha and was arrested. On the 9th Dr. and Mrs. Subbarayan were arrested at Salem and sentenced to six months imprisonment. On the 13th Rafi Ahmad Kidwai, former Minister in the U.P., Fokhruddin Ali Ahmed, former Minister in Assam, and S. Satyamurti, deputy leader of the Congress Party in the Central Assembly, were arrested, Satyamurti being sentenced to nine months imprisonment. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1940, Vol. II, pp. 50-52]

Altogether in November and December some 700 persons offered satyagraha and were sent to prison. The satyagraha remained peaceful throughout and the satyagrahis showed remarkable restraint and discipline. There was a jarring note from Bihar. In that Province, when on 27 November Shrikrishna Sinha, former Premier of Bihar, offered civil disobedience, it was accompanied by a noisy demonstration. Gandhiji was quick to pull the Bihar leaders up. He telegraphed to Rajendra Prasad, who had himself not offered civil disobedience because of ill-health:

Bihar accounts are disturbing... There should be no demonstration.

Authorities should be informed and not the public of impending resistance. [C.W.M.G., LXXIII, p. 202]

In the Punjab too there were acts of indiscipline. In the first week of December Sardar Sampuran Singh, leader of the Congress Party in the Punjab Legislative Assembly, offered satyagraha amid a noisy demonstration staged by students who saw in him a hero. What compounded the indiscipline was the conduct of Sampuran Singh when brought to trial. In his statement to the court Sampuran Singh made light of non-violence, which, he said, he only accepted as a matter of discipline. He further let it be known that he did not agree with the attitude of the Congress with regard to the war. The Magistrate did not send Sampuran Singh to Jail. He merely imposed upon him a fine of one anna, which he paid from his own pocket.

The Congress President asked Sampuran Singh for an explanation. The explanation was not found to be satisfactory and Sampuran Singh was expelled from the Congress.



Gandhiji was much cut up by the behaviour of Sampuran Singh. He regretted that his name should have been cleared for offering civil disobedience. In a statement after the trial he said:

I do not know who passed his name. In my instructions I had explicitly prohibited the inclusion of names such as his.... There has been about this unfortunate case of Sardar Sampuran Singh some bungling on the part of those who were in charge of the Congress organizations.

Sampuran Singh then met Gandhiji to clarify his position. He told Gandhiji that in the Punjab no one believed in non-violence except as a matter of discipline. Gandhiji said if that was true it was a very serious matter. Non-violence was the fundamental policy or creed of the Congress and no one who did not believe in it has a right to participate in the movement. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1940, Vol. II, pp. 50, 53; *C.W.M.G.*, LXXIII, pp. 212-13, 247-48]

In Bengal the smooth course of satyagraha was bedevilled by the infighting within the Congress arising from the attempts being made by the followers of the Bose brothers to capture the organization. Following the action of the Working Committee in August 1939, removing Subhas Bose from the presidency of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee and disqualifying him from holding any elective office in the Congress for three years, the group loyal to him in the Bengal Congress had continued to press for the ban against him being lifted. At the same time the group had continued to carry on agitational activities without consultation with, and even in defiance of, the Congress. In June 1940 Subhas Bose started an agitation in Calcutta for the removal of the Holwell Monument. On 2 July 1940 he was arrested for defiance of the law. The Congress refused to lend the agitation any support and refused to take notice of Subhash's arrest. Clarifying the position of the Congress Gandhiji wrote:

Subhas Babu did not defy the law with the permission of the Congress. He has frankly and courageously defied even the Working Committee. If he had asked for permission to raise any side issue for battle at the present juncture, the Committee would, I think, have refused it... Therefore if the Working Committee had taken any action, it would have been one of disapprobation. [*C.W.M.G.*, LXXII, pp. 259-60]



In December 1940, at the height of the civil disobedience movement, the schism in the Bengal Congress became further widened. Individuals from Bengal continued to press Gandhiji to induce the Working Committee to lift the ban on the Bose brothers. Gandhiji however remained unmoved. On 6 December in a telegraphic message he told Barada Prasanna Pain:

Regret inability even unwillingness to interfere. Notwithstanding my regard and friendship for the brothers feel ban cannot be lifted without their apologizing for indiscipline. [C.W.M.G., LXXIII, p. 212]

But the Bose faction in the Bengal Congress continued to carry on activities that amounted to violation of discipline. They held meetings and took decisions in the name of the Congress. Finally on 23 December 14 members of the Bengal Congress Parliamentary Party, including its deputy leader Santosh Kumar Bose, were expelled from the Party by the Congress President. Subhas Bose in a statement denounced the action of the President as being *ultra vires* of the Congress constitution. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1940, Vol. II, pp. 54-55]

Subhas Bose, who had been released from prison on 5 December, on the Holwell Monument agitation having been discontinued, wrote to Gandhiji on 23 December, offering his cooperation in the civil disobedience movement, even though it was not a mass struggle and was not for national independence but only for free speech. As for the situation in Bengal, he wrote, it had deteriorated. "The Maulana has been rushing headlong along the mad path of what he calls disciplinary action. I am not bothered about it, because if he wills it and seeks it, we are ready to meet him on his own ground. He cannot affect our public position in the least, and he has only been making himself ridiculous before the public of this province and thereby dragging the name of the Congress to the dust." [C.W.M.G., LXXIII, pp. 457-58]

Gandhiji, answering, wrote to Bose on 29 December:

I have not been in consultation with Maulana Saheb. But when I read in the papers about the decision, I could not help approving of it.... As for your Bloc joining civil disobedience, I think, with the fundamental differences between you and me, it is not possible. Till one of us is converted to the other's view, we must sail in different boats,



though their destination may appear, only appear, to be the same. [Ibid, p. 264]

Gandhiji thus made it very clear that not only were the means advocated by Subhas Bose different from his own, but even the end Bose sought to pursue was similar only in appearance, not in reality. Gandhiji further clarified this in a letter he wrote to Mukundlal Sircar, a follower of Bose, on 16 February, 1941. He said:

The differences in our case are vital and fundamental... Independence secured through violence would have contents different from that secured through non-violent means. My notion of independence is independence of the poorest and the lowliest in the land. But in political language all of us ...must think of independence though all will have different meanings for the same word. [Ibid, p. 336]

7

The Civil Disobedience Movement meanwhile languidly progressed on its set course. Gandhiji took great pains to see that those offering satyagraha fulfilled all the qualifications laid down, were physically fit and in the event of their being jailed their families and dependents would not be a charge on the Congress. Speaking to T. R. Deogiriker, President of Maharashtra P.C.C., he said:

Some persons come to me and say that they have thirteen persons to support. Wherefrom can I or the Congress Committees give them money?... I want to know under what pressing conditions they are offering satyagraha... I want to prepare a who's who. I want to publish a book giving details about the satyagrahis.

I do not want a large number of people going to jail. I want the choicest and the best men to offer satyagraha. They must not only be representatives but must be men of high standard.

Gandhiji then told Deogiriker that he intended to send Pyarelal to jail. He said:

Do you know what hardships I would be put to? He is my hand, my feet, nay, my brain. Without him I cannot work. But I am sending him on



the 15th. I want to send Mahadev also, but I would be crippled if I send him now.

Gandhiji laid great emphasis on the observance of all the conditions governing the offering of satyagraha. Intimation of the intended satyagraha should be given only to the authorities, not to the people. The notice given to the authorities must mention that the satyagrahi had been selected by Gandhiji. The satyagrahi must say only three things: (i) not to give money, (ii) not to give men for the army, (iii) to oppose war measures by non-violent means. Meetings could be held but they must not be connected with the satyagraha. [Ibid, pp. 222-25]

On 10 December Pyarelal courted imprisonment. Gandhiji wrote to J. G. Laithwaite, Private Secretary to the Viceroy:

Since I am myself not offering civil disobedience, I feel that I must send more men like Shri Vinoba Bhave, for I am anxious to show that the movement is not purely political. It is much more. And so Pyarelal Nayar has gone today. He and Mahadev have been my constant companions all these many years. Satyagraha is a movement of self-purification and self-sacrifice. I must continue to part with the best I have. And so Mahadev will follow Pyarelal in due course.

I must continue to offer such sacrifice until I carry conviction to the ruling power that the satyagrahis represent a definite opinion in the country and that they represent millions. [Ibid, pp. 227-28]

In the notice to the Deputy Commissioner, Wardha, sent on behalf of Pyarelal on 9 December, Gandhiji wrote:

Shri Pyarelal Nayar, my co-worker for past twenty-five years,... will offer civil disobedience tomorrow at 9 a.m. from the railway gate leading to Wardha from Sevagram. He will walk on in the direction of Ahjee and continue until arrested or except for rest and food...[Ibid, pp. 215-16]

Pyarelal was duly arrested and lodged in Nagpur Jail.

On 17 December Mahadev Desai, under instructions from Gandhiji, made the announcement that there would be no satyagraha between 24 December



1940 and 4 January 1941, both days inclusive. This was to ensure that British officials did not have to interrupt their Christmas and New Year holidays to deal with the satyagraha.

Mahadev Desai in the same announcement said that from 5 January 1941 onwards persons from outside the three categories so far permitted would be allowed to offer satyagraha provided they figured on the list approved by Gandhiji. Direct applications for permission to offer satyagraha had been pouring in at Sevagram from all parts of the country. They were all routinely forwarded to the P.C.C.s concerned. Mahadev Desai advised all civil disobedience candidates to write to the P.C.C.s, stating their names, addresses, ages, occupations, their freedom from commitments and illness and declaring their faith in non-violence as the only means of attaining swaraj. They must also believe in the vital connection between civil disobedience and constructive programme and that belief must be manifested in regular spinning and habitual wearing of khadi.

Students must not apply unless they had decided to give up their studies and secured the permission of their parents. [Ibid, p. 241]

In a letter to Lala Dunichand, President of the Punjab P.C.C., Gandhiji emphasized the qualifications that the would-be satyagrahis must possess. Satyagrahis, he wrote, must make sure that:

- (1) They are habitual and regular spinners.
- (2) They are habitual khadi wearers.
- (3) They believe in the necessity of communal unity and removal of untouchability in every shape and form.
- (4) They believe in the necessity of supporting village handicrafts and swadeshi in everything.
- (5) They believe that swaraj for the millions is unattainable without non-violence.
- (6) They believe in the Bombay resolution of the All India Congress Committee.
- (7) They believe in an inevitable connection between the above-mentioned points and non-violence.



Civil disobedience, Gandhiji wrote, was a matter of inviolable faith and not of discipline. Nobody was obliged to offer civil disobedience who did not believe in the urgency of it. [Ibid, pp. 257-58]

8

On 24 December 1940 Gandhiji penned an open letter to Adolf Hitler. Addressing him as "Dear Friend", Gandhiji wrote:

I hope you will have the time and desire to know how a good portion of humanity who have been living under the influence of that doctrine of universal friendship view your action... your own writings and pronouncements and those of your friends and admirers leave no room for doubt that many of your acts are monstrous and unbecoming of human dignity... Hence we cannot possibly wish success to your arms...Ours is an unarmed revolt against the British rule. But whether we convert them or not, we are determined to make their rule impossible by non-violent non-cooperation.... Our rulers may have our land, our bodies but not our souls.... That all may not rise to that degree of heroism and that a fair amount of frightfulness can bend the back of revolt is true, but the argument would be beside the point. For if a fair number of men and women be found in India who would be prepared without any ill will against the spoliators to lay down their lives rather than bend the knee to them, they would have shown the way to freedom from the tyranny of violence....

Means of destruction which he had brought to such perfection, Gandhiji reminded Hitler, were nobody's monopoly, and if not Britain, some other power would surely beat him with his own weapon. He warned the Nazi leader:

You are leaving no legacy to your people of which they would feel proud. They cannot take pride in a recital of cruel deeds, however skilfully planned.

Gandhiji concluded by appealing to Hitler to stop the war and submit his dispute with Britain to an international tribunal. [Ibid, pp. 253-55]

Gandhiji requested the Viceroy to allow the letter quick passage to the West. The request was turned down. Laithwaite answered that the Viceroy was



unable to accept the statements contained in the letter "as in any way a fair representation of the relations of Great Britain with India, which has so greatly benefited over so long a period of years from association with the Empire", and so could not give Gandhiji the assistance desired. [Ibid, p. 256]

Gandhiji could not let this pass. On 30 December 1940, he answered Laithwaite:

The despair of Indian nationalists like me has been that British functionaries could not be persuaded to see the other side of the shield. And so the distance between them and the nationalists is growing in spite of all efforts to the contrary.... The ordinary rule is that those should be the final judges who are beneficiaries and not the self-styled benefactors.

However, Gandhiji wrote, he did not want surreptitious publication of the letter, nor did he want to resort to open defiance so long as it was possible consistently with the national cause. [Ibid, pp. 266-67]

The Viceroy was of course being hypocritical when he talked of India having been benefited by her long association with the Empire. For in a communication to the Secretary of State he was to write about a year later:

Cabinet will I think agree with me that India and Burma have no natural association with the Empire, from which they are alien by race, history and religion, and for which as such neither of them have any natural affection, and both are in the Empire because they are conquered countries which had been brought there by force, kept there by our controls, and which hitherto it has suited to remain under our protection. [Nicholas Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power: 1942-47*, Her Majesty's Stationery Office, London, Vol. I, p. 49]

When satyagraha was resumed on 5 January 1941, people in thousands began to offer themselves for arrest all over the country. The numbers were so large that it was not found convenient to arrest all. Gandhiji issued instructions that in the event of not being arrested a satyagrahi should continue in his mission, reciting anti-war slogans and addressing anti-war meetings. Having once given notice to the authorities of his intention to offer satyagraha he need not give intimation again. He must move slowly from village to village, travelling a



short distance each day. No conveyance must be used. [*C.W.M.G.*, LXXIII, p. 273]

Another kind of problem soon arose. In many places trying magistrates, instead of sending satyagrahis to jail began to impose fines without option of imprisonment. In his instructions issued on 10 January Gandhiji said:

Punishment courted has to be joyfully suffered. Therefore when fines are imposed and the person fined is able to pay, he must do so willingly. The result may naturally be that such a person will be fined again and again. If he persists in his resistance, he may have no property left.... Therefore all propertied persons who wish to join the struggle should do so well knowing that the whole of their property may be taken away by the Government. This is a struggle which has no ending except in success.

Gandhiji advised that those propertied persons who did not wish to run the risk of losing their property should not join the struggle. [*Ibid*, pp. 277-78]

On 8 January 1941, Maulana Azad, the President of the Congress, was taken into custody at Allahabad and sentenced to 18 months' imprisonment under the Defence of India Rules. He had not offered satyagraha. He had been convicted for a speech delivered in Allahabad on 13 December. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1941, Vol. I, p. 28]

Gandhiji directed that no successor to Azad be appointed, also that every acting President in a Province must have his approval. Gandhiji further directed:

All representative Congressmen from members of village to Provincial Committees are expected to be in jail if they are fit and approved by me.... No fresh elections are to take place to replace those who will have gone. The idea is ultimately for every Congressman to act on his own and be his own president but nobody else's.... My intention not to court arrest abides, but the rulers may have a different plan.... Thus if I am arrested everyone will be under the discipline of his or her own conscience. In theory, therefore, a time may come when millions will be judges of their own fitness to offer civil disobedience.

The struggle, Gandhiji wrote, would not be a short one. It would be coterminous with the war in Europe. Therefore every satyagrahi who got a short term of imprisonment was expected to offer satyagraha again after his release



and continue to do so till the end of the struggle. Should the authorities not arrest the satyagrahis at all they should march on foot in easy stages in the direction of Delhi. [Ibid, pp. 281-83]

9

An event that caused quite a stir in the country in January 1941 was the disappearance of Subhas Bose from his residence. Bose was in the process of being tried under the Defence of India Rules in the court of the Additional Chief Presidency Magistrate, Calcutta. He was to appear in the court on 13 January but had been too unwell to attend and the hearing had then been postponed to 27 January. But early on that morning he was found missing from home. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1941, Vol. I, pp. 29, 33]

Nobody was aware of the whereabouts of Bose. Could he have gone to Pondicherry? Enquiries made there revealed that that had not been the case. Gandhiji anxiously telegraphed to Sarat Bose to let him know the truth behind the "startling" development. Sarat Bose answered that he was as much in the dark about the matter as the public. [C.W.M.G., LXXIII, p. 304]

As was later to turn out, Subhas Bose had fled the country. Arriving in Kabul after an adventurous journey, he had thence proceeded to Moscow and then to Berlin, where he had arrived on 28 March. He had got in touch with the German foreign office, which had provided him facilities to make broadcasts to India on the German radio. He had organized an Indian Legion to fight against the British. He had sought from the Axis Powers a declaration on the freedom of India and even met Hitler on 28 May in pursuance of that objective. He had received no encouragement from Hitler. He had then decided to go to Japan.

He had clandestinely left Germany on 8 February 1943 in a German submarine, got onto a Japanese vessel at some point on the way and reached Sumatra towards the end of April and was thence flown to Tokyo on 13 June, where he organized the Indian National Army.

Even though in his letter of 23 December 1940 to Gandhiji Subhas had offered the cooperation of his group in the Civil Disobedience movement, it appears that he had already made up his mind to chart a course separate from that of Gandhiji and the Congress. As he has explained in his book *The Indian*



Struggle, while he had been in jail between July and December 1940, he had done a lot of thinking. His cogitations had led him to the following conclusions:

Firstly, Britain would lose the war and the British Empire would break up.

Secondly, in spite of being in a precarious position, the British would not hand over power to the Indian people and the latter would have to fight for their freedom.

Thirdly, India would win her independence if she played her part in the war against Britain and collaborated with those powers that were fighting Britain. [Tara Chand, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Vol. IV, pp.416-18]

Meanwhile, the Additional Chief Presidency Magistrate of Calcutta first had a proclamation issued for the arrest of Subhas Bose and then on 12 March issued orders for the attachment of his property. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1941, Vol. I, pp. 36, 50]

10

The Civil Disobedience Movement was not affected by the flight of Bose. It proceeded as planned, under the tight control of Gandhiji. Volunteers from the provincial, district, tehsil and village committees of the Congress – about 15,000 of them according to the lists – continued to court imprisonment or pay fines, by repeating the prescribed slogans without any fanfare. In many cases police refrained from taking any action against the satyagrahis. It was too inconvenient to arrest them. The attitude of the police and magistracy found expression in the utterance of a Sub-Divisional Magistrate, R. Galletti, in Andhra Pradesh. Galletti had said that it was wrong on the part of the police to prosecute the smaller fry, leaving alone the prime movers who were the arch conspirators. There were a few sincere Congressmen, he had declared, but most lacked honesty. [Pattabhi Sitaramayya, *The History of the Indian National Congress*, Vol. II, p. 265]

Gandhiji wrote that though the remarks of the Magistrate were libellous, he proposed to take no notice of them. The Magistrate could not harm the movement. [C.W.M.G., LXXIII, p. 339]



In his instructions to the satyagrahis issued in March Gandhiji directed them that in the event of their not being arrested, they could do house-to-house propaganda but it should not take the form of picketing. Satyagrahis must not enter houses where they would not be welcome. The instructions continued:

Persons serving in Local Bodies must resign before offering satyagraha.

When a Congress Committee is suspended, its work should be entrusted to an approved satyagrahi.

Lady satyagrahis, if unable to march to Delhi, may tour in their own district and province.

Satyagrahis marching to Delhi should obtain a working knowledge of Hindustani....

Satyagrahis who are let off with fines should continue the satyagraha without giving a fresh notice.

Satyagrahis able to pay the fine may not evade payment, but are not bound to sell their property to pay it....

Satyagraha may not be offered in a place where Section 144 is in force.

Fetters and handcuffs, etc., should be borne cheerfully when being transferred from one jail to another.

Non-arrested satyagrahis marching to Delhi should, besides raising anti-war slogans ..., propagate the constructive programme of the Congress. [Ibid, pp. 377-78]

It was not incumbent on all the members of the Congress or the committees at various levels to offer civil disobedience and go to jail. Each one had the freedom of choice. The same was true of Congress members of Local Bodies. When it was suggested that they should resign from those bodies and offer civil disobedience, Gandhiji said:

Why should they resign? You did not take them on the Congress ticket on the condition that they should either go to jail or should resign, if the political situation develops in the way in which it has done now. [Ibid, p. 224]



Notwithstanding all the strictness employed by Gandhiji in the selection of satyagrahis, the number of satyagrahis in the country's jails kept swelling.

In the first phase of the movement lasting from 17 October to the middle of November the only two satyagrahis imprisoned were Vinoba Bhave and Jawaharlal Nehru. In the second phase of the movement when the members of the Working Committee and the A.I.C.C. and Congress legislators in the Central and Provincial Assemblies were permitted to offer civil disobedience, 11 members of the Working Committee and 400 legislators courted arrest, among them being Patel, Azad and Rajagopalachari.

In the third phase of the movement, when all Congressmen at the provincial, district, taluka and village level and all Congress members of municipalities and district boards were permitted to give their names for offering civil disobedience if they chose, 20,000 satyagrahis had been convicted by the middle of summer in 1941. [Tara Chand, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Vol. IV, pp. 309-10]

11

Towards the end of May 1941 a British M.P., Eleanor Rathbone, addressed an open letter to "Indian friends". She wrote that non-cooperating Indians must not be misled into thinking that all progressive British people were with them in throwing the blame for the deadlock in India on the British authorities. She then went on to eulogize the British rule, which had conferred so many benefits on India.

Rabindranath Tagore, then 81 and ailing, was furious at the impertinence of the lady. In a statement issued from his sick-bed on 4 June 1941 he said:

I have been deeply pained by Miss Rathbone's open letter to Indians.... Her letter is mainly addressed to Jawaharlal and I have no doubt that if that noble fighter of freedom's battle had not been gagged behind prison bars by Miss Rathbone's countrymen, he would have made a fitting and spirited reply to her gratuitous sermon....

The lady has ill served the cause of her people by addressing so indiscreet, indeed impertinent, a challenge to our conscience.



Rathbone had dilated on the blessing of English education which Indians had been receiving and which enabled them to drink deeply "at the wells of English thought". Tagore said it was sheer self-complacency on the part of the British to assume that had they not taught Indians they would have remained in the dark ages. What had come to India through English education was "not the best of English thought but its refuse" which had only deprived Indian children of wholesome repast at the table of their own culture. And how many had received any education? Tagore cited figures. In 1931 after a couple of centuries of British rule only about one per cent of the population was found to be literate in English. As against that, in the Soviet Union, after only 15 years of Soviet rule 98 per cent of the children were educated.

Even more important than education was food. Tagore wrote:

I look around and see famished bodies crying for bread. I have seen women in villages dig up mud for a few drops of drinking water; for wells are even morescarce in Indian villages than schools.... Shall we then be grateful to the British, if not for keeping us fed, at least for preserving law and order? I look around and see riots raging all over the country. When scores of Indian lives are lost, our property looted, our women dishonoured, the mighty British arms stir in no action....

Tagore concluded:

I should have thought that the decent Britisher would at least keep silent at these wrongs and be grateful to us for our inaction, but that he should add insult to injury and pour salt over our wounds passes all bounds of decency. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1941, Vol II, pp. 202-3]

Asked to comment on Rathbone's letter, Gandhiji told a correspondent: "After Tagore's reply, should I say anything?" [*C.W.M.G.*, LXXIV, p. 107]

The Poet's outpouring at Miss Rathbone's presumption was the last flicker of the lamp. He never recovered from the illness and passed away on 7 August 1941.

Gandhiji had been quite justified in the fears he had expressed that in the situation then prevailing in the country any civil disobedience movement was



bound to provoke conflict with the Muslims. For this reason, among others, he had resisted the pressure of wide sections within and without the Congress to start a mass civil disobedience movement. Even with the individual civil disobedience he had been extra careful in ensuring that the masses were kept away and the satyagraha was not accompanied by any sort of meetings or demonstrations. Nevertheless, whatever the reactions of British authority against which the symbolic action was directed, it roused the ire of the Muslim League.

The view was expressed by the leaders of the Muslim League that the only object of the civil disobedience movement started by Gandhiji was to bring pressure on the British Government to resile from the position it had taken in regard to the future constitution of India relating to the Muslims and concede to the Congress demands which were fundamentally opposed to Muslim India. It was asserted that what Gandhiji wanted was not freedom of speech but the acceptance of the Congress demands, viz., adult franchise, constituent assembly and national government. The satyagraha movement had been started to coerce the British to accept the Congress demands irrespective of any agreement with the Muslim League.

The Council of the All-India Muslim League, at its meeting in Delhi held on 23 February 1941, passed a resolution fixing 23 March every year as the Pakistan Day. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1941, Vol. I, pp. 292-93]

Jinnah went round the country holding meetings asking Muslims to stand up and fight for Pakistan, which was the only solution to India's problems. Speaking at Lahore, Aligarh, Delhi, Kanpur and various other places Jinnah harped on the theme, declaring: "Pakistan had been there for centuries. It is there today, and it will remain till the end of the world." Muslims and Hindus, he emphasized, could not rule jointly as they were different in dress, language and mode of living. [Ibid, pp. 46, 50, 52, 55]

It was not so much what the leaders of the Muslim League said to their followers, it was how they said it. Their fulminations were charged with intense hatred for the Hindus in general. There were calls for bloodshed. For instance at a Muslim League conference held in Mymensingh on 10 March 1941, the chairman of the reception committee read a Bengali poem which in translation ran:



O victorious soldiers, march forward

On our religious pilgrimage to Kaaba under the banner of the League

We shall spill as much blood as required.

Come quickly – break down Somnath.

If you want freedom, burn, burn, burn the Jatugriha and let all trouble end.

Two Muslim Ministers of Bengal were present on the occasion. [Ibid, pp. 127-28]

Incitement of passions was accompanied by organization of riots. Early in April 1941 several areas in Dacca were engulfed in communal riots. The riots, to be sure, had started on 17 March. Soon Narsindi, Raipura and Sibpur were in flames. On 1 April three Hindu villages were looted and burnt. On 2 April eight villages were raided and burnt, on 3 April 19 houses in Dacca were burnt.

In no less than 40 villages in the Narainganj sub-division a reign of terror prevailed. There were acts of loot, arson, plunder, forcible conversions to Islam and raping of Hindu women. As a result there was mass migration of Hindus to the neighbouring state of Tripura. In the Bengal Legislative Council, which debated the riots on 7 and 8 April, a Congress member charged that the whole thing had been preplanned and organized. [Ibid, pp. 223-24, 234-35]

The Fazlul Haq Government constituted a committee of enquiry on 24 May, but the rioting continued sporadically for many months thereafter. [Ibid, pp. 58, 62, 81]

But Dacca was by no means an exception so far as communal riots were concerned. There were riots in Ahmedabad, Bombay and Bihar in April and May. In Ahmedabad on one single day, 20 April, no less than 55 persons were killed and 390 injured in rioting.

Gandhiji was shaken by the riots. He wrote:

We have proved ourselves barbarians and cowards in these places. Arson, loot and killing of innocent people including children have been



common in almost all the places.... Individual cases apart, the Congress produced little or no influence over either the Muslims or the Hindus in the affected areas.... Muslim fanatics in Dacca and Ahmedabad did their worst in inflicting damage on Hindu property by looting and burning with a deliberation that showed premeditation. Hindus, instead of boldly standing up and facing the mischief-makers, fled in their thousands from the danger zone.

If the Congress could not regulate the communal situation through non-violence, Gandhiji went on, how could it hope to secure independence through non-violence? The masses must be told that if they could not defend themselves through non-violence, then they must defend themselves even through violence. Even violence could be both decent and indecent. Congressmen, Gandhiji exhorted, must throw themselves in the midst of rioting mobs and try to restore peace even at the risk of their lives. [C.W.M.G., LXXIV, pp. 26-29]

On 23 May 1941, addressing the National Youth Training Camp at Wardha, Gandhiji said:

Today my mind is full of only one thing. I cannot think of anything except what has happened in Ahmedabad, Dacca, Bombay and in Bihar.... It is unmanly to run away from danger. Dumb animals run away when beaten. [Ibid, p. 83]

So far as Congressmen themselves were concerned, Gandhiji was clear that they could only use non-violence in stemming communal riots. In a letter to Bhogilal Lala, Secretary of the Gujarat P.C.C., on 21 May Gandhiji wrote:

If my interpretation of the Congress creed is correct, the Congress and Congressmen may offer non-violent resistance only, and they are sure to succeed.... A Congressman may not directly or indirectly associate himself with gymnasias where training in violent resistance is given.

To provide guidance to Congressmen in communal riots Gandhiji announced the formation of an Advisory Committee comprising Mahadev Desai, Narhari Parikh, Bhogilal, Gulzarilal Nanda, Jivanlal Diwan, Mridula Sarabhai, Indumati Chimanlal, Khandubhai Desai and Raojibhai Patel. [Ibid, pp. 74-76]

K. M. Munshi took exception to the line taken by Gandhiji. In a letter to



Gandhiji on 26 May, he said he could not reconcile himself to the injunctions. If life, home, shrine and honour of women should be threatened by goondaism, organized resistance in self-defence appeared to him to be paramount duty, whatever form such resistance might take. He could not, he wrote, pledge himself not to preach, hold, organize or sympathize with organized resistance to violence in self-defence by all possible means. [Ibid, pp. 401-3]

On June 12 and 13 Munshi, along with Rajendra Prasad and a few other Congress leaders, had long talks with Gandhiji. Gandhiji said he was clear that the Congress as an organization could not countenance violent resistance even in self-defence. If Munshi did not find this course feasible, he could leave the Congress and organize the Hindus for violent self-defence. [Ibid, pp. 403-6]

Munshi accordingly resigned from the Congress. Gandhiji approved his action. [Ibid, pp. 112-14, 407]

Gandhiji, though eager for an agreement with the Muslim League did not feel that an understanding with Jinnah was possible so long as the League persisted in the position it had taken. Writing to Manu Subedar on 14 September he said:

As long as the policy of keeping at a distance from both the Government and the Congress and using concessions by either side for extracting more from the other remains, no understanding seems possible. A party following such a policy will never be satisfied with what it gets.

I am convinced that the riots in Sind, Dacca and Ahmedabad were intended to intimidate the Congress. [Ibid, p. 319]

As Congressmen in thousands embraced imprisonment to vindicate the elementary right of free speech, the Muslim League thus chose to plunge the country into a mini civil war. It was a dress rehearsal for the carnage that was to come later.



CHAPTER VI: INDIVIDUAL CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE - II

1

We saw how the Individual Civil Disobedience movement only succeeded in rousing the worst passions of the communalist Muslims leadership represented by Jinnah and his followers and in the unleashing, on their part, of communal carnage on a wide scale. The response of the British Government to the movement was no less hostile.

While at the administrative level the machinery of repression was let loose to crush the movement, which was intended, and was, no more than a symbolic gesture of defiance to register the protest of Indian people at the deprivation of a basic civic right, at the propaganda level spokesmen of the Empire sought to misconstrue and misrepresent the movement in the eyes of the world and to paint the Congress as an organization hostile to the cause of the Allies and chiefly responsible for the continued constitutional deadlock in India.

On 22 April 1941, in the British House of Commons, Secretary of States L. S. Amery, while speaking on a resolution to further extend the period of Governors' rule in the erstwhile Congress Provinces, roundly denounced the Congress as a totalitarian organization. Amery said:

I can only say ...that there is no greater danger to democratic government in India as elsewhere than party totalitarianism. What has been even more immediately serious is the effect of this demonstration of Congress methods upon other important elements in India — non-Congress Provinces, the Muslim community generally and the Princes. It has confirmed to a point of fixed determination their already growing reluctance to take part in, or come under, any Central Government in India which is likely to be subject to the control of majority in the legislature, which, in turn, would simply obey the words of the Congress Central Executive.

Amery went on to charge that the Congress had rejected the Federal provisions of the Government of India Act of 1935 largely because the Act provided for weighted representation to some extent in the legislature in favour of "the minority element", meaning of course the Muslims.



Reverting to the British Government's proposals contained in the Viceroy's declaration of 7 August 1940, Amery explained that they fell under two heads: major and interim. The major proposal was that "the framework of India's future constitution should be devised by Indians themselves and not by this House". This was, he said, a recognition in advance of India's status as a Dominion. The stipulation was that the constitution itself and also the body which was to frame it, must be the outcome of agreement between "the principal elements in India's national life". This was an essential condition, the Secretary of State declared, because in all federal constitutions previous agreement upon the nature of the constitution and upon the limits within which majority rule could be exercised had been the condition upon which the various elements of a federation had been prepared to come together. Subject to this condition the whole constitutional field was open for a modification or fundamental reconstruction of the existing Act. The makers of the constitution could, if they desired, opt for the British model, in which the Executive derived its authority from the Legislature, or for the American model, in which the authority was derived from the federating units.

The interim proposal was that the Viceroy would enlarge his Executive Council by inviting Indian leaders representing the main political parties to join the Council, so that the Indian element in the Council would be in a substantial majority.

Amery regretted that the Congress had rejected out of hand both the major and the interim proposals. Its attitude was 'all or nothing' and by 'all' it meant the immediate independence of India governed by a constitution which would be under the control of the Congress. It had then proceeded to launch "a curious campaign of Mr. Gandhi's devising", which was civil disobedience by instalments.

Most Conservative, and a few Labour, Members of Parliament, speaking on the motion, joined their voice to Amery's in regretting the position taken by the Congress. It was left to Sorenson (Labour) to put in a word for the Congress. He declared that

there was no party in the world more democratic than the Congress Party in India. The Congress required neither a dishonoured nor a blank cheque.



What Congress had been doing was to secure from this country recognition that India had the right to her political independence.

A suggestion had been voiced, Sorenson continued, that an Indian should be invited to join the Government in London as an Under-Secretary. It would have been much better, he said, if the suggestion had been made that an Indian leader, such as Jawaharlal Nehru, should be made a member of the Cabinet. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1941, Vol. I, pp. 313-26]

Amery's outburst against the Congress annoyed Gandhiji. In a statement to the Press on 25 April 1941, every line and every word of which, as Srinivasa Sastri was to comment, breathed indignation, "of a type somewhat unusual with the Mahatma", Gandhiji observed:

Distress has been known to have softened people's hearts and made them mindful of facts. But Britain's distress has evidently left Mr. Amery absolutely cold and untouched.*

Mr. Amery has insulted Indian intelligence by reiterating *ad nauseam* that Indian political parties have but to agree among themselves and Great Britain will register the will of a united India. I have repeatedly shown that it has been the traditional policy of Great Britain to prevent parties from uniting. 'Divide and rule' has been Great Britain's proud and ill-conceived motto. It is the British statesmen who are responsible for the divisions in India's ranks and the divisions will continue so long as the British sword holds India under bondage....

Mr. Amery, in utter disregard of truth, misleads his ignorant audience that the Congress wants 'all or nothing'.... I authoritatively stated that the British Government could not at the present moment grant or declare India's independence and that, therefore, for the time being, we should be satisfied with the complete freedom of speech and pen. Was that 'all or nothing'? With Mr. Amery's state of mind, I suppose it is too much to expect him to have the elementary grace to acknowledge the studied moderation of the Congress in its desire not to embarrass the British Government whilst it is fighting for its very existence. Not having that grace, he turns the Congress moderation against it and claims that



the Congress civil disobedience has fallen flat. [C.W.M.G., LXXIV, pp. 13-16]

Answering questions put to him by Frank Moraes on behalf of *The News Chronicle* of London, Gandhiji rebutted the ludicrous charge that he was a dictator and the Congress was a totalitarian organization. He said:

To describe me as a dictator is laughable, if only because I have no sanction behind my instructions save the willing and affectionate endorsement thereof by Congressmen. I have imposed no views on anybody. Imposition of non-violent views is a contradiction in terms.... Equally false is the description of the Congress as a totalitarian body with totalitarian ambitions. The essence of totalitarianism is that it should have violent sanction behind it. Mr. Amery knows that the Congress is pledged to non-violence and I challenge him to produce a single instance of an authoritarian resort to violence by the Congress to impose its will upon its opponents. [Ibid, pp. 16-17]

* Britain's distress, to which Gandhiji was referring in the statement, was real enough. The British had in the early months of 1941 taken a severe battering at the hands of Hitler. By 13 April 1941 the Nazi armies had overrun Yugoslavia after bombing to the ground its capital Belgrade and killing 17,000 of its civilians. Hitler had then marched on Greece, crushing Greek resistance, which was aided by 53,000 British troops. British troops had found themselves in such straits that evacuating them from a position of certain doom became a problem. In the last week of March in North Africa, German and Italian forces, launching a powerful attack, had quickly captured Cyrenaica, invested Tobruk and reached Bardia, posing a threat to the entire British position in Egypt and Suez. The whole of the Mediterranean region was to all intents and purposes in the Axis hands. [William L. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, pp. 1083-86]

That the British Government was not sincere in its repeated proclamations of concern to end the political deadlock in India was revealed by the summary manner in which it rejected an important initiative coming from non-Congress sources in India about this time.



The initiative came from a Non-Party Leaders' Conference sponsored by Tej Bahadur Sapru. The Conference, which met in Bombay from 14 to 16 March 1941 was attended by, besides Sapru, such outspoken opponents of the Congress as Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, Savarkar, and such loyalists as Sir Jagdish Prasad and the Maharaja of Burdwan. Other participants were N. N. Sircar, Cowasji Jehangir, Kunwar Sir Maharaj Singh, Sardar Jogendra Singh, Sardar Sant Singh, H. N. Kunzru, B. S. Moonje, T. T. Krishnamachari, Dr. R. P. Paranjpye, V. N. Chandavarkar, Fazal Ibrahim Rahimtoola and Sir Chimanlal Setalvad.

N. N. Sircar, who moved the resolution on the constitutional deadlock, strongly deplored the British Government's attitude that there could be no constitutional advance until and unless there was agreement between the parties. He asked: "Is there any important provision in the Government of India Act, 1935, which is the result of agreement between parties? ...If His Majesty's Government had insisted on substantial agreement between the parties on the material questions involved, there would have been no Government of India Act at all."

The resolution, unanimously adopted by the Conference, ran:

While India should not take advantage of Britain's difficulties in her heroic struggle, the Conference is equally desirous that India's domestic problems should not be pressed to her disadvantage. As a first step towards the removal of the present deadlock and until a permanent constitution is brought into force, the Conference desires to emphasize the immediate need for the reconstruction of the Governor-General's Executive Council.

The Conference considers that the present Council, which consists of three European members of the Indian Civil Service and three Indians of whom two are non-officials and one is a member of the Indian Civil Service, in addition to His Excellency the Viceroy and His Excellency the Commander-in-Chief, is neither adequate nor sufficiently representative to organize and direct India's war effort at this moment of grave peril....

For the reasons mentioned above the Conference is of opinion that the whole Executive Council should consist of non-official Indians drawn



from important elements in the public life of the country. This will naturally involve the transfer of all portfolios, including the vital ones of Finance and Defence, to Indians.

The Conference would be content during the period of the war that the reconstructed Centre remains responsible to the Crown; and so far as Defence is concerned, the position of the Commander-in-Chief as the Executive head of the defence forces of the country should not be in any way prejudiced.... In regard to all inter-Imperial and international matters, the reconstructed Government should be treated on the same footing as the Dominion Governments.

The Conference is further of opinion that with a view to create a favourable atmosphere for the working of the reconstructed Central Government, it is necessary to remove the doubts and misgivings of the people of this country as regards the genuineness of the intentions of His Majesty's Government by making a declaration simultaneously with the reconstruction of the Central Government that within a specified time limit after the conclusion of the war, India will enjoy the same measure of freedom as will be enjoyed by Britain and the Dominions. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1941, Vol. I, pp. 306-12]

Amery, in his speech in the House of Commons on 22 April, in addition to maligning the Congress and Gandhiji, also summarily rejected the Bombay Conference proposal. He began by casting doubt on the amount of support that the Bombay resolution had, saying: "I am not quite clear as to how many of those who attended one or more meetings of this Conference actually concurred in the resolution." He then proceeded:

I have already pointed out that the time-table of India's constitutional advance depends far more upon Indian agreement than upon ourselves. But the same applies to any far-reaching alteration of the present constitutional position. As I think I have already made clear, our existing proposal for the expansion of the Viceroy's Council is in suspense not because those concerned – I am leaving the Congress on one side for a moment – have condemned the proposal on the ground of inadequacy but mainly because of the difficulty of reconciling Muslim and Hindu claims



for relative positions. That difficulty is not lessened but inevitably enhanced by any suggestion of a new type of Executive with more extensive powers.

Amery pointed out that Sapru had not secured any agreement between parties for his scheme – not even between the Muslim League and Hindu parties other than the Congress. Jinnah had already dismissed the scheme as a trap into which Sapru had been led by the Congress. The Hindu Mahasabha, too, would not support such a Council unless Hindus were in a majority in it. Besides, it would be very difficult to persuade Parliament to confer Dominion or quasi-Dominion powers on a body so constituted. [Ibid, pp. 317-18]

Jinnah of course rejected the proposal in the most vitriolic words he could summon. He called it a "worthless document intended purely for purposes of propaganda to mislead the ignorant and credulous people". He said the Conference had been "engineered by agents of the Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha leaders".

Muslim League circles spread the canard that the Conference had been convened at the behest of K. Srinivasan, editor of the *Hindu*, and that the resolution passed had been drafted by Rajaji. [Ibid, pp. 66-68]

The Standing Committee of the Bombay Conference in a statement on 29 April categorically rejected Jinnah's insinuation that the Bombay Conference had been held at the instigation of some Congress leaders. Commenting on Amery's rejection of the proposal the statement said:

According to the Secretary of State the present position seems to be that until it pleases Mr. Jinnah to approve of any scheme, His Majesty's Government can do nothing to give effect even to their own intentions as announced in August last. [Ibid, p. 328]

Dr. Radhakrishnan was equally unequivocal in condemning the rejection of the Bombay proposal by Amery. He said:

The way in which the proposals of the Bombay Conference have been treated by the Secretary indicates that, even in this crisis, Britain is not willing to part with power in India. [Ibid, p. 63]



The Liberals were equally forthright in denouncing Amery's speech in Parliament. In a resolution passed at its meeting in Poona on 29 June, the National Liberal Federation stated:

The Council of the National Liberal Federation has read with profound dismay the speech of Mr. Amery in the Commons debate on April 22... The Council cannot agree with the implication contained in Mr. Amery's speech that no useful purpose will be served by reconstructing the Central Government on national lines unless at least the Muslim League agreed to such reconstruction... In the opinion of the Council, the speech of Mr. Amery is unsatisfactory not only in regard to the present but also in regard to the future as it refuses to indicate clearly the time within which India may expect to be endowed with full Dominion Status after the war. It also records its emphatic disapproval of Mr. Amery's statement that in the transitional period an Indianized Government at the centre cannot be treated in regard to international and inter-Imperial matters as a full Dominion.

By another resolution the Council of the Federation recorded its unqualified condemnation of the scheme of partitioning India as highly reactionary an anti-national and providing no solution of the minorities problem. [Ibid, p. 333]

3

On 21 July 1941, the Viceroy in a communique announced the long awaited expansion of his Executive Council by making five new appointments. The new members included in the Council were: Sir H. P. Mody, Sir Akbar Hydari, Dr. Raghavendra Rao, Malik Firoz Khan Noon and M.S. Aney. In addition, two other appointments were also made, namely, Sir Sultan Ahmed and Nalini Ranjan Sarker, replace Zafrulla Khan and G. S. Bajpai, who were to take up other appointments. Existing members who were to continue as members were the Commander-in-Chief, Reginald Maxwell, Andrew Clow, Jeremy Raisman and Ramaswami Mudaliar.

The Council would thus have twelve members: four Europeans, including the Commander-in-Chief, and eight Indians.



The communique also announced the formation of a National Defence Council consisting of 30 members, 22 of whom were from British India. These were: B. R. Ambedkar, Assam Premier Mohammad Saadulla, Bengal Premier Fazlul Huq, Nawab of Chhatari Mohammed Ahmed Said Khan, Muthiah Chettiar of Chettinad, Maharaja of Darbhanga, Ramrao Madhavrao Deshmukh, Sir Henry Gidney, Cowasjee Jehangir, Raja of Kallikote, Malik Khuda Baksh Khan, Jamnadas Mehta, G. B. Morton, Biren Mukherjee, Sardar Naunihal Singh Man, Begum Shah Nawaz, Premier of the Punjab Sikander Hyat Khan, Rao Bahadur M. C. Rajah, Professor E. Ahmed Shah, Premier of Sind Khan Bahadur Allah Baksh, Sir Jwala Prasad Srivastava and Sir Muhammad Usman.

A later communique issued on 3 October stated that since many more States than the required number had given their assent for the membership of the Defence Council, representatives of States would be attending the sittings of the Defence Council by rotation, except for the Jam Saheb of Nawanagar, Chancellor of the chamber of Princes, who would attend all sessions. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1941, Vol. II, pp. 300-302]

Jinnah was not at all amused by the action of the Viceroy in expanding his Executive Council and setting up the Defence Council without a reference to the Muslim League. In a statement issued on 22 July, he said:

The communique announcing the decision regarding the expansion of the Viceroy's Executive Council and the so-called National Defence Council is to be most deeply regretted.... The statesmanship of the Viceroy is leading him from one mistake to another, and it is most unfortunate and it is very painful to note that the Viceroy should have canvassed members of the Muslim League over the head of the leader and the executive of the party, and it is still more painful that some of the members of the League should have succumbed. When the offer of the Viceroy was made last August, it was not acceptable to the All-India Muslim League on the unanswerable ground that it did not give the representatives of the Muslim League a real and substantial share in the authority and power of the Government.... I congratulate the Viceroy on having created defections in the ranks of the Muslim League by securing the services of the Muslim League Premiers and some other members of the League who have



associated themselves with this scheme without reference or knowledge of the leader or the executive of the organization.

The action and the conduct of the Muslim League Premiers and the members of the League who have associated themselves with this scheme ...will have to be considered and dealt with as soon as possible. [Ibid, p. 302]

The Working Committee of the All-India Muslim League, meeting in Bombay on 25 August 1941, passed resolutions calling upon the erring members of the Muslim League Council to resign from the Defence Council. The Working Committee noted that while Saadulla Khan and Sikandar Hyat Khan had already announced their decision to resign from the Defence Council, Fazlul Huq had not done so. Huq was given ten days within which to resign. Sultan Ahmed was instructed to resign from the Viceroy's Executive Council.

Fazlul Huq did not immediately resign from the National Defence Council in terms of the Muslim League Working Committee's resolution of 25 August. On 8 September he wrote to the Secretary of the League casting aspersions on the President and calling his action unconstitutional. The President, Huq charged, had been using his powers in an arbitrary manner. He also declared that he was resigning from the Working Committee and the Council of the All-India Muslim League.

On 28 October 1941, the Muslim group in the Central Assembly headed by Jinnah staged a walk-out in protest against the way in which Muslim League's offer of cooperation in the war effort had been "completely ignored" by the Viceroy. Making a statement Jinnah said:

We have said from the beginning that the major issue will be considered later, and that within the framework of the present existing constitution you must, if you want our cooperation, associate with us now with a real genuine share in the authority of the Government not only at the Centre but in the Provinces. Ignoring that ...Government had come to its decision about expansion of the Executive Council." [Ibid, p. 108]

Fazlul Huq wrote another letter to the Secretary of the League on 14 November, going back on his earlier stand and obsequiously declaring his loyalty



to the President and his readiness to obey and carry out all decisions constitutionally taken. He also announced his resignation from the National Defence Council. The explanation was accepted. [Ibid, pp. 212-20]

That, however, was not the end of the matter. The Muslim League members of Fazlul Huq's cabinet proved to be considerably less charitable. Many of them took exception to Fazlul Huq's criticism of the "arbitrary conduct" of the President and organized a public demonstration at the Calcutta maidan against it. Fazlul Huq and his supporters in the Bengal Assembly thereupon floated a Progressive Assembly Party, which soon after grew into a Progressive Coalition Party, having the support of the Forward Bloc, the Krishak Proja Party, the Independent Scheduled Caste Party and some independents.

On 2 December 1941 the Muslim League leadership in Bengal directed the Muslim League legislators to form a Bengal Legislature Muslim League Party. Nazimuddin became the leader of this group. Fazlul Huq, having secured the support of Sarat Bose and Shyamaprasad Mukherjee, continued as Premier. On 11 December Jinnah expelled him from the League. [Ibid, pp. 40-43, 145-51]

4

In the summer of 1941 the war in Europe took on an ominous dimension. On 22 June 1941, Hitler invaded the Soviet Union without any sort of warning. To all appearances Germany and Russia had been on the friendliest of terms and ever since the signing of the Non-Aggression Pact between the two countries on 20 August 1939, Russia had been helping Germany in its wars of aggression in all kinds of ways. The invasion therefore took the Russians quite unawares and stunned the world.

In a three-pronged drive, involving well over a hundred army divisions, a quarter of them armoured, over a thousand-mile front from the Baltic in the north to the Black Sea in the south, the invading forces quickly and ruthlessly crushed such resistance as was hastily put up and in a matter of weeks were deep inside Russia. In a few months, Hitler was sure, Leningrad and Moscow would fall. Indeed on 18 September he issued an order that Leningrad was to be "wiped off the face of the earth". The surrender of the city, if offered, was not to be accepted. Germany must not take upon itself the responsibility of feeding the



city's population. The existence of Leningrad and its population was of no interest to Germany, Hitler declared.

On 3 October 1941 in an address to the German people he announced:

I declare today and I declare it without any reservation, that the enemy in the East has been struck down and will never rise again.

About the same time Goering in a letter to the Italian Foreign Minister Ciano wrote:

This year between twenty and thirty million persons will die of hunger in Russia. Perhaps it is well that it should be so, for certain nations must be decimated.... In the camps for Russian prisoners they have begun to eat each other.

The speed at which Nazi armies were sweeping across Russia was so astonishing that by September 1941 Hitler was instructing the German army command to be prepared to disband forty infantry divisions. The Nazi propagandists were openly boasting: "for all military purposes Soviet Russia is done with. The British dream of a two-front war is dead."

That the total Nazi conquest of Russia was imminent was a perception shared with Hitler and his propagandists by the intelligence agencies of most capitalist countries. As early as in July 1941 the American General Staff was informing American editors and Washington correspondents that the collapse of the Soviet Union was only a matter of a few weeks. [William L. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, pp. 1117-19]

While German armies and German tanks were racing across the plains of Russia, ravaging the country like a tornado and overcoming all resistance met on the path, Japan had been getting ready for its act in the Far East. On 28 July 1941 it landed forces in Indo-China, posing a direct threat to Singapore, Burma, Malaya and other British and Dutch positions. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1941, Vol. II, pp. 51-52]

Threat of war was thus moving towards India from west and east. But all that the British rulers could do by way of mobilizing the country and enlist popular support or the war effort was to give effect to a decision announced a full year



earlier to expand the Viceroy's Executive Council by including in it a few more Indians of the Viceroy's choice.

In the House of Commons on 1 August 1941, L. S. Amery, while commending the new Executive Council as a team of individual competence, which it would be difficult to rival in India, as indeed elsewhere, elaborated the latest thinking in British official circles on the question of responsible Government in India. He said:

Today the major issue is not whether India should govern herself but how she is to govern herself.... Six years ago ...we and Indian political leaders alike took it for granted that the Central Government of India should follow the customary lines of our British system of responsible parliamentary government and Act of 1935 was framed on that assumption.... We must remember that our system of Government ...does depend entirely for its working upon certain indispensable conditions.

It postulates a party system in which loyalty to party is never the supreme loyalty.... These conditions do not exist where party loyalty and party discipline override all other considerations, where party executives outside the Parliament are the only arbiters of policy and real rulers, where the minority always remains the underdog.

The working of the party Governments in the Provinces, Amery informed the M.P.s., had convinced "great and powerful elements in India's national life that their lives and their liberties would not be assured" under such Governments. In the result there was a growing demand from the Muslims "for a complete breaking up of India into separate Hindu and Muslim dominions".

The August 1940 declaration of the Viceroy, Amery went on, that the future constitution of India must be decided upon by Indians themselves by agreement, had been received by the Muslims as a welcome assurance that their fate would not be settled over their heads by some deal between the British Government and the Congress. Moreover, in insisting on agreement between "the principal elements in India's national life" the British Government did not mean merely an agreement between the main political parties only but also



between geographical and administrative elements, especially the Provinces which continued to have responsible ministries, and of course the Princes.

Members, especially Labour Members, suggested that the Government was not doing all that could be done to improve the situation in India. They demanded that civil disobedience prisoners should be released. There was no reason why leaders of the eminence of Jawaharlal Nehru should be in jail.

Amery expressed the British Government's helplessness about this. He said:

Mr. Gandhi is insisting that those who are out of prison should promptly go back again. Something like half of those who offended against the order were dealt with by being arrested and let go, while others received comparatively light sentences. The Government is not laying down any conditions ...but at any rate so long as the situation stands as it is, the Government are unable to do otherwise than they are doing now – let those who insist on going to prison have their Will. [Ibid, pp. 305-15]

5

Jawaharlal Nehru, who was looked upon by some left-wing Englishmen as someone from whom it might be possible to secure cooperation in the war effort, and who was at the time in prison, was in a rebellious mood. In a letter written to Gandhiji in the last week of October 1941 he poured out his feelings. He said:

At present I have a long period of prison before me and I cannot ask, or expect, the world to wait for me. Apart from this prison sentence I cannot change my nature now, nor do I want to do so. The moment I go out of prison I plunge into fierce activity. I grow more and more into a rebel and as a rebel I shall behave. I have no patience left with compromises and the sickly variety of people who want the best of both worlds.... I am not afraid of civil war; invasion, chaos. But I am disgusted at people who presume to meddle in high affairs and have not the nerve, the intelligence, or the character which high enterprises require. Everybody talks of a new order now – Hitler, Churchill, Roosevelt, Matsuoka, etc. I do not know what the new order is going to be but I do know that a new world will arise out of the ashes of the old which is dying.



Nehru referred to a message he had received that he might be released, and proceeded:

If this happened I did not want to behave as so many of our gallant comrades have behaved – who lie low, or recoup their health, or make repeated pilgrimages to Sevagram (with the necessary publicity) and generally attempt to create an impression that they are at grips with a terribly difficult problem and meanwhile keep well away from the danger zone – safety first. This kind of thing is not admirable, although you seem to encourage it in various people. So I wondered what I should do if I was discharged. I wanted to go out like a live piece of coal or battery charged with electricity or like an arrow from the bow. I would not have gone straight to Anand Bhavan, I would not have gone straight to Sevagram. Of course I would have seen you soon enough. But from the hour of my release I would have started to do my utmost against this infamous Government which presumes to rule over us. May I mention one thing here? – I was sorry to know from Mahadev that he had actually pleaded with the Home Member – I forget his name – for facilities to be given to me.

After a brief diversion in which he dwelt on his failings as a husband and a father and letting Gandhiji know that his ideas of marriage and sex were different from Gandhiji's, Nehru concluded:

India grows upon me more and more and I am ever discovering something new in her. It is a voyage of discovery which has no end.... I do believe intensely in India, though it would be hard to define this belief. I have never yet been disappointed in the common people of India [The Diary of Mahadev Desai (unpublished), Book No. 42, pp. 78-83]

Vallabhbhai Patel fell seriously ill in jail. A gastrointestinal ailment of long standing suddenly flared up, causing him acute suffering. A polypus was suspected, but a check-up conducted by no less than seven doctors showed that the suspicion had been groundless. Nevertheless the reports of Patel's affliction caused Gandhiji much anxiety. He advised him to go on a diet of fruit juices and apply mud packs to the abdomen. [C.W.M.G., LXXIV, pp. 221, 240, 242, 245, 253] Patel's condition however did not improve and the authorities thought it prudent



to discharge him from prison on 20 August 1941 – about nine months after his arrest.

A month and a half later, on 6 October, C. Rajagopalachari too was freed from jail, having completed his sentence. [Rajmohan Gandhi, *Patel*, pp. 299-300]

6

With wars raging in the west and the east, communal violence inside, and the British rulers doggedly refusing to relax in the slightest degree their rigid control over the most elementary freedoms, the country remained through the period a prey to panic, fear and extreme uncertainty. Congressmen, selected by local Committees and approved by Gandhiji after a close scrutiny of their political, moral, financial and medical fitness, continued peacefully to court imprisonment in accordance with the procedure laid down by Gandhiji.

But to what end? – many were asking. More and more people began to be besieged by doubt if the action plan which Gandhiji had chosen for the Congress was the best of all possible alternatives, if it would produce results.

Gandhiji was flooded with correspondence – which was of course nothing unusual – and besieged by visitors, important and not so important, but all driven by anxiety. The questions to which they sought answers were: what course should Congressmen and people in general adopt (1) in relation to the war, now that it had assumed wider and more threatening dimensions with the invasion of the U.S.S.R. and the ominous Japanese movements in South-East Asia, (2) in relation to communal killings indulged in by goonda elements, and (3) to make the British Government see reason and respond to the country's urgent demand for freedom.

Among the visitors were Nalini Ranjan Sarker and M. S. Aney, who in August were made Executive Councillors by the Viceroy.

N. R. Sarker, who visited Gandhiji on 18 July, sought Gandhiji's opinion on how Congressmen should deal with communal rioting. Gandhiji expressed the view that so long as the Congress did not change its creed, the response of Congressmen in the face of riots could only be non-violent. Physical culture institutions organized by Congressmen could therefore be only non-violent and



non-communal even if Muslims, as was likely, did not join them. During the riots in and around Dacca the Congress had proved wholly ineffective. Gandhiji was certain the riots had been encouraged by Fazlul Huq. The Hindus of East Bengal would have to organize themselves, or there was no hope for them. Congressmen, while remaining in the Congress, could not resort to violence. On the other hand cowardice was worse than violence. If a stabber was seized on the spot and done to death, Gandhiji said, he would defend the action. But this could not be done from the Congress platform. [The Diary of Mahadev Desai (unpublished), Book No. 42, pp. 19-20]

In a statement to the press issued on 5 August in response to a letter from 48 Congress prisoners in a jail in the Punjab, asking whether a Congressman could use violent means against a violent dacoit and yet remain in the Congress fold, Gandhiji said:

Of course.... But if I am asked whether such persons should remain in the Congress, my answer would be an emphatic no. That is for public conduct. No law has been laid down by the Congress as to private conduct. The Congress will refuse, as it should, to judge the conduct of a person who resists by force a robber robbing his property, or an assailant molesting his daughter.... Whether persons who break the rule or even preach the use of violence by Congressmen in such cases should be turned out of the Congress is a different question.

My personal attitude is clear. I would not necessarily turn out such persons from the Congress. [C. W.M.G., LXXIV, p. 213]

Gandhiji was asked again and again if the invasion of Russia by Germany and the enlargement of the area of warfare had in any way changed the nature of the war. Gandhiji's answer was no. The entry of Russia into the war, he told an interviewer on 5 September 1941, had not materially altered the complexion of the war. Besides he did not consider Russia as having been wholly free from blame. As for sympathy for Russia as a victim of aggression, it was all right, but mere expression of oral sympathy would serve no purpose. [Ibid, p. 295]



Writing to Prithvi Singh on 20 September, Gandhiji expressed the same view. There was nothing that could be done to help Russia, though it was true that much had been done in Russia for the people. [Ibid, p. 336]

Many Western friends of India were critical of the anti-war attitude of Gandhiji, as also of the civil disobedience movement being carried on by him. Among them were Duncan Greenlees, H. S. L. Polak and Agatha Harrison, though in the case of the last named, it was more the influence of her surroundings. Gandhiji wrote to her on 22 October:

Distrust of the Rulers is growing and spreading. The distance is increasing. We here perceive no difference between Hitlerism and British Imperialism.... In this unholy duel, so far as I can see, non-violence is working its way in a silent but sure manner. My faith in it is daily owing stronger. Whether, as Polak says, and as you almost hint ...it can stand the strain if bombs were dropping near my feet and I was witnessing dear ones being crushed to death, I cannot say.... The Rulers feel a sense of security in the existing situation. The Princes obedient, the Muslim League showing its harmless teeth, and the Congress led by me following its equally harmless Civil Disobedience.

So far as Civil Disobedience was concerned, Gandhiji told Agatha Harrison, it must continue. It would stop only when freedom of speech consistently with non-violence was conceded and political prisoners unconditionally discharged. Of course it would not mean a settlement. The Congress would accept no settlement short of complete independence. [C.W.M.G., LXXV, pp. 37-38]

The United States had been from the beginning actively supporting Britain in her war against Germany through supplies of war material and through diplomacy. On 14 August 1941 President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill met on board a ship in mid Atlantic and issued a joint declaration, which came to be known as the Atlantic Charter. The clauses contained in the Atlantic Charter were:

- (1) The U.S.A. and the U.K. seek no territorial or other aggrandizement;
- (2) they desire to see no territorial changes that do not accord with the freely expressed wishes of the peoples concerned;



(3) they respect the rights of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they live; (4) they will endeavour to further the enjoyment by all states, victor or vanquished, of access on equal terms to the trade and to the raw materials of the world which are needed for their economic prosperity; (5) they desire to bring about the fullest collaboration between all nations in the economic field; (6) after the destruction of Nazi tyranny they hope to see established a peace in which all nations can dwell in safety within their own boundaries, and which will afford assurance that all the men in all the lands may live out their lives in freedom from fear and want; (7) such a peace should enable all men to traverse the high seas without hindrance; (8) they believe that all nations must abandon the use of force and that, pending the establishment of a wide and permanent system of general security, the disarmament of nations which threaten or may threaten aggression is essential; they will aid and encourage all practical measures which will lighten for peace-loving peoples the crushing burden of armaments. [*The Penguin Political Dictionary*, pp. 22-23]

Asked to comment on the Charter, Gandhiji said:

I shall be more than pleased to send my heartiest congratulations immediately the United States and Great Britain resort to disarmament, and [I shall] call it the triumph of non-violence. [*C.W.M.G.*, LXXIV, p. 244]

But Gandhiji did not really envisage in the Atlantic Charter the emergence of a non-violent new world order of his conception. [*Ibid*, p. 295]

Soon Churchill made it clear that clause (3) of the Charter, which recognized the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they wished to live, did not apply to India. Speaking in the House of Commons on 9 September 1941, he said:

The Joint Declaration does not qualify in any way the various statements of policy which have been made from time to time about the development of constitutional government in India, Burma or other parts of British Empire.... At the Atlantic meeting we had in mind primarily the extension of the sovereignty, self-government and national life of the



States and nations of Europe now under Nazi yoke.... This is quite a separate problem from the progressive evolution of self-governing institutions in regions whose peoples owe allegiance to the British Crown. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1941, Vol. II, p. 324]

This statement of Churchill drew sharp reactions in India, not so much from nationalist circles, who had never expected anything different from Churchill, as from people considered loyal to the Empire. Sikandar Hyat Khan, Premier of the Punjab, strongly criticized the reference to India in connection with the Atlantic Charter and called for a separate announcement from the British Government that within a reasonable time India would have the status of full and equal partnership with Britain. [Ibid, pp. 24-25]

Tej Bahadur Sapru, speaking for the Non-Party Leaders' Conference, said it was difficult to believe that the expression "all peoples" in clause 3 of the Charter could have been intended by President Roosevelt to exclude the people of India, or that Churchill could have ignored at the time India's claim to self-government. He quoted Roosevelt as having said after the Atlantic meeting that "not a single section of a single continent went undiscussed during the meeting". [Ibid, p. 270]

In the Central Assembly on 29 October a resolution was moved criticizing the British Prime Minister for excluding India from the ambit of Clause 3 of the Charter. Speaker after speaker, such as Sardar Sant Singh, Abdur Rasheed Chaudhury, G. V. Deshmukh, Jamnadas Mehta, and L. K. Maitra expressed the view that Clause 3 of the Charter was an unequivocal declaration that all races and countries had the right to self-determination and that after the war India too would have the right to frame its own constitution. In the Council of State too a similar resolution was moved. The resolution also expressed the fear that Churchill's statement might adversely affect the war effort.

In the Assembly M. S. Aney, the Congressman who had joined the Viceroy's Executive Council as a member and who was the leader of the House, tried to soft-pedal the debate. He argued that Churchill's statement did not negate all the promises that the British Government had given to India. In the Council of State Akbar Hydari, another new member of the Executive Council, declared that the Government would remain neutral on the resolution. The resolutions in both the



Houses were passed, in the Assembly without a division and in the Council by a majority of ten votes. [Ibid, pp. 98, 111-12, 125]

7

On 29 September M.S. Aney called on Gandhiji. Much of the discussion was concerned with the position of Indians in South Africa, Kenya and so on, on which Aney wished to ascertain Gandhiji's views, and on the India-Burma Immigration Agreement signed in August 1941. This last had been strongly criticized by Gandhiji for the disabilities it sought to impose on the Indians domiciled in Burma. Gandhiji had described it as panicky and penal, worked out in secrecy and sprung upon an unsuspecting public. It was an undeserved slur both on India and Burma. Gandhiji had demanded scrapping of the Agreement in as much as it broke every canon of international propriety. [C.W.M.G., LXXIV, pp. 255-59]

Aney told Gandhiji that the Government of India had agreed to postpone the application of the Agreement and that the Secretary of State had asked for reconsideration of the Agreement – all because of Gandhiji's severe denunciation of it.

Aney then asked Gandhiji whether, if the right of free speech was granted, he would call off civil disobedience.

Yes, said Gandhiji, but the deadlock would continue.

Recognition of the right of free speech would not mean that India was a partner in the war. As for any agreement by which popular ministries might be installed in the seven Provinces that were without such ministries, Gandhiji did not think it was possible unless Indian Independence was recognized.

To enforce the demand, Gandhiji said, he had the option of launching a mass civil disobedience movement, but if he did so there would be massacre, Jallianwala Baghs would be staged and he did not wish to take that risk for nothing.

Aney argued that something should be done at least to keep away a third power. Gandhiji said he was not afraid of a third power. He was more afraid of the existing alien power than a third power. If a third power came, for which British folly alone would be responsible, India's position would be in no way worse than it already was. If only the country could understand the trick of non-



cooperation it need not fear even a combination of Hitlers. [The Diary of Mahadev Desai (unpublished), Book No. 42, pp. 31-42]

On 21 October Rajagopalachari, Vallabhbhai, Rajendra Babu, Kripalani and Asaf Ali assembled at Sevagram to confer with Gandhiji. Turning to C.R., Gandhiji said: "You better open." C. R. said he would rather speak to Gandhiji alone.

He said: "I do not think the movement has done any good. There has in fact been considerable deterioration. Their hatred is growing, and it is not a temporary irritation on their part. Suffering for the sake of suffering seems to be a waste. You are wasting people's capacities. The Britisher is fast becoming a despot. People must be made to feel that they are their own masters. Non-violent resistance will not work the magic. There is no enthusiasm in people."

Gandhiji: "Isn't it tragic that though you do not share my view, like many others, you still consider me to be indispensable? A general should be removed the moment he is found unfit. As for me, my faith is increasing. This is the supreme moment in the nation's life. It should be satisfied even with a handful. If even the handful go, I would not mind."

C.R.: "Out of the handful you have lost me. My love for you is increasing, as my faith in you is decreasing. I cannot pretend that I follow you."

C.R. added that with Gandhiji it was a personal matter: opposition to all war. The protest having been made, the movement should be stopped, for there was no tangible object.

Did not C.R. agree, Gandhiji asked, that it being an imperialist war, it should be opposed?

No, C.R. said, the war being imperialist on both sides, they should be neutral.

Gandhiji then told the gathering that C.R. had explained his position to him, that the differences between them had increased, but that C.R. did not wish to oppose him and therefore did not wish to make his views public.

The discussion between Gandhiji and the assembled leaders continued in the following days.



Rajendra Babu said he was unable to see how the Individual Civil Disobedience movement could be a preparation for the coming struggle. Workers were being subjected to repression. There was no enthusiasm in them. The district boards were in a terrible state. The British, whether they won or lost, were going to continue the war. In what way was the Congress preparing itself for the situation? How was the country preparing itself to resist Hitler?

What would the Congress do, Gandhiji asked, if the Poona offer was revived and the Viceroy opened the door but said he could not part with the Defence portfolio, or the portfolio concerned with the maintenance of public order? Would the Congress accept the offer?

Rajaji said it would depend upon the spirit in which the offer was made.

But in that case, Gandhiji said, the Congress would be bound to make an honest endeavour to make the war effort as successful as possible. That would mean countenancing violence, with the result that what had been gained through non-violence would be lost. In non-violent action was embedded the idea that they must work on non-violent lines as much as possible. They would then transform themselves. It was much more probable that at a given moment the country would respond to non-violent effort. But if they did not have the requisite faith in non-violence, then C.R.'s position was the only one that could be taken.

Rajaji said all who agreed with Gandhiji did not share his reasons. Jawaharlal Nehru was with him because he thought it was a good fight and it must go on. Rajendra Babu was of the view that by taking office the Congress would cause further deterioration in the situation. When Gandhiji said even a few agreeing with him would do, he was speaking the language of mere faith when there appeared to be no ground for the faith.

Rajendra Babu said that those who shared Gandhiji's belief in non-violence for the maintenance of internal order and for defence, would not be able to hold on to the view even for one year after Gandhiji's disappearance. If Gandhiji was depending on their strength, he was depending on false strength.

Gandhiji answered: "They may not believe with me in a non-violent state of my conception. I believe things go by faith. For my purpose if they have that faith, it is enough. I cannot reason beyond a certain point. Only their faith must



not be hypocritical – that is all. Jawaharlal answers my purpose. It suits him to agree with me. He wants to build a state which would be the negation of imperialism. He will do nothing to sustain imperialism. And he knows that imperialism cannot be destroyed through violence."

C.R.: "But does that suit you?"

Gandhiji: "It does. That is how non-violence works. The essence of the thing is to deal with men who are saturated with violence."

Gandhiji suggested that C.R. should convert the four of them – Rajendra Babu, Vallabhbai, Kripalani and Asaf Ali. He should then get a manifesto ready and issue it, laying down the reasonable minimum demands on which the Government might be likely to yield. Rajaji's view, Gandhiji said, was that he would be untrue to his non-violence if he did not give Government whole-hearted cooperation in the war. Government in course of time were bound then to climb down. He told Rajaji: "We can argue till the end of time but we will not agree. So you should carry on your campaign. The Congress will not be divided. It will be wholly with you."

In the discussion on the following days Rajaji also argued that Congress members of the Central Assembly should be allowed to attend the Assembly and ventilate public grievances. Gandhiji said the platform of the Assembly had been provided by the Government and it might at any time snatch it from under their feet. The best thing would be not to depend on the Government.

Should the Britishers be faced with defeat and find it necessary to make terms with Hitler, even then they would want to keep India. Either way India would have to deal with the British. If they became arrogant mass civil disobedience would have to be resorted to. Hundreds of thousands might have to go to jail or embrace death. Even so the Congress would live and the coming generations would derive inspiration from it. The British in the end would have to come to terms with India.

At the end of the war, Gandhiji said, there was just a chance that the British might decide that the satyagrahis were the only pure and efficient people and try to arrive at a settlement with them.



Rajaji asked why Gandhiji nurtured such a hope. Gandhiji said it was because of his irrepressible faith in human nature. The British could not but respond to the truth, sense of honour and bravery of the satyagrahis.

Of course Hitler might refuse to make peace with England and try to establish his rule in India. His rule would be far more brutal. India would have to resist him with the same technique. People would have to put up with all cruelties and fight on till the end.

A letter just then received from Jawaharlal Nehru from jail only lent support to Gandhiji's contention that it was not the time for the Congress to seek power and position in exchange for cooperation in war. Nehru wrote:

Why do people worry so much about getting something quickly now, and fear that if they do not get it it might elude their grasp? Do they not realize that we have come to the end of an age and there is no further room for quibbling and political trickery and manoeuvre – all the arts of an average politician? Only strength counts in this naked age, which lays bare all weaknesses. It may be the strength of armed might, which is above law and lawyers, or some other form of inner strength, which is also above law and lawyers. A people or a nation which still thinks in terms of law and lawyers is lost. [Ibid, pp. 65-88]

8

On 28 October Gandhiji issued a detailed statement for the guidance of satyagrahis. He referred to his prolonged talks with leaders (which continued, as we saw from 21 to 26 October) and to public speculation as to the trend of the talks, and let it be known that those who had not been whole-heartedly in favour of the Bombay resolution sanctioning individual civil disobedience had to come out of jails with their doubts confirmed, while those who had never had any doubts had become firmer in their opinion as regards the correctness of the course adopted. As for himself, Gandhiji said, he had never had any doubts, or he would not lead a fight which involved not only the fate of the Congress but the fate of the nation as a whole.

Gandhiji then referred to the complaints that had been reaching him. These were: (1) that fewer people were coming forward to offer civil



disobedience than before, (2) that there was marked deterioration in enthusiasm, (3) that those who were discharged were not seeking rearrest, (4) that there was no discipline among satyagrahi prisoners, many of whom had no notion of non-violence, (5) that the treatment of 'C' class prisoners was inhuman, made worse by the fact that books, newspapers and sanitary facilities were not provided to them, (6) that the policy of non-embarrassment would not work because even the rulers did not appreciate it and that therefore the struggle should be intensified without regard to non embarrassment, and (7) that there was no life left in the Congress, there being no meetings, demonstrations and no other activity.

As regards the first two points, wrote Gandhiji, enthusiasm that was froth was no use in non-violent action. Continuous feverish activity could only promote violence and retard the steady march of non-violent action. It was only natural that fewer people should be coming forward to offer satyagraha, for the movement was intended to be a protest registered through selected representatives of the people, and the list of such representatives being limited, must at some time be exhausted. If he were to relax the strict conditions he had imposed and give a general call he would be overwhelmed by applications. But in that case it would be mass action, not admitting of individual choice and individual examination. Such a call could not be given before the end of the war. For any such action would be naked embarrassment of the British and betrayal of non-violence. In the absence of communal unity, it would further be an invitation to civil war.

The complaint that fewer satyagrahis released from jail were offering themselves for rearrest, Gandhiji admitted, was partially valid. But even if there were only a few people to court imprisonment again and again it would be enough. The rest could devote themselves to the constructive programme.

As regards indiscipline among satyagrahi prisoners, some cases had been brought to his notice, wrote Gandhiji, but it was wrong to say that indiscipline was universal.

'C' class prisoners were certainly subjected to inhuman treatment. Gandhiji said he himself was against classification of prisoners. Prisoners must be given a balanced diet without regard to classification and they should be allowed to



replenish it if they so wanted at their own expense. There should be identity of treatment of prisoners in all provinces. Satyagrahi prisoners however must not resort to hunger strikes and the like. They must obey jail regulations.

Criticism had been voiced of the policy of non-embarrassment. The policy, Gandhiji wrote, had been enunciated in the Bombay resolution. It was the only policy the Congress could consistently adopt. It was also expedient. Had the Congress decided to take recourse to armed resistance, the principle that Britain's difficulty was India's opportunity might have applied. In non-violent resistance the exact opposite would be the case. The Congress could not be temperate and furious at the same time.

Some advocated, Gandhiji said, that to make a success of the policy of non-embarrassment, civil disobedience should be given up. But civil disobedience, Gandhiji argued, was a completely non-violent action. It was a disciplined protest against the denial of the right to speak against Britain's war or all wars. The British Government could obviate the possibility of embarrassment by conceding the right.

To say that no life had been left in the Congress, Gandhiji said, was wrong. Still waters ran deep. Congressmen would not let the Congress die of inanity. That there were no spectacular shows, such as parliamentary activity or mass civil disobedience, did not mean that the Congress was doing nothing. Things were going according to plan. Neither was a necessary condition. In the fight in which the country was engaged, the only thing that had abiding importance was the constructive programme: work for communal unity, abolition of untouchability, spinning and allied crafts. These activities were at the basis of non-violence. The programme gave ample scope for public meetings and demonstrations. [C.W.M.G., LXXV, pp. 55-62]

Gandhiji's belief throughout the period remained unshaken that vocal expression of opposition to the war, non-embarrassment in practice and non-violent individual civil disobedience as a mode of political action was the best package of policy for the Congress and the country in the given situation. It was correct in principle, moral and politically expedient.



And yet more and more leading workers of the Congress were coming out with doubts and misgivings and expressing views of which Rajaji was the most articulate advocate. The swiftness and ruthlessness of German armies' advance in Russia was filling people's minds with apprehension that the Nazi war machine might prove too strong for Britain and her allies and that time might come when India found herself up against the Nazi savagery.

Once Vallabhrao wrote to Gandhiji on 1 November asking him whether he would choose Hitlerism or democracy represented by Britain. He suggested that Gandhiji should open an anti-Fascist front to raise a national army and strengthen the national defence campaign.

On 2 November Dr. Subbarayan met Gandhiji and expressed his doubts. "We do not want Nazism," he said. "We do not want Russia to be crushed. How do we fight Nazism?"

Gandhiji expressed the view that the British would not let go of India so easily. They would put up the mightiest effort possible, mightier than in England. Should they find themselves unable to defend India, they would come to terms with Germany. So whether Britain won or lost India would have to deal with England. The Congress would have to give them battle.

By joining the war effort the Congress would only reduce itself to a non-entity. It could not add a rupee or a soldier to the men and material that the British were already taking from India. The Congress would then be like the dog under the cart.

Gandhiji assured Subbarayan that he detested Nazism as much as anyone else. But he did not detest British Imperialism any less. What had Hitler done which was worse than many things that the British had done. During the Zulu war when a Zulu chief refused to pay the poll-tax they had punished the whole tribe. Horsemen rode into their settlements and whilst they were sleeping they were done to death. So he would not defend British Imperialism.

As for resisting Hitler, should the worst come to pass the only force that would resist Hitler would be the Congress. It would be ready with mass civil disobedience. Non-violence, therefore, was the best policy and civil disobedience must be continued to keep up the spirit of the people. [The Diary of Mahadev



Desai (unpublished), Book No. 42, pp. 98-102]

Non-violence, as Gandhiji never tired of repeating again and again, was the only effective way of tackling all problems, whether external or internal. Asked by visitor as to the most efficacious way of dealing with communal riots, Gandhiji said:

The only solution is for Hindus to be brave – violently or non-violently. If he was brave he would not feel he was at a disadvantage. If a Musalman gives me a blow and I receive it with a brave and non-violent heart I would not receive another blow.... Even a tiger would recognize fearlessness. But we need not cultivate that high order of fearlessness. This limited fearlessness is enough.... If the Congress as a body, however small, cannot evolve this degree of non-violence, then any other action that we evolve is doomed to failure. We ought to be able to deal with Muslims non-violently. [Ibid, pp. 103-4]

On 25 November Khurshedbehn Naoroji and Kamaladevi Chattopathyaya sought Gandhiji's views on the sociological status of non-violence. To what extent could a non-violent individual, a non-violent society and a non-violent state exist? — Khurshedbehn asked.

Gandhiji answered:

The first can exist, has existed and will exist. The non-violent state has existed in our imagination, except perhaps in Asoka's time, when it is said to have existed. I have the firmest faith that a non-violent society can exist and, therefore, also a non-violent state.... If a non-violent individual is a reality, a non-violent state is not only a possibility but a probability.... We do not see such a society or state in existence because we are all of little faith.

Freedom from Hitlerism too, Gandhiji asserted, could only come through non-violence. Should England be defeated in the war India might be ruled jointly by Germany and England – England might be ruling under some kind of a mandate, while Indian ports would be thrown open to German trade. In the event of England winning the war India might be ruled by England and America. India must develop non-violently if she wanted to exist as an independent nation.



Gandhiji said he did not agree with those who argued that the Congress should learn the art of self-government by taking office. He said his whole soul rebelled against the idea. If the Poona offer had been accepted, the 17 lakhs of Congressmen would have become so many recruiting agents for the British.

How would Gandhiji stem the tide of parliamentarism? – Khurshedbehn asked. In that case Gandhiji said, he would have to retire and someone else would have to take over.

"Rajaji?" Kamaladevi asked. "Or Jawahar," said Gandhiji. He proceeded:

There is no third. Both of them will combine and evolve a joint policy. Though they may quarrel, each has affection for the other. C.R. respects Jawaharlal's argument, brilliance, readiness for compromise, and so does Jawaharlal respect Rajaji. But Jawaharlal sides with me today as I represent the fighting spirit. He will have no compromise with Imperialism. There Jawaharlal and I see alike, for I am a born anarchist.... But my retirement in the sense of my dying – doing nothing, writing nothing, saying nothing, retiring altogether from public gaze – will not come. That is not how I am built.... C.R. accuses me of want of faith in the rulers. I accuse him on the other hand of want of faith in his countrymen. He thinks we have to go through a long drawn out agony, as we are an inert mass of people ...that we should lose no opportunity for seizing whatever comes to us.... There are so many things we can do, he says, prohibition, khadi and so many other things. I know. But when we gave up offices, we had counted the cost.

Was individual satyagraha conceived as a moral protest or as a definite political step towards freedom? – Gandhiji was asked.

He said directly it was neither. Satyagraha had been launched to secure freedom of speech. Freedom of speech desired was to voice a protest against violence or all war. It was also a definite step towards freedom, for there could be no freedom without freedom of speech.

The satyagraha also implied a rejection of the parliamentary programme, for the parliamentary programme involved the closest association with the prosecution of the war. The constructive programme by itself could give India



political independence. But if that was so, it might be asked: 'why interpolate civil disobedience?' Gandhiji's answer to this was that India must appear to be non-cooperating with the war. The moment civil disobedience was stopped it might be said that India was cooperating in the war effort. So it was necessary to continue the moral protest. Civil disobedience and parliamentary programme could not go together.

Did Gandhiji insist on the constructive programme because it was necessary to win independence or because he wanted to found a non-violent state? - Kamaladevi asked.

The programme was necessary to win independence, Gandhiji answered, but of course a non-violent state would mean all the things that the constructive programme sought to promote. It provided the basis for building up the non-violence of the strong.

Gandhiji said he was becoming more and more convinced that Congressmen should withdraw from the Legislatures in Sind, Bengal and the Punjab. For in the Legislatures of these provinces Congressmen could not but represent only the Hindus – they could not represent the Muslims, and they would not be able to escape the charge that the Congress was a Hindu organization.

The parliamentary programme, Gandhiji said, was not as a matter of fact an essential part of the struggle for freedom. The Congress, by remaining outside the Legislatures could hurl defiance and compel justice by propaganda and civil disobedience. [Ibid, pp. 125-37]

But the rejection of the parliamentary programme was a doctrine which appealed little to Congress members of Legislatures. Satyamurti, a staunch and loyal Congressman, after having offered civil disobedience and suffered imprisonment, on coming out of jail strongly urged Gandhiji that Congress members of the Central Legislature should be permitted to attend the sittings of the Legislature if they were not offering civil disobedience. He also argued that those who believed in the parliamentary programme should have the freedom to propagate their views among Congressmen.



Gandhiji answered that Satyamurti was not expected to gag himself. The Congress constitution recognized the right of free speech by Congressmen and he was therefore free to speak and convert the people to his views. [C.W.M.G., LXXV, pp. 16, 27, 66, 84, 99]

10

On 3 December 1941 the Government of India, in a change of stance towards the Civil Disobedience movement, announced the release of satyagrahi prisoner. A communique issued from New Delhi in this connection said:

The Government of India, confident in the determination of all responsible opinion in India to support the war effort until victory is secured, have reached the conclusion that those Civil Disobedience prisoners whose offences have been formal or symbolic in character, can be set free. Effect will be given to this course as soon as possible. There are Provinces in which local conditions may mean delay; but before the end of the year the Government of India hope that throughout India practically all such persons will have been set free. With them there will be released also Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. [The Indian Annual Register, 1941, Vol. II, p. 40]

Reacting to the communique, Gandhiji in a statement issued on 4 December said that Government's decision could not evoke in him "a single responsive or appreciative chord". He proceeded:

If the Government of India are confident of the determination of all responsible opinion in India to support the war effort, the logical conclusion would be to keep the Civil Disobedience prisoners in their custody, because they produce a jarring note. The only meaning I can attach to the release, therefore, is that they expect that the prisoners will have changed their opinions in their self-invited solitude. I am hoping that the Government will be soon disillusioned.... The Government claim that, in spite of the Congress efforts, they are able to get all the men and money from India. Therefore the Congress opposition, in their estimate, can only be a moral effort and a moral demonstration. I for one am entirely satisfied with it, because I am convinced that from the moral demonstration will



arise, when the moment comes, a demonstration which will result in the attainment of India's independence. [C.W.M.G., LXXV, pp. 131-32]

Azad and Nehru were released on 5 December 1941. Immediately on his release Jawaharlal Nehru sent greetings to the Congress and the people of the United Provinces. In his message he said:

It is good to see the wide fields and crowded streets and ever-changing panorama of humanity. But it is not good to go in and out of prison at the bidding of an alien authority. It is not good to come out of the narrow confines of jail into the larger prison that is India today. The time will come surely when we break through and demolish all the prison walls that encompass our bodies and minds, and function freely as a free nation. But the time is not yet....

...The call of India is there for those who wish to hear, the call of suffering humanity becomes more agonizing from day to day. [Pattabhi Sitaramayya, *The History of the Indian National Congress*, Vol. II, p. 287]

Now that Azad and Nehru had been released, Gandhiji was keen that they should all meet. Azad, immediately after his release got in touch with Gandhiji on the telephone expressing his desire to see him. Gandhiji wrote to Nehru asking whether they could all go to Bardoli, where Gandhiji was scheduled to be for about a month from 9 December onwards. The programme had been fixed on the insistence of Vallabhbhai, who wanted Gandhiji to give one month to Gujarat. Gandhiji told Nehru that the discharge of satyagrahi prisoners by the Government was a challenge and the Working Committee and the A.I.C.C. should meet to consider the next step. [C.W.M.G., LXXV, p. 133]

How would the Working Committee and the A.I.C.C. meet the Government's challenge? It remained to be seen. The question to be considered and decided was a straight one. The assembled leaders could either decide to continue the Civil Disobedience movement in the way it was being conducted or abandon it and chart out a new course. In a statement issued on 7 December on what Congressmen should do in the meanwhile, Gandhiji said:

If the A.I.C.C. meeting is to come, as it must, pending the meeting members of the Working Committee and the A.I.C.C. must not offer civil



disobedience, nor should those who are interested in reversing the Bombay decision. Apart from these, civil disobedience should continue without interruption. Of course it will stand suspended on Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Year's Day.

And what should satyagrahis do if they offered civil disobedience by repeating the prescribed formula but were not arrested? They must not be discouraged, Gandhiji said. The constructive programme was always there, which was a precondition for civil disobedience. Prosecution of the constructive programme meant constructing the structure of swaraj. It expressed corporate non-violence. Gandhiji advised discharged satyagrahis to have some breathing time and not to show undue haste in offering themselves for rearrest.

Gandhiji made it clear that he had no authority to suspend the Civil Disobedience movement on any extraneous grounds. Only the Congress could do so. For him personally there was no choice. He concluded:

Therefore, for those who think like me, whether we are misunderstood or worse befalls, we must express our faith through our action, hoping thereby that ultimately our way will be accepted by all warring powers as the only escape from a blood-bath which is reducing man to his lowest depth. [Ibid, pp. 136-38]



CHAPTER VII: CONGRESS REAPPRAISAL OF CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

1

The beginning of December 1941, when the British Government decided to discharge the Civil Disobedience prisoners, including Jawaharlal Nehru and Maulana Azad, also saw a profound shift in the war situation.

In Europe for the first time since September 1939 when Hitler started his wars of conquest, the Nazi warlord found that he could not have it all his own way. In the early months of the invasion the conquest of Russia had appeared to Hitler only a matter of a few weeks. But as the first shock was over and the Russians began to mobilize, the German armies found the going getting more and more difficult. Hitler's generals soon realized that they had under-estimated the size, the strength and the fighting ability of the Red Army.

Hitler had ordered that Moscow must be taken before the onset of winter and accordingly three large armies advanced towards the city from north, south and west. By November 1941 spearheads of Nazi armies were within a few miles of the city. On 6 December the Russians unleashed themselves. Seven armies – 100 divisions in all – with infantry, artillery, tanks, cavalry and planes, struck at the Nazis so suddenly and fiercely that the Third Reich never really recovered from the blow. The Germans fled in disorder. Over a million men were lost – a few hundred thousand were killed, many times more were incapacitated and hundreds of thousands of others lost their lives from frostbite in the severe Russian winter. [William L. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, pp. 1117-18, 1121-28, 1130-39]

In North Africa, too, the German advance had been checked, though not overcome, while in Syria, Iraq and Iran Nazi activity had been effectively neutralized.

The threat from the west of an Axis pincer movement towards India was thus lifted. It had in any case been only a possibility, as the theatre of war had remained remote.



The threat from the east, however, suddenly became imminent, even immediate, and very grave. Japan, which had so far remained engaged in the conquest of China, got it into her head to take on the U.S.A. and Britain, too. In the early hours of 7 December 1941, without warning, planes from a Japanese carrier task force which had stealthily sailed to Hawaii, launched a lethal bomb attack on the American Pacific Fleet stationed at Pearl Harbour. There were then in the harbour seven battleships, eight cruisers, forty-one destroyers and five submarines. They were sitting ducks for the Japanese bombers – 189 of them, followed by 50 fighters. In the attack, which came in three waves and lasted for an hour and forty-five minutes, the American fleet had been knocked out. The damage was five battleships sunk, 150 navy aircraft destroyed, and well over 2,000 officers and men killed.

Simultaneously the Japanese attacked and took the islands of Guam and Wake and bombed airfields and military installations in the Philippines. Soon after Japanese forces landed in the Philippines. The small American force proved no match to them. Manila fell to the invaders. After a feeble and futile defence for a couple of months American forces under MacArthur withdrew from the islands.

On the same day Malaya and Hong Kong were also struck. The invasion of Hong Kong came on 18-19 December and on Christmas Day the garrison surrendered.

Then in a lightning overland campaign across British Malaya, in which the Japanese army covered some 700 miles in about two months, they took Singapore, a base to strengthen which the British had spent a sum of 250 million dollars and which was considered impregnable.

On 9 December two prestigious British battleships *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse*, sent for the defence of Singapore, were sunk. Bangkok was then taken and Siam forced into a treaty of alliance with Japan, which was signed on 21 December.

From Siam the Japanese invaded South Burma and soon were in control of lower Burma, overcoming the resistance of a much smaller British force assisted by a small American volunteer group.



While advancing through the Philippines, Malaya and Burma the Japanese also launched attacks against the Dutch in Borneo, Tarakan, Celebes, Timor and Bali. On 14 February Sumatra was invaded.

In a matter of just a few months Japan was in complete control of the South Pacific, and poised to advance towards India. [*Collier's Encyclopaedia*, New York, Vol. 23, pp. 614-16]

2

On 9 December, as planned, Gandhiji left for Bardoli. While in the train, he took up the writing of a comprehensive tract on the constructive programme and its applicability in the existing situation. He completed it on 13 December at Bardoli and it was later published under the title *Constructive Programme: Its Meaning and Place*.

In this booklet, which considerably enlarged the scope of the constructive programme, Gandhiji defined the constructive programme as the programme of "construction of *poorna* swaraj or complete independence by truthful and non-violent means". Efforts at construction of the edifice of independence through violent and, therefore, untruthful means would only lead to violence, manifested in the destruction of property, life and truth, as in the prevailing war. Independence brought about by such means presupposed only ascendancy of that party of the nation which made the most effective use of violence. In it perfect equality, economic or otherwise, was inconceivable.

Gandhiji elaborated the various items of the constructive programme as follows:

(1) *Communal Unity*: This required every Congressman to represent in his own person every Hindu and non-Hindu and to identify himself with every one of the millions of the inhabitants of Hindustan. Social separation of Hindus and Muslims, denoted by such things as "Hindu water" and "Muslim water" would then be done away with. Such a revolution was bound to result in political unity.

The belief, long held by Congressmen, that power came only through Legislative Assemblies, was a grave error brought about by inertia or hypnotism. Parliaments had no power or even existence independently of the people. Gandhiji explained:



Civil disobedience is the storehouse of power. Imagine a whole people unwilling to conform to the laws of the legislature and prepared to suffer the consequences of non-compliance. They will bring the whole legislative and executive machinery to a standstill. The police and the military are of use to coerce minorities however powerful they may be. But no police or military coercion can bend the resolute will of a people who are out for suffering to the uttermost.

Parliamentary activity under separate electorates had created artificial incompatibles, Gandhiji argued. Living unity could not be brought about by artificial entities being brought together on a common platform. Such legislatures could only provide platforms for wrangling and sharing of crumbs of power that might fall from the rulers. They were a disgrace and could not be a means to complete independence.

The Congress could however put up candidates for election to such bodies to prevent undesirable elements getting into them.

(2) *Removal of Untouchability*: Gandhiji regretted that many Congressmen considered work for removal of untouchability merely as a political necessity and not something indispensable. Congressmen must identify themselves with Harijans, make common cause with them and befriend them. They should approach the *Sanatanists*, not in a militant spirit but in a friendly spirit, to change their attitude towards the Harijans. Abolition of untouchability was part of the task of building the edifice of swaraj.

(3) *Prohibition*: Although prohibition had been an item on the Congress programme since 1920, Congressmen had not taken an adequate interest in it. Medical men, women and students could do much to advance the cause of prohibition. Congress committees could start recreation booths to provide rest and refreshment to tired labourers and wean them away from drink. That was the non-violent approach to prohibition. It would make legal prohibition easy and successful even if it did not pave the way for it.

(4) *Khadi*: Khadi, Gandhiji admitted, was a controversial subject and that many people were of the view that in advocating it he was taking the country to the dark ages. However, he considered that it was the beginning of economic



freedom. It stood for the swadeshi mentality, a determination to find all the necessities of life in the country through the labour and intellect of the villagers. It freed the villages from the bondage of cities. Khadi was the symbol of unity of Indian humanity, of its economic freedom and equality. It was, in Jawaharlal Nehru's words, "the livery of India's freedom".

Khadi meant the decentralization of production and distribution of the necessities of life. Heavy industries, which must be centralized and nationalized, would occupy the least part of national activity, which would mainly be in the villages.

Giving figures for 1940, Gandhiji said an aggregate of 2,75,176 villagers, including 19,654 Harijans and 57,378 Musalmans, scattered in 13,451 villages, had received through the khadi activity Rs. 34,85,609. This was, of course, no more than a hundredth part of what could be achieved if Congressmen honestly took up the khadi programme.

For the expansion of khadi activity Gandhiji laid down some suggestions. These were:

1. Every family with a plot of ground should grow cotton at least for family use. After all, in Bihar, peasants had been growing indigo for the planters. As things existed, cotton-growing was a centralized activity and cotton was exported to Britain and Japan. It was a money crop and subject to market fluctuations. Under the khadi scheme cotton-growing would be freed from the uncertainties of the market.

2. Every spinner should buy — if he did not grow his own cotton — enough cotton which he could gin without the hand-ginning roller frame. He could gin the cotton he required with a board and rolling-pin. If this should be considered impracticable, hand-ginned cotton should be bought for carding.

For spinning Gandhiji recommended the *dhanush takli*. It was more easily made, cheaper and did not require frequent repairs as a spinning-wheel did.

The yarn spun could be sent to the A.I.S.A., got woven for personal use or exchanged for khadi.

If Congressmen could put their hearts into the work much could be achieved.



(5) *Other village industries*: Unlike in khadi, there was not much scope for voluntary labour in the other village industries. They were subsidiary to khadi, without which they could not exist. But they were essential in village economy, which would not be complete without hand-grinding, hand-pounding, soap-making, paper-making, match-making, tanning, oil pressing, etc. Congressmen if they settled down in villages, could infuse a new life into these village industries.

(6) *Village sanitation*: Divorce between labour and intelligence, Gandhiji wrote, had resulted in criminal negligence of the villages. Instead of being clusters of graceful hamlets villages had become so many dung heaps. Approach ways to villages stank. They were surrounded by dirt. If the majority of Congressmen had been villagers, villages would be models of cleanliness. Neglect of cleanliness was a vice that was responsible for the disgraceful state of India's villages.

(7) *New or Basic Education*: This was, Gandhiji wrote, a new subject. However, the Working Committee had been so much interested in it that since the Haripura session of the Congress in 1938 an organization called the Hindustani Talimi Sangh had been functioning for the promotion of Basic Education. Basic Education had been principally designed for the villages. If the structure of swaraj was to be built, children of the villagers must not be neglected. The existing system of primary education was a farce and paid no regard to the wants of the people, even of cities. Basic Education developed both the body and the mind and kept the children rooted to the soil.

(8) *Adult Education*: Congressmen had woefully neglected Adult Education. Adult Education did not merely mean teaching the illiterate to read and write. It should mean political education of the villagers through word of mouth. Should the Government interfere, a fight could be put up for the right. Literary education could go side by side with it. Not every Congressman was fitted for this specialized work. But Congressmen who were teachers would have no difficulty in laying down a suitable course for Adult Education.

(9) *Women*: Satyagraha had brought India's women into the open in an incredibly short space of time. It had therefore become necessary for Congressmen to take up the service of women. Woman had been suppressed under custom and law for which man was responsible and in the shaping of which woman had had no hand. Men, instead of considering women their friends and



co-workers, had come to look upon them as slaves and themselves as their lords and masters.

It was for Congressmen to see that women realized their rightful status and played their part as equals of men. Wives then would not be dolls and objects of indulgence but would be treated as honoured comrades in common service. The same applied with necessary changes to mothers and daughters.

(10) *Education in Health and Hygiene*: It had been established, Gandhiji wrote, that ignorance of the laws of health and hygiene was responsible for most of the diseases that afflicted mankind. The high death rate in India, which was largely due to poverty, could certainly be brought down if people were properly educated in health and hygiene. The fundamental laws of health and hygiene were easily learnt. Some of these were: to think pure thoughts and banish all idle or impure thoughts, to breathe the freshest air day and night; to establish a balance between bodily and mental work; to stand erect, sit erect and be neat and clean in everything that one did; to eat to live for service, not to indulge oneself and to eat just enough to keep the mind and body in good order; and to see to it that one's surroundings were also clean.

(11) *Provincial Languages*: Because of the preference given to English by the educated and politically-minded classes, a deep chasm had been created between them and the masses and the languages of India had suffered impoverishment. Educated persons were unable to express abstruse thoughts in their mother tongue, with the result that the masses remained cut off from advanced thought. Unless the mischief was undone it would not be possible for the masses to contribute to the construction of swaraj.

(12) *National Language*: India's national language was indisputably Hindi, Gandhiji asserted. The Congress at its annual session held in Kanpur in 1925 had called it Hindustani. Ever since, at least in theory, Hindustani had been accepted as the Rashtrabhasha. Gandhiji regretted that Congressmen by and large had failed to give effect to the resolution on the national language. It was shameful that Congressmen still preferred to speak in English and expected others also to do likewise. Unless Congressmen took the trouble to learn Hindustani India could make no progress.



(13) *Economic Equality*: This was the master key to non-violent independence. Economic equality meant abolition of conflict between capital and labour. It meant levelling down of the few rich and levelling up of the semi-starved millions. So long as the wide gulf that separated the rich from the hungry millions was not bridged, a non-violent system of government was impossible. The contrast between the palaces of New Delhi and the miserable hovels of the poor could not last a day in a free India where the poor would enjoy the same power as the rich.

The doctrine of trusteeship advocated by him, notwithstanding the ridicule heaped upon it, was, Gandhiji wrote, the only way to achieve economic equality non-violently. It was difficult to work. Nevertheless the effort was worth it. The only other way to achieve economic equality was the violent way, which in the end could not succeed. Non-violence, being a process of persuasion and conversion, was the only way to achieve lasting results. Moneyed Congressmen must show the way. It was a major reform and must not wait for the advent of swaraj.

(14) *Kisans*: Swaraj was a mighty structure, requiring for its building eighty crores of hands. Eighty per cent of those hands were the hands of kisans. Once the kisans became conscious of their non-violent strength no power on earth could resist them.

Kisans must not be used for power politics, Gandhiji warned. He cited the instance of the kisans of Champaran who had fought non-violently over a single issue and succeeded. There were also other instances of successful kisan movements, such as those of Kheda, Bardoli and Borsad. They were all successful because they were carried on over specific issues and sought redressal of felt grievances.

The way some Congressmen had sought to organize kisans had done them no good, for they had not used the non-violent method. Those who did not believe in non-violence were free to organize the kisans as they liked. Only, they must not do so in the name of the Congress.

(15) *Labour*: The Ahmedabad Labour Union, Gandhiji wrote, was a model of non-violent labour organization which all India could copy. It had a hospital, a



school for the children of the mill-hands, classes for adults, its own printing-press, khadi depot and living quarters. All mill-hands were voters and influenced the municipal policy of the city. The Labour Union had led many successful strikes. Generally its relations with the employers were governed through the mechanism of voluntary arbitration. Gandhiji hoped that in time the All-India Trade Union Congress would accept the Ahmedabad method and have the Ahmedabad organization as part of the All-India Union.

(16) *Adivasis*: The term had been coined by Thakkar Bapa and described the Aboriginal Hill Tribes such as Bhils and Gonds. Service of the Adivasis was also part of the constructive programme. India was so vast and the races inhabiting it so varied that it was impossible for anyone to have a full knowledge of them and their conditions. There were over two crores of Adivasis in India. Thakkar Bapa had been serving the Bhils of Gujarat and since 1940 Balasaheb Kher had been working among the Adivasis in Thana District. He was the President of the Adivasi Seva Mandal. There were several other such workers in various parts of India. The humanitarian work that they were doing would certainly bring the country nearer to true independence.

(17) *Lepers*: Lepers had been heartlessly neglected. Only the Christian missionaries had taken up their cause. Among Indians only Manohar Diwan was serving the lepers near Wardha, under the inspiration of Vinoba Bhave. If independence was to be won by non-violent means in the quickest way possible no leper or beggar in India must be left uncared for. Gandhiji said he was including anti-leprosy work in the constructive programme for the first time.

(18) *Students*: Students were the hope of the future. During the Non-cooperation movement they had been invited to leave schools and colleges and a large number of them had responded and had remained steadfast in the country's cause. But the lure of the so-called modern education had been found to be too strong. Students wasted precious years in acquiring knowledge of a foreign language which took the place of their mother tongue. Gandhiji cited the example of Japan, where all education was given entirely in Japanese. Chiang Kai-shek knew very little English.

From students would come the future leaders of India. It was a pity that non-violence did not attract them much. Violence seemed to them to yield



immediate results, even though those results might be temporary. Gandhiji invited the students to join him in his search. The terms he laid down were:

1. Students must not take part in politics.
2. They must not resort to political strikes. If some of their heroes should be arrested and their grief on that account should be unbearable, they should request the authorities to close the institutions on the occasion. They must on no account use coercion against dissenting students or the authorities.
3. They must spin regularly.
4. They must wear khadi and use other village-made products to the exclusion of foreign or machine-made things.
5. They should not impose *Bandemataram* or the Congress flag on others.
6. They must cultivate friendship with Harijan students and students of other faiths.
7. They must do scavenging and cleaning in villages in their neighbourhood and learn to give first-aid to injured neighbours.
8. They must learn Hindustani, written both in Devanagari and Persian scripts.
9. They must translate into their mother tongue everything they learn.
10. They must do nothing in secret; they must be above board in their dealings and they must lead a life of self-restraint. They must learn to quell riots non-violently, even at the risk of their lives.
11. They must be correct and chivalrous in their conduct with girl students.

(19) *Place of Civil Disobedience*: If the cooperation of the whole nation could be secured for the constructive programme, Gandhiji wrote, civil disobedience was not necessary for securing swaraj. But such might not be the case. The need for civil disobedience therefore would remain. Civil disobedience would have three functions:

1. It could be offered for the redressal of a local wrong.
2. It could be offered by way of protest against a particular wrong, by way of self-immolation, to rouse local conscience.



3. If there was not full response to constructive programme, it could be offered as it had been offered in 1941. Though part of the battle for freedom, it was offered over a single issue: the right of free speech. Civil disobedience could never be offered for a general cause, such as that of independence. The issue must be definite and capable of being clearly understood and within the power of the opponent to yield.

Civil disobedience was a stimulation for the fighters and a challenge to the opponent. Civil disobedience for independence without the cooperation of the millions by way of constructive effort was mere bravado and worse than useless. [C.W.M.G., LXXV, pp. 146-66]

3

Meanwhile, as news of the Japanese advance in the east flooded public awareness, vague fears gave way to a scare and then to panic, especially in the eastern and coastal areas. The way people behaved did no credit either to the rulers or the ruled. In places as far apart as Dibrugarh in Assam and Rameswaram in the south people began to flee their homes. Normal work was disturbed. Schools and colleges were closed. The Government did nothing to check the failing morale. They talked of civil evacuation, declared "non-family" areas and spoke of slit trenches, baffle walls, sandbags, and storing foodstuffs.

On 23 December 1941, Rangoon was bombed and the news completely dislocated life in Madras and Calcutta. In sheer animal fright people fled their homes. School and college authorities in panic closed those institutions, causing much demoralization amongst the students. Rumours were rife. Nearly half of Calcutta's population just fled. Railway stations became choked and passengers were exploited by all sorts of people, including the porters. The influx of people into the neighbouring areas shot up the rents of houses. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1941, Vol. II, pp. 73-74]

The Government, so far as the large mass of the people were concerned, had, to all intents and purposes, decided on a policy of letting things drift. People looked to Gandhiji and the Congress to provide guidance. In a statement to the Press issued on 19 December Gandhiji declared that he was advising Congressmen in Assam not to offer satyagraha but to devote themselves to



steadying those who were under Congress influence. Although, Gandhiji said, it was for the Congress to provide guidance, on his part he would advise the people not to be scared even if bombs should drop in their midst. The danger for the time being was to be expected only in the big cities and those in such cities who were unprepared to take risks should quietly leave. He further said:

I would not like it to be said of us as a nation that we run about like mad men on the approach of the slightest danger. We must face bravely any situation that may befall us. Congressmen who are war resisters will remain at their posts and offer such assistance to the people as is within their power. They will run, at any risk, to the help of those who may be injured.

Whilst I have been and am still against Congressmen joining A.R.P., I have never thought or suggested that Congressmen should leave points of danger or fields of service. It is not necessary to belong to any Government organization to be able to render effective service without expectation of reward or praise. The chief thing is to preserve complete equanimity, no matter what danger faces us. This is especially so for those who are war resisters and fear no enemy. [*C.W.M.G.*, LXXV, pp. 178-79]

The panic and fear that gripped the country on the threatened approach of the Japanese was in a large measure due to their distrust of the British and the feeling that when the crunch came British authority would both be unable and unwilling to defend them. The British were aware of this. In a secret report to the Viceroy, Sir A. Hope, Governor of Madras, wrote on 4 January 1942:

The results [of the British retreat from Malaya] have had a bad effect on public opinion and there is great criticism of our propaganda and lack of belief in our official statements. The great majority of Indians in Malaya and Burma are Madrasis I do most fervently hope that truth can be told ...because the rumours being spread both by the enemy sources and the usual rumour-mongers are doing a great deal of harm.

To take an instance.... Why should we announce that there were 600 casualties in the first raid when we know that there were at least 1,700 ? I



do not agree at all with Dorman Smith [Governor of Burma] that it is not better to tell the truth....

I am really alarmed at the disbelief in official communiques among all classes.... There has been partial exodus from the City on fear of bombing ...there is a panicky atmosphere about fear of looting, bombing, anxiety about relatives in Malaya and Burma, lack of news and general "wind-up".

...The fact that Europeans were evacuated from Penang whilst Indians were not, had done a great deal of harm, although no doubt the far larger number of Indians in Penang presented obvious transport difficulties.

Nonetheless there is pretty bitter feeling about it. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. I, pp. 6-7]

While in the cities of India confusion reigned, shortages grew and prices of essential commodities shot up on the one hand and on the other British strength to stand up against Japan and British *bona fides* as regards India and Indians more and more came into question, there was rethinking on the part of the leaders of public opinion and especially Congress leaders, who regarded themselves as responsible for the destiny of the country.

Though officially the Congress Working Committee was yet to do the stock-taking, there were straws in the wind that showed which way the thinking was going. Thus on 12 December in a statement to the *Daily Herald* of London Jawaharlal Nehru said:

The entry of Japan into the war has now made it world-wide and it approaches India's border. That is of vast interest to us, but it will not make us panicky. Our sympathies must inevitably be with the non-Fascist nations and such help as we can give them, consistently with our principles, would flow to them if we functioned as a free people. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1941, Vol. II, p. 43]

Addressing a mass meeting in Bombay, where they had gone on their way to Bardoli, on 18 and 19 December, both Azad and Nehru lambasted the British



Government for its obduracy in denying freedom to India and thus making it impossible for India to help in the war, Azad said:

The issue before the Congress today is not of violence *versus* non-violence. The main obstacle is the British Government's attitude towards India. Unless that attitude is changed there can be no change in our attitude. [Ibid, p. 45]

4

When Azad spoke of the need for the British Government to change its attitude towards India, and Nehru spoke of India functioning as a free nation before help could flow to the British in the war, what they had in mind was some immediate arrangement under which a National Government would come to be established at the Centre, responsible to the Legislature and with full powers to handle the country's defence – something very much along the lines of the Poona resolution, which had been rejected by the British. Now that the war situation had undergone a drastic transformation to the detriment of the British and the threat to India had become immediate and ominous, with the Japanese in full pursuit of the fleeing British forces, Congress leaders were beginning to consider it incumbent upon them to take charge of the country's affairs.

Gandhiji did not share the view. He continued to emphasize the point that India must not participate in the war because participation in the war would be participation in violence. This position, if it was valid while the war was being mainly fought in the west, remained valid even after it had taken on an added dimension and was approaching India. Answering a question on how he would deal with foreign invasion Gandhiji had said on 28 November:

We won't allow an invader to take charge of the country. We have to think hard as to how the invader will act.... Supposing the Iranians descended on the Frontier Province – an inhospitable land. The Frontier people will form a living barrier against them. The invader will begin cutting to pieces hundreds by hundreds. I never meant 'first of all take possession of the land, etc., and then we non-cooperate'. If they overrun the country we of course give them battle. [The Diary of Mahadev Desai (unpublished), Book No. 43, p. 11]



Defence of India, thus, was, in Gandhiji's view, not a function of the British Army, but that of the people of India. A concomitant of this position was that the freedom of India must come as a result of the striving of the people of India and not as a *quid pro quo* for help or promised help to the British in the war. The policy of non-embarrassment was dictated by the consideration that while the war was on the Congress must not do anything which would create difficulties for the British and hinder the war effort.

But what if the British Government, after the war, should entrench themselves in India more firmly than before? — Gandhiji was asked. In his answer Gandhiji said on 30 November 1941:

The real battle commences.... We have to give them notice to give us independence, and to frame it properly, bringing in the Princes and so on. We may follow up the ultimatum with such struggle as we commenced in Bardoli or in Dandi. Whether it will be mass civil disobedience or by stages I can't say. Every available force will be mobilized. It will be a fight to the finish. Even if there is violence we may not suspend the struggle. [Ibid, p. 15]

That would be after the war. While the war continued, the Congress, Gandhiji felt, must not seek power, for accepting power must involve the Congress in the war and take it away from non-violence. For this reason Gandhiji was perfectly satisfied with the way the Individual Civil Disobedience had been going on. It did not matter if fewer and fewer people offered themselves for arrest or rearrest. The protest would have been registered and when the war ended the Congress would be ready to take on the British Government and wrest from it complete independence for the country. This remained the position when the Congress Working Committee met at Bardoli to take stock and decide on the future course of action.

The Working Committee commenced its sittings from 23 December 1941. Its deliberations continued for full eight days ending on 30 December. The account here is taken from the Diary of Mahadev Desai.



The President, Maulana Azad, opened the debate with a brief statement, in which he expressed his distress and his shame at the way the satyagrahis had been released by the Government *en masse*. The feeling in Government circles, he said, was that the Congress had suffered decline in influence and prestige and that there was a possibility of rift developing in its ranks. If that came about, it would be a great misfortune for the country.

Gandhiji did not share Azad's alarmist view. Civil disobedience, he said, had been going on at a satisfactory pace and did not need to be intensified. Perhaps it might even be necessary to go slow with it here and there, for instance, in Assam. Gandhiji said he could not contemplate abandoning civil disobedience. However few the persons going to jail, they went in the name of the Congress and were its representatives. It did not therefore matter whether there was one or many. If he were to relax the very strict conditions he had laid down, thousands would volunteer.

Gandhiji mentioned the consultations he had had with Bhulabhai Desai and other members of the Central Legislature and informed the Committee that they were all in favour of going back into the Assembly. They were further of the view, in which they had also the support of Rajaji, that Civil Disobedience should be abandoned. Rajaji would want to go even further and have the Congress take charge of Governments in the Provinces.

The view also had been expressed, Gandhiji said, that if Civil Disobedience had to be continued it should be mass civil disobedience. It had become a farce the way it had been going on.

The question to be decided, Azad said, fell into two parts: (1) should there be a change in the attitude of the Congress towards the war? and (2) should there be a change in the way the movement was being carried on ?

Jawaharlal Nehru disagreed with such a formulation of the question. The major question, he said, was what attitude the Congress should adopt towards the British Government.

Rajaji said:

If I strike a jarring note, I do not do so hastily or without trepidation. But it becomes necessary to find out what results we have produced apart



from [demonstrating] our faith in our principles. Mahatmaji begins and continues all the time with an unflinching faith in the correctness of the principles. But we are a committee, and we have to examine facts, results; otherwise we would be perpetuating an error.

Rajaji asserted that Civil Disobedience had not produced on the British Government the effect that it was intended to produce and expressed the view that there were "overwhelming grounds" for suspending the movement. A great moral protest had been recorded and he saw no necessity to continue it. There was no point in making the protest coterminous with the war. Coming to the political situation Rajaji said:

Supposing tomorrow by a miracle the British Government says: 'we shall give you what you require'...supposing we get complete freedom, can we say we shall have no war? That is talking in the air....

If our inclination on the whole is that we do not want to settle while the war is going on, we may say so definitely. If we feel for various reasons that we should keep on agitating, we may... There is a psychological exhaustion in the country... The breaches and disappointments are growing. Is it right to go on...?

Asaf Ali questioned the relevance of the very line of the debate. To have Civil Disobedience or not to have Civil Disobedience was not the only question left for the Working Committee to discuss. War was going on all over the world. Men and material were going out of the country. Where one man was wanted a hundred volunteered. As the war approached the shores of India panic increased. At the same time people felt jubilation whenever the British sustained defeats. It was a dangerous thing. There was no preparation in the country to face possible bombing. What was needed, Asaf Ali argued, was organization of a parallel government. Legislatures should be used to strengthen the Congress. Civil Disobedience was widely perceived as a futile movement, or at best as a pacifist movement. With America having joined the war, it would now be seen as a movement lending support to the Axis powers.

Rajendra Babu did not agree with Rajaji that Civil Disobedience should be withdrawn because it was having no impact on the British. In the first place, he



said, the movement had not been started in the hope of making an impact on the British. The movement included both those who were pacifists and those who had political objection to participation in the war. The British knew that so long as Gandhiji did not come out in their support not much help could come from the Congress. That was why they had rejected the Poona offer.

The question arose as to what the Congress should do if the British offered India independence and expected to be helped in the war.

Gandhiji said conditional freedom would be no freedom.

G. B. Pant first argued for Civil Disobedience to be continued. They need not go into the question of violence and non-violence. It was clear that Gandhiji did not want to lend support to the war. The Congress need not bother about what it would do if a National Government was offered. They would cross that bridge when they came to it. What was disturbing was that in the course of the Civil Disobedience the Congress had become isolated from the masses. The day-to-day work of the organization had come to a stand-still. In the earlier satyagraha movements thousands and thousands of people had participated. The situation now was that it was difficult to mobilize even a hundred. That was so in Assam, in the Punjab, in Bengal and in the U.P. That being the case perhaps it might be better to suspend the movement after all, viewing the question "from a practical standpoint". Non-violence, Pantji thought, was the best policy in the event of India being invaded, for a bullock cart could not compete in a race with a motor car.

He pleaded for a more vigorous prosecution of the constructive programme.

Sardar Patel argued strongly for Civil Disobedience to be continued. It had achieved one thing. It had shown to the world that India was not voluntarily in the war. Otherwise the position might have been misunderstood. Also, because of the movement the poor in the countryside had been saved from a lot of coercion and torture.

Shankarrao Dev and Harekrushna Mahtab more or less expressed similar views. The Poona offer must not be revived, and non-violence must continue as a policy to deal with the war. What could violence do? Even if a crore of rupees were raised, they would not be able to save Calcutta from being bombed.



P. C. Ghosh too was for continuation of the movement. Britain, he said, was the first enemy of India, whereas Japan was only a possible enemy. As a moral protest satyagraha had been successful to a great extent.

Jawaharlal Nehru said the general course of the struggle had brought strength to Congress. The fifteen months of satyagraha were not just wasted. It was no good crawling to the British and asking them for positions of power. The Congress must not take any step that would betray weakness. So far as the British Government was concerned the Congress must stand fast like a rock. Nehru said he had been opposed to the Poona resolution, which was the offspring of the Delhi resolution, which in its turn was the offspring of the Wardha resolution. He said he was opposed in principle to any sort of "parliamentary or unparliamentary work".

The question had been asked, Nehru continued, what India would have done had she been free. Well, she could have been non-belligerent. But rather than accept slavery he would opt for violence. What he had said for human beings also applied to nations. The result of non-violence must not be weakness, cowardice and slavery.

Nehru said it would be a disaster if Nazism won and the Soviet Union lost. Hostility towards the British must not mean loving the Nazis. India becoming a theatre of war was not a pleasing prospect, but it would not be such a tragedy. No nation had made any progress without going through fire. China had been transformed during the preceding three or four years. Two or three million Chinese had perished, but a new China had arisen. India was not going to be a strong nation until she had her baptism of fire.

He did not consider it likely that Germany or Japan might come. Bombing was a possibility. It had to be considered what the Congress policy should be with regard to the Government A.R.P. measures.

Bhulabhai Desai harped on the need to stop the satyagraha. "This supposedly great movement has ceased to have any value whatsoever," he said. "Its continuance portends complete failure. There is very little response from the people." Bhulabhai also spoke of the proximity of war to India and the need to take part in A.R.P. measures. Then there was the communal question. Muslims



thought that the movement had been launched to compel Government to yield power to the Congress. Continuance of the movement would aggravate communal tension. "We ought to take power," Bhulabhai concluded.

C.R. came down heavily on the view expressed by Gandhiji in his pamphlet on constructive programme that parliamentary work in the conditions that existed in India could not be an instrument for the achievement of independence and declaring that it was civil disobedience which was the storehouse of power. In propounding such a doctrine, Rajaji said, Gandhiji had given a *carte blanche*, an incitement, to parties to indulge in C.D. and enlarged the doctrine of Thoreau. It was, he declared, one of the most dangerous propositions to lay down. It was the death knell of Hindu-Muslim unity.

Maulana Azad asked if Gandhiji's refusal to consider any possible proposal from Britain was because he thought the proposal would be unsatisfactory or because it might involve India's participation in war.

Sadar Patel, Shankarrao Dev and P. C. Ghosh declared that both on ethical and political grounds the Congress must not become a participant in the war.

6

Gandhiji then tried to explain his position on non-violence. He spoke of non-violence, he said, not as a religious person but as a political person. He had come upon it in the course of serving fellow human beings. It was in 1893 that he had first thought of the way of suffering. Nobody in all the years that had followed had ever said that he had ceased to be political because he had chosen non-violence. But it was absurd to demand that because he was a politician he must not talk of non-violence. Jawaharlal was right in saying that he would want India to be non-violent but if it could not become non-violent it should take up arms and fight. He himself was prepared to say the same.

The Poona resolution, Gandhiji repeated, was the result of his own folly. He was thankful that nothing had come of it. He had been receiving letters from all over the world commending non-violence as the only way which could save the world. Why should he be ashamed of it?

What the Congress could get from the British by abandoning non-violence would not be independence. If Rajaji could prove to him that by giving up non-



violence the country would become stronger, Gandhiji said, he would be prepared to give up non-violence. Referring to the suggestion that Civil Disobedience should be abandoned, Gandhiji said:

I have heard what Bhulabhai and others have said. I have heard what Asaf Ali has said.... When I decided not to allow Civil Disobedience in Assam and Sind it was after due consideration. I want to conduct the campaign in a different way now. I want to keep out persons in positions of responsibility. I want to keep out the masses. I want to send the fewest persons. I want to have it understood that so long as free speech is not conceded our struggle will go on. We shall continue to shout: "Not a man, not a pice for the war." But I shall send the fewest persons and lay down the severest conditions for the satyagrahis. I want to keep the spark alive. It will be a limited programme, an illustrative programme....

If you accept this, Sind, Bengal and the N.W.F.P. will be kept out of the purview of civil disobedience. I do not want to divide Hindus and Muslims.

Maulana Azad: "The Congress had accepted non-violence only for a limited purpose. You had accepted that position. When under the Congress Ministries firing had to be resorted to, you did not raise the question. You raised the question for the first time in June 1940. The position of the Congress had been that we would not support the war because we had not been consulted. The Bombay A.I.C.C. resolution did not invalidate the Poona offer."

Jawaharlal Nehru: "The Bombay resolution was 80 per cent my draft and I can give its correct interpretation. I am surprised to hear that the Congress had become a pacifist organization. I consider the English pacifists a worthless lot. They have encouraged Hitler."

The drift of the discussion pained Gandhiji. He understood, he said, from what he had been told that the majority of people in the country were not with him. He had held that the Congress had been treading the path of non-violence during the preceding twenty years. Now he was being told that that was not true, that very few were interested in the constructive programme. Having withdrawn



himself from the Congress at Poona he ought not to have come back. His remaining out of the Congress could not harm the Congress, Gandhiji assured the members. Civil disobedience that he would carry on then would not be in the name of the Congress, but it would benefit the Congress.

Gandhiji advised the Working Committee to ask the British for an unequivocal pledge that India would be granted full independence after the war. Such a pledge should be underwritten by the Allied Powers. While the war continued there should be a representative Government at the Centre, in which Muslim League might also be represented.

His going out, Gandhiji assured the Committee, would not divide the Congress.

Jawaharlal Nehru was distressed by the drift of the debate. He could not see why there should be such a great divide between Gandhiji and the Congress, because, as the situation was developing the likelihood was that the Congress would not participate in the war. On non-violence, he said, he was prepared to go along with Gandhiji and be guided by him. As things were developing, his position was becoming that of a square peg in a round hole. It would be best for him also to get out and work independently.

This disturbed the members. Rajaji assured them that anything Gandhiji did would not result in a split in the Congress. But the Congress must make its position clear. Gandhiji's non-participation in the war was based on non-violence. That was not the Congress position. They must give their reason for not participating in the war. Was it because they had not been consulted? Was it because their demands had not been met?

Maulana Azad said the door should be left open in case the British Government changed its attitude.

Bhulabhai said the Congress should agree to participation in the war effort if an adequate offer was made.

Jawaharlal found the statement that the Congress should assist the British Government outrageous.

The position of the different participants in the discussions as it emerged was roughly as follows: Gandhiji remained opposed to any offer of participation



in the war under any conditions, purely on grounds of non-violence. Jawaharlal was willing to go along with Gandhiji and continue the struggle against the British Government. He could not think of participating in the war which would mean assisting the British Government. Maulana Azad wanted to keep the door open for any offer from the British Government which would enable the Congress to change its attitude towards participation in the war. C.R. and Bhulabhai Desai wanted the Congress to set out its terms for participation in the war, which the British Government could consider. They wanted the Congress to capture power. Vallabhbhai Patel, Rajendra Prasad, P. C. Ghosh, Pattabhi Sitaramayya and to an extent G. B. Pant supported Gandhiji's position.

In short the counsels were divided.

A committee of four, consisting of Azad, Nehru, C.R. and Pant, then worked on the resolution first drafted by Nehru. [Ibid, pp. 28-104]

The resolution as passed read:

Fourteen months have elapsed since the Working Committee held their last meeting and during this period the world has fallen ever deeper into the abyss of war and rushed headlong towards self-destruction... The burden of guiding the Congress and the nation at this critical stage... is a heavy one which the Committee can only shoulder worthily with the full cooperation of the people of India... The Committee are convinced that full freedom for the people of India is essential even, and more especially, in the present state of world turmoil, not only for India's sake but for the sake of the world. The Committee also hold that real peace and freedom can only be established and endure on the basis of world cooperation between free nations.

The Committee gave full expression to their attitude towards the war in their statement issued on September 14, 1939 wherein they condemned Nazi and Fascist aggression, and expressed their willingness to help the cause of freedom and democracy, provided the objectives of the war were clearly stated and acted upon... Subsequent pronouncements made on behalf of the British Government and their reactionary and oppressive policy made it clear that this Government was determined to



maintain and intensify its imperialist hold and exploitation of the Indian people.... Not only has every offer made by the Congress for an honourable compromise been rejected, but public opinion voiced by organizations regarded as moderate has also been flouted.

The Congress was therefore compelled ...to request Gandhiji to guide the Congress in the action that should be taken. Mahatma Gandhi, desirous of avoiding embarrassment to his opponent as far as possible ...limited the satyagraha movement which he started to selected individuals who conformed to certain tests he had laid down....

Throughout this period the attitude of the British Government has been hostile to Indian freedom and it has functioned in India as a completely authoritarian Government....

While there has been no change in the British Government's policy towards India, the Working Committee must nevertheless take into full consideration the new world situation that has arisen by the development of the war into a world conflict and its approach to India. The sympathies of the Congress must inevitably be with the people who are the subject of aggression and who are fighting for their freedom. But only a free and independent India can be in a position to undertake the defence of the country on a national basis.... The whole background in India is one of hostility and of distrust of the British Government and not even the most far-reaching promises can alter this background, nor can a subject India offer voluntary or willing help to an arrogant Imperialism which is indistinguishable from Fascist authoritarianism.

The Committee is, therefore, of opinion that the resolution of the A.I.C.C. passed in Bombay on September 16, 1940 holds today and defines Congress policy still. [C.W.M.G., LXXV, pp. 451-52]

The Committee was obviously stretching it when it declared that the resolution of 16 September 1940 still defined the Congress position. For there was now a marked shift in emphasis. The earlier resolution had protested against the Government not tolerating "free expression of public opinion in condemnation of their associating India in the war against Germany against the



will of a vast body of the people of India". It was only the spirit of satyagraha, according to that resolution, which had prevented the Congress from doing anything to embarrass the war effort. It had committed the Congress to non-violence not only in the struggle for swaraj but also "in so far as this may be possible of application" in free India.

The resolution now passed said that the Congress had launched the satyagraha because the British Government had rejected its offer for an honourable compromise. It also took note of the approach of the war to India and emphasized the need for "the defence of the country" (naturally armed defence was contemplated) which only a free and independent India could undertake.

Gandhiji of course did not agree with such an interpretation being put on the Bombay resolution. On 30 December he wrote to the Congress President, not challenging the Working Committee's interpretation of the resolution, but confessing that he himself had been in error in interpreting the resolution to mean "that the Congress was to refuse participation in the present or all wars on the ground principally of non-violence". He wrote:

The discovery of the error makes it impossible for me to lead the Congress in the struggle for resistance to war effort on grounds in which non-violence was not indispensable... It is my certain belief that only non-violence can save India and the world from self-extinction. Such being the case, I must continue my mission whether I am alone or assisted by an organization or individuals. You will, therefore, please relieve me of the responsibility laid upon me by the Bombay resolution. I must continue Civil Disobedience for free speech against all war with such Congressmen and others whom I select and who believe in the non-violence I have contemplated and are willing to conform to prescribed conditions. [Ibid, pp. 189-90]

In a statement issued to the Press on the same day Gandhiji made a public admission of his error in interpreting the Bombay resolution. The resolution, he said, in declaring that the Poona offer had lapsed had not meant that the door to negotiations had been closed. As the latest resolution of the Working Committee said, the door had not been barred altogether.



The resolution now passed by the Working Committee had not specified the conditions upon which the door could be opened, for the Working Committee did not want to be insulted again. The key to unlocking the door remained in the hands of the British Government. It was important, however, that everyone should understand that nothing would be accepted by the Congress short of what it stood for. Clarifying his own position for the public Gandhiji said:

I have made it clear in my letter to Maulana Saheb that I could not possibly identify myself with the door to participation being kept open in any shape or form, because that would mean, in my opinion, a recantation of all that the Congress has stood for in the last twenty years or more. I would not be guilty of selling that heritage even for the independence of India because it would not be real independence. [Ibid, pp. 190-92]

The Working Committee, accordingly, by a resolution on the same day relieved Gandhiji of the responsibility laid upon him by the Bombay resolution, but assured him that "the policy of non-violence adopted under his guidance for the attainment of swaraj and which has proved so successful in leading to mass awakening and otherwise will be adhered to by the Congress". [Ibid, p. 450]

8

The votaries of non-violence in the Working Committee and outside were considerably distressed and disturbed at the thought that the resolution had committed the Congress to participation in the war in the event of the Government offering terms that the Congress might find acceptable. They found themselves at a loss as regards the course they should pursue. Rajendra Prasad, Abdul Ghaffar Khan and others sought guidance from Gandhiji.

At their meeting on 1 January 1942, Gandhiji told Rajendra Prasad that the resolution of the Working Committee need not be taken as final, since it had yet to come before the A.I.C.C. The majority of the A.I.C.C. might well decide that the Congress must face the war with non-violence. There were those in the Congress who were neutral on the question of non-violence and there were those who had no faith in non-violence. Gandhiji said he and those believing in non-violence could not represent either group.



Asked what attitude they should adopt at the A.I.C.C. Gandhiji said they could throw out the resolution or modify it in such a way as to preclude offer of help in the war effort. Or they could do what Jawaharlal had done: keep quiet if they could not support the resolution.

Rajendra Babu asked whether, if the A.I.C.C. opted for non-violence on the question of war, and the Maulana stepped down, Gandhiji would be willing to resume the leadership of the Congress. Gandhiji said if the majority opted for non-violence he would advise the Maulana to leave the Congress and consider any proposal from the Government from outside the Congress. If the Maulana found himself in a minority he could even form a party of like-minded people within the Congress along the lines of the Forward Bloc and the Socialist Party. But the chances were that the Maulana would not leave. He would say: 'I bow to the majority.' [The Diary of Mahadev Desai (unpublished) Book No. 43, pp. 105-8]

Talking with Abdul Ghaffar Khan later Gandhiji said: "Mere talking in the air will not do. We must act. I told the Maulana that if we countenanced violence, our twenty years' effort would be wasted. I told him I could not mount to heaven leaving my faithful dog behind. If today I were made the king of India or the Viceroy I would not put swords in the hands of the people. But the Maulana said that at some stage India would have to arm itself."

Gandhiji told the Frontier leader not to depend on him for advice and guidance, for he might not be there always. He might die or be imprisoned. There was no need for Ghaffar Khan to leave the Congress. He must remain in the Congress and concentrate on the charkha and village industries.

Abdul Ghaffar Khan said he could have no faith in people who said one thing in Poona and another in Bombay. His views were his own and could not be shaken. He did not worry whether the people of the N.W.F.P. would follow him or not. His job was to place his views before the people. [Ibid, pp. 108-10]

On 3 and 4 January 1942 Gandhiji attended the meeting of the Gujarat P.C.C. Gandhiji told the Gujarat leaders that if they were of the view that free India should have an army, then they should support the Working Committee's resolution. But those of them who stood for non-violence would have a hard time



of it. He would not send them to jail, he would not send them to Legislatures. He would want them for the task of constructing the edifice of swaraj. Did it mean that Congressmen must come out of the municipalities and district boards? – Gandhiji was asked. Yes, Gandhiji answered, they would have to come out of them. "I want to tell those who are looking for a key to unlock the door of compromise that they are giving up the very thing that has given life to the country. Ahimsa has been the policy of the Congress. It was never conceived as an expedient," Gandhiji said.

Gandhiji was told that Maulana Azad and Jawaharlal, while answering questions in Bombay the previous day, had expressed views more or less similar to Gandhiji's. Jawaharlal had said that the country was not strong enough to put up an armed resistance against an invader and therefore thought that non-violence was the best way. He had spoken of creating a non-violent atmosphere in the country.

That might be so, Gandhiji said, but then why that resolution? Why was it passed? The resolution, he said, had opened the door for the Congress to help the British Government. [Ibid, pp. 111-17]

Addressing the P.C.C. members on 4 January, Gandhiji said:

The resolution means that, if the Government gave a guarantee that full freedom would be given after the war, the Congress would help in keeping this Empire alive.... If you feel that on your agreeing to offer full cooperation in the war effort India will have complete independence after the war ...that even during the war you will run your own affairs provided of course that your Defence Minister will carry on the war to victory, you must confirm the Bardoli resolution.... Only those will express their disapproval of it who are sure in their heart of hearts that prudence, political insight, policy, every consideration demands that ahimsa may not be sacrificed for swaraj.

When Gandhiji asked for votes on the question, 36 voted for the Bardoli resolution while 27 were against it. [C.W.M.G., LXXV, pp. 197-98]

On 7 January 1942 Gandhiji announced that he had decided to resume publication of the three Harijan weeklies. As regards the programme of Civil Disobedience he said:



So far as I can see, Civil Disobedience in the sense in which it was launched is not likely to be revived on behalf of the Congress till the war has ended. In a purely symbolic manner it may have to be kept up not in the name of the Congress but on behalf of resisters of all war on the pure ground of non-violence, no matter how few they are. It will be kept up for the sake of asserting the right of resisters to carry on propaganda against all war. [Ibid, pp. 201-2]

The *Harijan* weeklies started appearing again from 18 January 1942, after having been absent from the stands since 17 November 1940.

On behalf of those who were committed to a non-violent world order, Gandhiji again underlined the supreme importance of khadi and the constructive programme. Speaking at the Khadi Vidyalaya, Bardoli on 8 January, he said:

What is going to be the part that crores of our people will play during the deadly carnage that is going on? ...There is starvation and poverty everywhere. There is scarcity of water ...and we and our cattle die like flies for want of water.... We have sworn by ahimsa and pledged ourselves to win swaraj by ahimsa. It is twenty years since we took the pledge, yet we do not know how to redeem it.... Land we have, but the land system, uneconomic holdings and methods, have reduced us to the level of beasts of burden; it does not yield us enough to eat all the year round, and we are workless for almost half the year. We have, therefore, to take up subsidiary industries. Those are the charkha and the allied industries. [Ibid, p. 204]

9

From the point of view of the majority in the Working Committee the Bardoli resolution was in the nature of an invitation to the British Government to make proposals that could pave the way for ending the impasse and enable the Congress to address itself to the task of organizing the defence of the country.

Would the British oblige? It appeared very unlikely, for it soon became clear that they did not see the resolution in the light in which those behind the resolution wished them to see it.

Roger Lumley, the Bombay Governor, found it an "unattractive document". In his report to the Viceroy on 1 January 1942 he noted that the Congress press



was describing the resolution as "opening the door", "again holding out the olive branch to Britain", "a desire to cooperate" and so on, and commented that he could not see any olive branches on the face of the resolution. It appeared to be the same old policy, "namely, to force concessions out of us as a price of cooperation in the war". Indeed it went even further, "for the hint that no assurances about the future will be acceptable suggests that cooperation can only be secured by surrendering everything to the Congress now". [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. I, p. 2]

British newspapers, such as *Manchester Guardian*, *The Times*, *New Statesman and Nation*, *Spectator*, all voiced relief that the Congress Working Committee had allowed Gandhiji to withdraw himself from leadership. The Congress could not now advance as one of the reasons Gandhiji's "unresisting pacifism" for its refusal to participate in the war. They expressed the view that Churchill and Amery should not let the opportunity that had been provided by the resolution slip by. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1942, Vol. I, pp. 30-31]

But the prospect of any sort of negotiations with the Congress was not welcome to the Churchill-Amery duo. They did not much care for the association of the Congress with the war effort, because such association involved, as *quid pro quo*, granting of political concessions that would bring the Congress – Indian nationalism – to power. Churchill's abhorrence of nationalist India was so deep-seated that he would not consent to have dealings with the Congress even to advance the cause of the war.

"Was our policy calculated to get the fullest war effort from India? Ought we to be doing more to increase war production in India?" – the question had been raised in the British Cabinet on 19 December 1941. Churchill, then in the U.S.A., wrote to the Lord Privy Seal:

The idea that we should "get more out of India" by putting the Congress in charge at this juncture seems ill-founded. Yet that is what it will come to if any electoral or parliamentary foundation is chosen. Bringing hostile political elements into the defence machine will paralyze action.

He concluded:



I trust we shall not depart from the position we have deliberately taken up. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. I, p. 14]

In the first week of January 1942 Amery assembled some British editors for a "confidential meeting" and told them not to pursue the subject of negotiations with the Congress, which most of them had been suggesting. He told them that the war effort did not depend on the Congress. It depended "on the support of States, the Muslims and other elements not within the Congress", that to a large extent it was "dependent on Muslim support", and that "any step in constitutional sphere which would alienate Muslim opinion might have most serious repercussions on India's war effort whereas active assistance of Congress would not make much difference to India's fighting strength."

His view of the Bardoli resolution, as conveyed by him to the Viceroy, was that it was an attempt on the part of the Congress to get the British Government to go back upon its August 1940 declaration which insisted upon agreement, and thus to prejudge the situation against the Muslims. The answer to the Congress, he said, would be to ask it to come back in the Provinces and to take its share in the National Defence Council. [*Ibid*, pp. 20, 22]

Linlithgow instructed Lumley to invite Jinnah to a meal and sound him on the political situation. Jinnah accordingly came over on 15 January and Lumley wrote to the Viceroy that Jinnah had given no indication that he would change his policy, that he appeared quite satisfied with the attitude of the British Government, though "he expressed some fears that the British Press and public opinion would be taken in by the Congress and other Hindu propaganda", and that the British Government might succumb to pressure. [*Ibid*, pp. 25-29]

Everything thus, for the British, was in place: the Muslim obduracy ensuring deadlock would continue, recruits and money would keep coming from India, and there was no need at all for them to provide the key to unlock the door to negotiations with the Congress.



CHAPTER VIII: THE LIBERALS' MEMORANDUM

1

By the end of the first week of January 1942 Gandhiji had got through his engagements in Bardoli and was back at Sevagram on the 10th. On 11 January he received Reginald Coupland, professor of history at Oxford, who had been engaged in an investigation of India's constitutional problem for the British Government.

Coupland mentioned Jinnah and expressed himself baffled by the communal question. Gandhiji said Jinnah was the British Government's creation. Had they not put him up to it, he would not be dictating terms. The British Government knew, the Viceroy and all the Governors knew, that the Congress meant well by the Muslims. They had all been full of admiration for the way the Ministers had conducted their affairs in the Provinces. And yet Amery was saying to him; 'Agree, Agree.' How could they agree? How could they settle with Jinnah?

The British had similarly put up Ambedkar, and had it not been for his fast Ambedkar would have done a great deal of mischief. [The Diary of Mahadev Desai (unpublished), Book No. 43, pp. 140-45]

On 13 and 14 January Gandhiji attended the deliberations of the Working Committee, held preliminary to the meeting of the All-India Congress Committee on 15-16 January.

At the outset Gandhiji expressed the view that at the A.I.C.C. there should be no voting and no division on the Bardoli resolution, though members should be allowed to speak on it. The debate that followed was heated, if not acrimonious. The issue was again the interpretation of the resolution, its precise meaning and the message it might carry to the people.

Did it mean opening the door? — and opening the door to what? There appeared to be no prospect of any proposal coming from the Government.

Nehru regretted that Gandhiji's letter to the President asking to be relieved of the leadership had conveyed the impression that the Congress had reversed



its policy of non-cooperation. It appeared that with the Bardoli resolution transfer of power had become the main thing.

Rajendra Babu and Kripalani, strong supporters of Gandhiji's position, said that the resolution could bear no other meaning.

Nehru emphasized the point that the resolution made no mention of helping the British Government. It spoke of help in the furtherance of the larger cause emerging from the war. When the whole world was caught in a quagmire, India could not keep aloof. Any compromise with British Imperialism, which was crumbling, was out of the question. The issue was how to save India. He did not want to emphasize the independence of India after the war – "but now". He said the Congress must organize the people, in every village, in every city, as they were already doing in the U.P. – so that it could take over when the British administration collapsed.

Kripalani said the Congress could say that only a free India could decide whether to cooperate or not and how.

Gandhiji opposed any change being made in the Bardoli resolution or another resolution being brought forward. So long as no response came from the British Government they were all in the same boat. He personally would continue the work he had been doing. He would want the Congress to go back to the villages and make the villages free. The villages must be made self-sufficient in the necessities of life. Congressmen should go to the villages and work silently. The Congress then would emerge stronger from the predicament in which it found itself.

Would Gandhiji's counsel and guidance be available to the Congress? – Jawaharlal Nehru asked. And what was the position in regard to Civil Disobedience? Gandhiji said if the Government allowed the *Harijan* weeklies to function, he would not ask anyone to offer satyagraha. If there should be interference, then he would himself resort to satyagraha or ask a chosen few to do so. [Ibid, pp. 146-67]

The A.I.C.C. meeting duly began at Wardha on 15 January in a special pandal erected for the purpose. Of the total membership of 390, 219 attended,



while 40 members were still in prison. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1942, Vol I, p. 279]

Inaugurating the proceedings Maulana Azad explained that as a self-respecting nation, India could have pursued no other course but that of non-participation in the war. Then Gandhiji had started the Individual Civil Disobedience movement, which had been of a symbolic character, a movement begun not at the bottom but at the top. Through it the message had been conveyed about the position of India in the war.

The policy of the Congress remained what it had been in September 1940, but questions had arisen in the Working Committee and certain differences had come to the fore. Gandhiji had remained unmoved in his position (that the price of freedom must not be participation in the war). As for himself, Azad went on, he could not take his position on the lofty position where Gandhiji stood. When freedom of the country knocked at the door, whether under the umbrella of war or peace, he, as a Congressman, could not turn it back. From the place which Gandhiji occupied, he could certainly say that he would not accept the freedom of India if it came in the welter of war.

The question, Azad said, was one of fundamental import. Gandhiji insisted that unless the Congress based its opposition to participation in the war on non-violence he would not lead it. He wanted that India should not even put up an armed defence if attacked. The position was logical, but not one on which Congressmen could set their sights. [The Diary of Mahadev Desai (unpublished), Book No. 43, pp. 168-71]

Gandhiji, explaining his position, regretted that the Congress President had praised him to the skies as if he were not an ordinary mortal but a dweller in the clouds. This was far from the case. He said:

Ahimsa with me is a creed; the breath of life. But it was never as a creed that I placed it before India or, for that matter, before anyone except in casual or informal talks. I placed it before the Congress as a political weapon, to be employed for the solution of political problems. Maybe it is a novel method, but it does not on that account lose its political character.... As a political method it can always be changed, modified,



altered, even given up in preference to another. If, therefore, I say to you that our policy should not be given up today, I am talking political wisdom. It is political insight. It has served us in the past, it has enabled us to traverse many stages towards independence and it is as a politician that I tell you that it would be a grave mistake to think of giving it up. If I have carried the Congress with me all these years, it is in my capacity as a politician. It is hardly fair to describe my method as religious because it is new.

Gandhiji reminded the delegates that the Congress had taken a pledge that it would win swaraj only through ahimsa. Why did it now want to depart from it? "I want to tell you," he warned, "that this bargain will not bring you complete independence." He added:

Independence for me means the independence of the humblest and poorest among us. Today we are at the threshold of independence on the strength of ahimsa. For the Congress to abandon ahimsa and to join the war is to undo the work of the past twenty years.

Nevertheless Gandhiji advised the delegates to accept the resolution of the Working Committee. It was not the time to canvass support for this group or that and seek a vote. The Poona resolution was bad. It had tried to interpret ahimsa. The Bardoli resolution did not have this shortcoming. He had at first thought of seeking a vote on the resolution, but as the situation developed stage by stage, as he saw the climate in the country and the criticism of the Congress outside India, he had come to the conclusion that he must ask the A.I.C.C. to accept the resolution deliberately and whole- heartedly.

The resolution was certainly a step backwards, but it was good to step back in order to jump forward. Moreover, it correctly represented the majority view of the Congress. He did not want the Congress to look ridiculous in the eyes of the world; he did not want it to be said of it that in order to retain his leadership it had bidden good-bye to its senses because it had not the courage to give him up. It had been suggested, said Gandhiji, that there was a rift in the Congress lute. It had even been suggested that he and Jawaharlal had been estranged. This was baseless, he assured the A.I.C.C. He said:



Jawaharlal has been resisting me ever since he fell into my net. You cannot divide water by repeatedly striking it with a stick. It is just as difficult to divide us. I have always said that not Rajaji, not Sardar Vallabhbhai but Jawaharlal will be my successor. He says whatever is uppermost in his mind but he always does what I want. When I am gone he will do what I am doing now. Then he will speak my language too. After all, he was born in this land. Every day he learns some new thing. He fights with me because I am there. Whom will he fight when I am gone? And who will suffer his fighting? Ultimately he will have to speak my language. Even if this does not happen, I would at least die with this faith.*

Describing the Bardoli resolution as a mirror in which all the groups within the Congress could see themselves, Gandhiji said the resolution had been drafted by Jawaharlal, whose opposition to participation in the war effort was as strong as his own. It had then been worked on by Rajaji, who would like to participate in the war effort if the Government accepted the conditions laid down by the Congress. The resolution as passed threw on the Government the entire burden of wooing the Congress. The resolution provided scope for all the points of view within the Congress including that of Rajendra Babu. The resolution said that when India became free it could defend itself with arms. But votaries of non-violence could hope that when the time came India would find that the best way of defending itself was through non-violence.

The resolution had postponed Civil Disobedience, Gandhiji said. As for the parliamentary programme, though it had come to stay, in his view it could have no place in the programme of the Congress. What then were the Congressmen to do? Gandhiji said:

Neither Jawaharlal nor Rajaji will let you remain idle. I certainly will not. Let those who think the constructive programme is insipid know that there is nothing in the Working Committee's resolution to prevent a Congressman at his own risk from leading civil disobedience – individual or mass. But let me warn the enthusiasts that they will not handle the weapon with any success.

The operative part of the resolution, Gandhiji said, was contained in the instructions about the constructive programme. If properly implemented the



programme laid down could form a complete substitute for Civil Disobedience. Gandhiji concluded by appealing to the delegates to pass the resolution without dividing the House. [C.W.M.G., LXXV, pp. 219-29]

Answering a question Gandhiji said that though he had changed his earlier opinion that the House should be divided on the resolution and wanted the delegates to pass it without division, his position remained what it had been at Bardoli. The Congress had divested itself of the responsibility for Civil Disobedience and left him free to do what he liked. It meant that Civil Disobedience was to remain in his absolute control. The reason for the suspension of Civil Disobedience was wholly extraneous to his retirement.

Congressmen, he said, would have to give a good account of themselves now. Jawaharlal would be asking for diaries from millions of men. He would not go to sleep. [The Diary of Mahadev Desai (unpublished), Book No. 43, pp. 183-84]

*The announcement by Gandhiji that Nehru would fill his place after his disappearance from the scene, could not have been wholly unexpected, for, as Gandhiji himself said, he had always been saying it. Besides, it was not more than a recognition of Nehru's immense popularity and the status he enjoyed in his own right in the councils of the Congress. Curiously, Gandhiji's words of tribute to Nehru were interpreted to mean that he had appointed Nehru his heir in preference to Rajaji and Sardar Patel. (The version of Gandhiji's speech found in *The Indian Annual Register* and in Mahadev Desai's summary in *Harijan* indeed mention Rajaji but do not mention Sardar Patel.) Interpreted in that sense they became a subject of comment from many quarters, the most recent being that from Rajmohn Gandhi. Rajmohan Gandhi in fact proceeds as if Gandhiji had not mentioned Rajaji at all and had to make his choice between Nehru and Patel. He quotes a British writer to the effect that though Nehru had "charm", it was doubtful if he had in him the hard stuff of a revolutionary. He then quotes various other people to the effect that Patel was "masterful" and had force. And he proceeds: "Why did the Mahatma prefer charm to force?" He cites various reasons: the advanced age of Patel, his ill-health and the fact that he was not as popular as Nehru among the youth, the Left and Muslims. He also speculates that Gandhiji might have felt that Nehru would resent a number two position while Vallabhbhai's commitment had nothing to do with rank. [Rajmohan Gandhi, *Patel*, pp. 301-2].



Evidence that is on record does not suggest that at that point of time Sardar Patel's chances of filling Gandhiji's place in the event of the latter's disappearance from the scene were rated very high. In Gandhiji's mind too he was not one of the persons to be considered for the role. For instance in a conversation with Khurshedbehn Naoroji and Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya on 25 November 1941, when Gandhiji was asked if he thought Rajaji would take his place if he should not be around any more, Gandhiji answered: "Or Jawahar. There is no third." [The Diary of Mahadev Desai (unpublished), Book No. 42, p. 128]

Earlier, on 7 October 1940, while forwarding a letter of Nehru concerning an English soldier who had left the army out of sympathy for the Indian cause, Gandhiji wrote to the Viceroy: "The Pandit's letter I send in order that you may know the inner working of the mind of one who will be the future leader of all India." [C.W.M.G., LXXIII, p. 81]

Nehru was widely believed to exercise a hold on the imagination of India that was unsurpassed. Mahadev Desai has noted down in his diary a witty saying that must have been current at the time: "India listens to Jawaharlal, Jawaharlal listens to Gandhi, and Gandhi listens to God." [The Diary of Mahadev Desai (unpublished), Book No. 42, p. 42]

The British too appeared to believe that apart from Gandhiji the only person who counted in the Congress was Nehru. Linlithgow in his letter to the Secretary of State dated 23-27 January 1942 wrote: "The Congress Working Committee, with the possible exception of Nehru, who is in a very special position, appears more and more clearly as a collection of declining valetudinarians who have no grip on the country, but who, politically, are purely parasitic on Gandhi the spell-binder." [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. I, p. 60]

Moving the resolution, Jawaharlal Nehru said it was the result of ten days of wrangling in the Working Committee, and reading it as a whole hardly anyone could disagree with it. It was said that there were three groups in the Working Committee. Why, there were in fact fifteen groups? represented by the fifteen members of the Committee. So what? There should be differences of views.



The resolution summed up the entire story. From the very beginning the attempt of the British Government had been to suppress the country. There had been no change in that attitude. Now the British Empire was crumbling before their eyes. No one could tell what the future might bring. A free India might have to fight shoulder to shoulder with the British. The Congress had never thought of bargaining for freedom in exchange for cooperation in the war. But if the British could concede freedom to India, they would to some extent have atoned for their sins of two hundred years. Gandhiji could find it in himself to love the whole world, but the country seethed with generations of accumulated anger.

Some described the war as an imperialist war, some called it a people's war; some were fighting for their freedom, some to crush the British Empire. But the eyes of the British had not been opened. He, Nehru, had therefore come to the conclusion that freedom could not come from any settlement with the British. The area of the war had become enlarged by the entry of Russia and Japan, but the attitude of the British Government towards India had only hardened. It was clear that even if the British Government was able to defeat Japan, the war certainly could bring devastation to India. The pace of events had become fast and no one knew what might happen in six months. It could well be that faced with certain defeat the British might say to the Congress before surrendering: 'Take your heritage.' Surrender had become commonplace in the war. In France five million had surrendered in a matter of three weeks. Once an army was destroyed it was not easy to raise another army. But whatever might be the issue, India could not tolerate the British regime even for a minute longer. It was unbearable that even an ordinary peasant should ask for protection of the British Army. If the Japanese should come India was in no position to offer them resistance. Nevertheless it would have to do so.

Many thought Gandhiji was being visionary in insisting on non-violence. Nehru said he himself thought that Gandhiji was being hundred per cent practical. Indeed those opposed to him were being visionary. But non-violence had many aspects. There was the individual aspect, there was the personal aspect and there was the international aspect. In Bombay the Congress had said that free India would stick to non-violence in external relations. Seeing the years of horror of war, disarmament appeared to be the only course. In the face of



external aggression too India had been left with no recourse but non-violent resistance, which was what Gandhiji preached.

But what would be the impression left on the world if the Congress said that India could not involve itself in the war because of considerations of non-violence? People would say that we had no political reasons left for non-participation.

Rajaji's approach was different, Jawaharlal explained. He believed that if India was conceded freedom it could participate in the war effort. It would do good both to the British and India. In practical terms there was no possibility of any settlement with the British.

Congressmen had work to do. They did not any more have the option of jail-going. As for the parliamentary programme, only the dull-witted could think about it. Gandhiji had said that every Indian must become a rebel. They must go to every town, every village and pursue the constructive programme with full strength, so that when the structure of the British regime collapsed, they would have the machinery ready to take its place.

4

Rajaji, seconding the resolution, referred to the impression that had been created that he was advising the Congress to give up non-violence. That impression, he said, was wrong. He adhered to non-violence so far as the struggle for swaraj was concerned. Where he quarrelled with Gandhiji was in the latter's extension of the principle of non-violence to other areas. Gandhiji was essentially a practical man. But sometimes he was wrong. His concern was to stop all wars and if India could come up to the level of offering non-violent resistance to aggression, it would be a great adventure. But that was not the case.

Rajaji cited past resolutions of the Congress and circulars issued from the Congress office to show that the stand of the Congress had been that it would help in the war if India were free. The British Government's attitude had not changed, but certain other developments had taken place. The Japanese had entered the war. Singapore had been bombed. Those developments called for India's cooperation. With the attitude of the British Government remaining unchanged, the Congress policy of non-cooperation remained. But supposing the



British were to say: come, help us, India could not shirk the responsibility of self-defence. Freedom carried that responsibility. Some people were not sure of what was going to happen to the British. But should Britain be defeated and the Axis powers win, India could not very well say that it had wanted to be neutral but was compelled. That attitude was both unworthy and foolish. If it was desired to make terms with Japan, they should say so openly.

The resolution had not spelt out the Congress terms, for the British already knew what the Congress wanted. The resolution made it plain why the Congress had refused to help, and its non-cooperation would continue. It would not bow the head. But in a non-violent struggle one must always be ready for a settlement.

Rajendra Babu, speaking for the votaries of non-violence said it was not right to suggest that they were prepared to give up the freedom of the country in order to uphold non-violence. Though he himself was a votary of complete non-violence, he was not prepared to give up freedom. But freedom in a true sense was not possible except through non-violence. The countries which were considered free were not really free. They had to be ready to have millions of children slaughtered and millions and millions worth of property destroyed. War solved no problems. He expressed the view that strictly on political grounds it would be extremely dangerous to give up non-violence. The Congress must continue along the path of non-violence. Whichever power India had to fight for her freedom, she must do so non-violently.

Jawaharlal was provoked into answering Rajendra Babu. When Rajendra Babu said that the countries believing in violence were not free, what did he mean? – he asked. Did he mean that England and America were not free? What sort of independence had the Congress in mind for which it had been fighting since 1885 and for the preceding twenty years under the leadership of Gandhiji? Was it other than national freedom – freedom to the country to run its own affairs? The world was full of violence. The task was to reform it. Those who spoke of non-violence tolerated the violent economic organization of society. Non-violence would prevail when landlordism had been abolished, when exploitation had been ended. Those who said that such evils would be removed gradually, through love, only sought to sustain violence. Jawaharlal said he wished to have violence banished from the world. But it called for radical



measures. It could not be done by applying balm on the surface. [Ibid, pp. 186-205]

The resolution was passed by the A.I.C.C. by 204 votes to 15. The only change made was the addition of the words "from any quarter" after the words "subject to aggression" in the penultimate paragraph. The sentence now read: "The sympathies of the Congress must inevitably be with the people who are the subject of aggression from any quarter and who are fighting for their freedom." [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. I, p. 38; *The Indian Annual Register*, 1942, Vol. I, p. 35]

5

On 17 January 1942, various Provincial workers and members of the Working Committee met Gandhiji to seek his guidance in regard to the duty of Congressmen in the light of the resolution passed by the A.I.C.C. Gandhiji again emphasized the supreme importance of the constructive programme for the achievement of swaraj. If they vigorously pursued the programme they would find that the country already had swaraj. Communal unity was an important part of the constructive programme. This could not be achieved through any Congress-League pact or parliamentary pact. People lived in villages — whether it was the N.W.F.P or Kerala. If Hindu-Muslim unity could be achieved at the level of the masses, fear of communal riots would vanish and swaraj would become easy of achievement. The same applied to the eradication of untouchability. If Bhangi and Mahar could lovingly embrace each other a great step would have been taken towards swaraj. If the thousands of Congressmen who were ever ready to offer civil disobedience and go to jail were to take up the great work of social reform that eradication of untouchability represented, there would be no need for offering civil disobedience. On the other hand if that work was neglected and instead people took up civil disobedience, such disobedience would not be civil and would bring violence in its wake. And of course it would not bring swaraj.

The untouchables had a feeling that under the British regime there had been a slight improvement in their condition. Some of them therefore were subservient to the British Government. They felt that if swaraj came it would be swaraj for the caste Hindus, not for them, and they would be suppressed. Swaraj



was wanted for those who had been suppressed. It was wanted for the Muslims and for the untouchables.

Maulana Azad asked what the Congress as an organization should do.

Gandhiji explained the work that had been done and was being done at Sevagram. It had a population of 700, Gandhiji said, one-third of them being untouchables and 10 families of Muslims. Caste people and untouchables had separate wells. Now the condition of the untouchables had greatly improved. Touchables and untouchables all came to him. Spinning was widespread and many had become habitual wearers of Khadi, a school had been started, where basic education was imparted. The seed had been sown and the tree was growing. There was a health care scheme under which medicines were made available to forty villages. It was run by Pyarelal's sister, with Shri Shankaran of Kerala as her understudy. They were on call night and day and were doing great work. There was an agriculture graduate in the village. There were more cows and better kept.

The Congress could do much more such work.

Sardar Patel asked if Congressmen could join A.R.P.

Jawaharlal expressed surprise at such a question. Congressmen could not join A.R.P., he said. Of course they could help. If too many people were injured in a bombing raid and A.R.P. could not provide personnel to help, Congressmen must offer help. They did not have to go to A.R.P. for training. The Congress would provide the training. Congressmen would not salute the Union Jack. Similarly Congressmen would not join the committees formed for the distribution of foodgrains. [The Diary of Mahadev Desai (unpublished), Book No. 43, pp. 211-24]

On 22 January Gandhiji addressed the U.P. Congress workers at Benares.

Sri Prakasa asked if emphasis in the Congress work should be on the principle (ahimsa) or on the cause (freedom).

Jawaharlal Nehru asked: "I shall not waste your time by raising the interminable debate of violence and non-violence. I would want you to tell us how you see the picture of events unfolding in the next six months or a year from



now. You have said this is going to be the last battle and that you would not stop it midway. What development do you visualize?

Answering Sri Prakasa, Gandhiji said in placing the principle, or the creed, before the Congress his intention had been to advance the cause of the Congress. Had he not recommended non-violence for the achievement of an objective he would have ended up by becoming a religious leader. Ever since he had undertaken the struggle in South Africa he had always used non-violence as an instrument, never as a religious dogma.

Jawaharlal's question, Gandhiji said, was very good. It was also a difficult question to answer. He was himself not clear in his mind as regards the future. As far as he could see, British Empire was faced with a grave danger. But that did not imply that the Empire was finished, as Jawaharlal believed. The British were a brave people and they would fight to the last.

Even if India should not be able to participate in the task of stopping the war, certainly there could be no peace without her participation. But that would be so if every Congressman bore it in mind and worked for it. Gandhiji said:

I stick to the statement that this will be my last struggle. The situation has changed further. Japan has advanced up to Rangoon. In the east everywhere the British are on the retreat. The war may come to India. In such a situation although the fight against the British will continue, the method will have to change. How can I then ask Jawaharlal to go to jail? Of course if the British interfere in our work, all may have to go. Much can be achieved in a year or two. Who could have thought that Japan would advance as far as Rangoon in such a short time.

Gandhiji referred to the fall of Singapore, which had been a strong fortress. He had been told by the Chief of Staff of the measures that had been taken to guard India: army formations had been sent to Singapore and to Aden. But in a matter of just six weeks Singapore had been overrun. Who could say what might happen in a year and a half. The day of India's freedom could not be far away.

The matter of immediate concern was what Congressmen should do. Gandhiji suggested that no Congressman should be satisfied by merely paying four annas for his membership. None could afford to be indolent. He had not



chalked out a year's programme, Gandhiji said. The programme could be modified after a month. There was the khadi programme. Although the means were not lacking, as things were, people might have to go without clothing and covering for the winter. What was wanted was people in vast numbers who would undertake voluntary spinning. The requirement of the country could not be met by employing spinners on a daily wage of 3 annas. Only participation of millions of people in the work could be effective. The work must be undertaken on an emergency basis, since the danger from the East had increased and the time might arrive when there would be no cloth in the country. Although the matter was not reported in the newspapers vast masses of people were already going about naked.

Gandhiji was asked why, having first talked of opposing the Bardoli resolution at the A.I.C.C. he had changed his attitude and decided to support it.

Gandhiji said he had come to the view that opposing the resolution would amount to violence and bring no results. Opposing the resolution would have been meaningful if all the members of the A.I.C.C. had been votaries of non-violence. Besides, the resolution left the door open to people of all views. Those who wanted to follow him in non-violence were left free to do so. There was no immediate prospect of the Congress being enabled to offer its cooperation in the war effort. When the time came and the Congress decided to cooperate with the Government those believing in non-violence could leave the Congress.

Why should the Congress be scared of foreign aggression? Why should those who were ready to lay down their lives for freedom fear the Germans or the Japanese or the Afghans or the goondas? If the people were afraid it was for the Congress to infuse fearlessness among them.

Gandhiji was asked if it was right for him to have permitted the sale of blankets to the army from khadi bhandars.

Yes, Gandhiji answered. It was a matter of simple business ethics. It was not for him to ask for whom the blankets were intended. The manufacturer of firearms could enquire for whom the firearms were being purchased. A chemist similarly would want a doctor's certificate before selling alcohol or poison. But a



rice-seller could not ask for whom the rice was required. Of course they were free to disagree with him and proceed as they thought proper.

As things were developing, there was going to be a famine of cloth in the country. The factories that were manufacturing cloth might be required to produce arms and ammunition and then even the Government might want us to supply khadi.

What was the duty of Congressmen in times of raids and scares and resulting disturbances? – Gandhiji was asked. He said:

The emergency is there today. Dacoities are rampant and unless the Congress asserts itself effectively, the situation will get out of our hands. The need for peace brigades was never more urgent than now. The risk of death is there, whether you choose violence or non-violence. Why not then prepare yourself to die non-violently? ...As for the protection of the wounded in air raids, the bulk of the work will come upon yourselves. You will not join the A.R.P.... But it is certain that the Government will not be able to render assistance everywhere. Did they do so in Rangoon? We have harrowing tales of the dead and wounded lying on the streets of Rangoon uncared for.... We have to prepare volunteers for this work, ready to take risks and to act with initiative.... In this work you will heartily cooperate with the authorities wherever they will accept your cooperation. [Ibid, pp. 224-40; C.W.M.G., LXXV, pp. 246-51]

6

In the midst of the momentous decisions that Gandhiji was called upon to take as regards the policy and programme of the Congress in the face of the dangers that confronted the country, he also had occasion to speak out again on the question of language. The opportunity was provided by the Silver Jubilee Convocation of the Benares Hindu University on 21 January 1942, which Gandhiji had been invited to address. The Vice-Chancellor of the University, Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, requested Gandhiji to send him a written address. But Gandhiji answered that he could not do so. He was nervous of speaking in front of learned men, he wrote to Radhakrishnan. The surroundings would give him the word. Speaking *ex tempore*, he reminded the audience that he had first spoken at the



University twenty-five years earlier in 1916 at the foundation-laying ceremony of the institution. He paid glowing tributes to the great work Madan Mohan Malaviya had done for the creation of the University and then, coming to the question of language, he said:

As speaker after speaker spoke and left the dais I longed for someone who would address the audience in Hindi or Urdu, or Hindustani, aye, even in Sanskrit, even in Marathi, or, for that matter, in any of the Indian languages. But no such good luck befell me and you. Why? We are slaves and have hugged the language of those who have kept us enslaved.

He mentioned the case of Japan, which had successfully challenged the supremacy of America and England. Boys and girls in Japan's schools received all their education only through the Japanese language. Had the Japanese chosen English as a medium of education, they might have learnt a new language, but they could not have made the progress they did in gaining new knowledge. [C.W.M.G., LXXV, pp. 240-45]

Gandhiji returned to the theme in an article in *Harijan* of 1 February 1942. He referred to Article 25 of the Congress constitution, which laid down that the proceedings of the Congress sessions, the A.I.C.C. and the Working Committee would be conducted in Hindustani and the proceedings of Provincial Congress Committees would be conducted in the language of the Province concerned, and regretted that the article in question had not been given effect to. The fault, Gandhiji wrote, was of Congressmen, for they did not take the trouble to learn Hindustani. The result had been tragic. Provincial languages had been impoverished and Hindustani had been displaced at the all-India level. It had led to a gulf being created between the leaders and the masses.

Hindustani, Gandhiji emphasized, was not a language apart from Hindi and Urdu. It was a scientific blend of the two. It was the common language of the unlettered millions of Hindus and Muslims living in northern India. The written language had taken "two different turns tending to widen the differences by each running away from the other". Gandhiji called upon the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan and the Anjuman Taraqqi-e-Urdu to produce literature that could be enjoyed by



both Hindus and Muslims and that could bridge the gulf that separated Urdu from Hindi. [Ibid, pp. 251-53]

Gandhiji's plea for Hindustani in his convocation address at the Benares Hindu University was misinterpreted. Some reports quoted him as saying that it was sinful for any Indian to study or speak in English. He was charged with insincerity, as he himself made liberal use of English.

Writing in *Harijan*, Gandhiji denied the accusation. He wrote:

The report is wholly untrue. But once an untruth gets a start it is most difficult to overtake.... Let it be known that I am a lover of the English language and the English. But my love is wise and intelligent. Therefore I give both the place they deserve.... I recognize the great importance of the English language for international intercourse. I hold its knowledge as a second language to be indispensable for specified Indians who have to represent the country's interest in the international domain. I regard the English language as an open window for peeping into Western thought and sciences. For this too I should set apart a class.... But I would not burden India's children and sap their youthful energy by expecting the expansion of their brains through the medium of a foreign language. I do hold it to be a sin on the part of those who are responsible for producing the unnatural condition under which we are being educated. Such a thing is unknown in any other part of the world. [Ibid, pp. 264-65]

An Urdu enthusiast, a Muslim, wrote to Gandhiji, protesting that in the name of Hindustani he was really advocating the cause of Hindi. Urdu, he wrote, was "more developed, more beautiful, more concise, and more expressive".

No language, Gandhiji wrote, was intrinsically all that the correspondent said. A language became what its speakers and writers made it. A language was a human creation and took the colour of its creators. Every language was capable of infinite expansion. English was what Englishmen had made it; Bengali was what Bankim and Tagore had made it.

Urdu was not really a language different from Hindi, Gandhiji asserted. It was only Hindi written in Persian script and having a sprinkling of words borrowed from Persian and Arabic. The existing Hindu-Muslim animosities had widened the



breach between the two but some day the animosities must come to an end. Then the coming generations would be proud of their common speech, Hindustani.

Gandhiji again made a plea for both forms of Hindustani written in both scripts being learnt by all and even suggested the formation of an association for the purpose. He hoped in time Hindustani would cease to be defined as Hindi plus Urdu. The equation then would be Hindustani = Hindi = Urdu. [Ibid, pp. 278-80]

7

January 1942 saw yet another initiative originating in India for ending the political deadlock and creating conditions for a larger participation of Indians in the country's affairs. This came in the form of a memorandum cabled to Winston Churchill, then in Washington, on 2 January. The memorandum; drafted by Sapru, was signed by himself and twelve other men distinguished in India's public life, namely, Srinivasa Sastri, M.R. Jayakar, Sir Jagdish Prasad, Sivaswami Aiyar, Lord Sinha, Raja Maharaj Singh, Moropant Joshi, Mohammad Yunus, Venkatarama Sastri, S. Radhakrishnan, Chunilal Mehta and Rahimtoola Chinoy.

The memorandum drew the British Prime Minister's attention to the gravity of the international situation and the need for enlisting the whole-hearted and active cooperation of India in the war effort, and appealed to him to show "some bold stroke of far-sighted statesmanship". It proceeded:

Is it not possible for you declare this juncture that India no longer be treated dependency to be ruled from Whitehall, and henceforth her constitutional position and powers identical with those other units British Commonwealth?

The concrete measures suggested were:

(1) Conversion and expansion of Central Executive Council into truly National Government, consisting entirely non-officials of all recognized parties and communities, and in charge of all portfolios subject only to responsibility to Crown.

(2) Restoration, in Provinces now ruled autocratically by Governors Section 93 Government of India Act, of popular Governments broad-based



on confidence different classes and communities; failing this, establishment of non-official Executive Councils responsible to Crown, as proposed for Centre.

(3) Recognition India's right to direct representation through men chosen by National Government in Imperial War Cabinet (should such body be set up) and in all allied war councils, wherever established, and at peace conference.

(4) Consultation with National Government, precisely same footing and same extent as His Majesty's Government consult Dominion Governments in all matters affecting Commonwealth as a whole and India in particular.

The memorandum said these were war measures whose adoption need in no way prejudice claims or demands of different parties in regard to India's permanent constitution. Nothing less than the policy enunciated could resolve the crisis in India. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. I, pp. 3-5]

The Tories in the India Committee, headed by Amery, received the proposals with a dismissive shrug. In his note to Churchill on 22 January Amery suggested that the British should stand firm "on the present position, i.e., both on our 1940 policy ...and on the present expanded Executive".

In the draft reply to Sapru that Amery prepared for Churchill he expressed the British Government's view that the existing Executive Council, which included a substantial number of Indians, was good enough and its replacement "lock, stock and barrel" by a new Executive, was not desirable. As for the Central Government of India being made responsible to the Crown, rather than to the Crown in Parliament,* the proposal would not be constitutionally satisfactory. Was the Governor General to become a personal autocrat amenable to no form of constitutional control?

So far as India's representation in various international and inter-Imperial bodies was concerned, the draft reply went on, India had been represented in the Imperial War Cabinets of 1917 and 1918, at the Peace Conferences and India had shortly before signed the declaration of aims by 26 United Nations.**



In so far as the Provinces were concerned, restoration of popular Governments there was in the hands of the people of each Province. The proposal about the formation of non-official Executive Councils in the Provinces "responsible to the Crown" was open to the same objection as in the case of the Centre. To whom would a Provincial Executive Council be responsible? – to the Governor ?

As Amery saw it, the task was to devise a framework of government "without fettering or overriding that individual freedom and way of life of the various profoundly different elements which make up the great sum total". All must come together to promote such a constitutional solution, but not during the war, not "under conditions which inevitably preclude due consideration either in India or in Parliament". [Ibid, pp. 31-34]

Linlithgow also expressed his disapproval of the Sapru proposals. He was opposed to the severance of the parliamentary control demanded, what *The Times* had called "Home Rule for the Viceroy" and to the idea of a non-official Executive Council, which could not be brought together without the support of the majority parties. Countenancing Sapru's proposals, Linlithgow said, would also antagonize the Muslim League and the Princes. He too was for the British Government to stand firm and make no further move. [Ibid, pp. 47-48]

In another telegram to the Secretary of State he said none of the signatories to the memorandum was by himself of any real political importance, and only two of them were Muslims. The members of the existing Council, he said, were better men than the signatories, including Sapru himself.

He also addressed Churchill on the issue, saying: "I have no doubt myself as to wisdom of standing firm and facing the music, and I am sure you will agree. If there is anything that can possibly be done to damp down ill-conceived speculation ...it would be invaluable. Immense harm has been done here by campaign that has been run at home for the last three or four months." [Ibid, pp. 52-54]

Attlee, while agreeing generally with the draft reply of Amery, felt that it would have to be followed by some action. He expressed his lack of confidence in Linlithgow's judgment and said it was worth considering whether someone



should not be charged with a mission to try to bring the political leaders together. [Ibid, p. 75]

On 28 January Amery, in a paper for the ensuing debate on India in Parliament, argued that the question involved in the political deadlock in India was not whether to transfer power to Indian hands, for it had already been settled in principle by the pledge given in the name of the British Government, culminating in the Viceroy's declarations of 10 January 1940 and August 1940. The question was to what Indian hands the power must be transferred.

Full Dominion Status in accordance with the Statute of Westminster and full and equal partnership had been promised as soon as possible after the war under a constitution of Indian devising. This was in keeping with the principle enunciated in Article III of the Atlantic Charter. But the question arose what constituted the people or peoples of India whose freedom of choice as to the form of Government was to be respected. There were in India two great communities, over and above all other local differences. They were as separate, as antagonistic in culture and outlook as any of the contending nations in Europe. Echoing the stand taken by the Muslim League Amery asserted that they could not be classified as majority and minority.

The Congress, in its ingrained conviction that it was the natural heir to the British Government in India ignored this fundamental issue. It was also ignored by the British Parliament when it based the Government of India Act of 1935 on the possibility of a Central Government on British lines, and thought that the position of the Muslim community could be safeguarded by separate electorates. The experience of the Congress Governments in the Provinces and the centralized dictatorship of the Congress High Command had further alienated the Muslims and led them to reject entirely any system of Government for India as a whole. The demand for Pakistan was the extreme form of that rejection. Amery expressed the hope that practical considerations would induce the Muslims to accept "some form of all-India Government over a carefully limited field and under some mutually agreed constitution". The parliamentary responsible Government as envisaged by the Declaration of 1917 and worked out in the Act of 1935, Amery declared, was no longer in the picture.



As for the Sapru memorandum and its demand for the conversion of the existing Executive Council into a National Government, the crux of the problem was who would comprise the Executive. The signatories themselves including Sapru, were not capable of delivering the goods. The Congress had not shown that it would accept even the principle. The Muslim League might accept but only on a pledge that Pakistan would not be ruled out. It would also insist on more places than the Hindu parties would be willing to concede.

Amery concluded that there was no immediate further interim constitutional advance that the British Government could make. It must stick to the August 1940 declaration and to the pledges which it embodied. [Ibid, pp. 81-90]

Attlee again disagreed. In a note for the Cabinet on 2 February he said he was unable to accept the conclusion "that nothing can and should be done at the present time". He argued:

The Secretary of State thinks that we may weather the immediate storm by doing nothing; but what of subsequent storms? Such a hand-to-mouth policy is not statesmanship....

I find it quite impossible to accept and act on the crude imperialism of the Viceroy....

I think it is fatally short-sighted and suicidal. I should certainly not be prepared to cover up this ugliness with a cloak of pious sentiment about liberty and democracy....

I do consider that now is the time for an act of statesmanship. To mark time is to lose India.

Attlee suggested two practical alternatives:

(a) To entrust some person of high standing either already in India or sent from here with wide powers to negotiate a settlement in India or
(b) to bring representative Indians over here to discuss with us a settlement....

It would be necessary to give our representative very wide powers both as to the future and as to the present....



Attlee concluded:

My conclusion therefore is that a representative with power to negotiate within wide limits should be sent to India now, either as a special envoy or in replacement of the present Viceroy, and that a Cabinet Committee should be appointed to draw up terms of reference and powers. [Ibid, pp. 110-12]

*Under the existing constitutional arrangement, introduced by the Government of India Act of 1858, the control of the Government of India, which had till then been the responsibility of the President of the Board of Control of the East India Company, rested in the hands of the Secretary of State for India, who was, in subordination to the British Cabinet, the fountain of authority in India. He was assisted by the Council of India, which had replaced the Board of Control. [Percival Spear, *The Oxford History of Modern India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1992, p. 229]

**On 1 January 1942 in Washington, G. S. Bajpai, India's Agent General in the U.S.A., had signed on behalf of India the Joint Declaration of the United Nations, referring to the Atlantic Charter as "a common programme of purposes and principles." [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. I, p. 11]

8

Attlee's proposal that some positive and demonstrative action was called for in India expressed the feeling of a growing number of people in the British Cabinet and in Parliament. This feeling was the result of the increased threat to India and the need more effectively to mobilize the country for defence on the one hand and the pressure from Britain's allies in the war, the U.S.A. and China, for some steps to be taken to associate nationalist India with the war effort. The visit of Chiang Kai-shek to India in the second week of February lent an edge to this feeling.

On 13 February Amery informed Linlithgow that his draft reply to Sapru had been rejected by Churchill "as merely argumentative and negative in substance" and that the Prime Minister contemplated answering Sapru by an entirely novel method of a broadcast appeal to India. This would call upon Indians to leave aside all controversies during the war and make their full contribution to the war effort. The Prime Minister would ask Indians, including the Princes, "to



whom we are joined by treaties" to come together in a representative Indian Defence Council, which, during the war, would help in the war effort by way of recruitment, production of munitions, organizing Air Raid Precautions and steadying the population in case of raids or invasions. After the war it would "set to work without delay to hammer out India's future constitution". This constitution would have to be "an expression of the desire of the people of India as a whole to adopt the proposals so framed".

Churchill, in a separate communication to the Viceroy, said that the broadcast would not take place for ten days and that possible fall of Singapore would be considered in timing. [Ibid, pp. 157-61]

Linlithgow opposed the idea. The political parties would reject it, the existing Defence Council, which was nominated by the Viceroy, would resent being replaced, the Legislature would be sidetracked and communal rivalries would increase and affect the conduct of the war. He told Churchill, "I am well aware of the gravity of the military position in Burma and the Malay Archipelago, but that is no reason for doing anything hasty or unsound ...we must regard the morale and fighting value of the Army as more important than U.S.A. opinion or that of any minorities in the U.K." He had also the gravest objection to the Defence Council being given the function of constitution-making after the war. [Ibid, pp. 165-71]

A further objection, which Amery raised, was that in the proposed Defence Council the Congress was bound to be the largest element, while Muslims would be less than one-third of the British Indian representatives and less than one-fourth of the whole body. [Ibid, pp. 175-76]

9

An event that came as a shot in the arm for the Congress and exposed the pettiness of Churchill, Amery and Linlithgow, was the visit to India of Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek in February 1942. The visit which lasted 12 days from 9 to 21 February assumed importance in the context of the military debacle suffered by the British in Malaya and Singapore and imminent threat posed to Burma.



On 24 January 1942 the British Government received word from Clark Kerr, British Ambassador in Chungking, that Chiang Kai-shek wished to pay a visit to Burma and India to examine with the authorities the military situation about which he felt considerable anxiety, and to see Gandhiji and Nehru.

The Chinese leader's explicitly expressed wish to see Gandhiji and Nehru threw the British into a tizzy. Did he think the Congress was the only party that mattered? What about Jinnah? If he saw Gandhiji and Nehru, Linlithgow said, he would make sure that he saw Jinnah too, whether he liked it or not. The British War Cabinet considered that it would be most unfortunate if the impression was given that Chiang was going to India to see the Viceroy, Gandhi and Nehru. The best course would be for Chiang to see the Viceroy, who would then ask him which representative Indian personalities he would want to see. The Viceroy could then invite them to Delhi to meet Chiang.

Churchill on 3 February telegraphed to Chiang saying that his desire to see "persons like Mr. Gandhi and Mr. Nehru, who are in a state at least of passive disobedience to the King Emperor", was a serious matter and should be talked over first with the Viceroy. In any case, he must also then see Jinnah, who represented 80 million Muslims, leaders of 40 million depressed classes and the Princes, ruling over 80 million people. The Congress in no way represented the "martial races" of India.

Churchill also told the Viceroy: "We cannot possibly agree to Head of Foreign State intervening as a kind of impartial arbiter between representative of King Emperor and Messrs Gandhi and Nehru... In no circumstances must he be allowed to see Nehru... by getting off at Allahabad or wherever Nehru may be."

The British Government soon received intimation that the principal purpose of Chiang's visit was to see Nehru, whom he knew, and Gandhiji, and that if he were prevented he would feel as if he had been tricked.

On 10 February a Government functionary called on Gandhiji with a message from the Viceroy inviting him to Delhi to see Chiang. Gandhiji told him that he had already received a telegraphic communication from Delhi that the Generalissimo and Madame Chiang would be visiting Wardha on 12 or 13 February.



Linlithgow told Amery he would prevent any such visit taking place, and that he had informed Madame Chiang accordingly. He had taken steps, he informed the Secretary of State, to see that Chiang should not be able to obtain transport for Wardha "whether by train, air or road". Even at the cost of offending him he would be compelled to respect the wishes of the Viceroy in the matter.

The Foreign Office was a bit troubled by the way things were going. There was another side to the picture. Eden told Churchill, "If things go wrong in Burma, it will be most difficult to keep China in the war and Chiang Kai-shek would be our only hope." Couldn't the meeting take place elsewhere than in Delhi or Wardha?

What with the rulers determined to prevent Chiang going to Wardha and the latter unwilling to put Gandhiji to the trouble of journeying out anywhere else to see him, Gandhiji at one point gave up the hope of meeting the Generalissimo. On 11 February he wrote to him to convey his regret. He said: "The knowledge that circumstances over which you and I have no control make it impossible for us to meet brings us closer in spirit."

It was then mooted that Gandhiji should meet Chiang at Santiniketan while the latter was on his way back on the conclusion of his visit. Amery informed Churchill: "Santiniketan is Rabindranath Tagore's centre of spiritual meditation and has always been thought well of by the authorities" and there could be no objection to Gandhiji's meeting him there as the place was not "a rival headquarters of authority in India".

Gandhiji did make the journey and saw Chiang and his lady at Calcutta on 18 February. The meeting lasted four and a half hours. Chiang painted a vivid picture of the horrendous deeds of Japan in China and expressed the fear that if Japan should overrun India, India too would be subjected to similar cruelties. Although he agreed with Gandhiji that civil resistance was not mere passivity, he was doubtful of its being applied successfully against the Japanese. Gandhiji said:

All I can say is that God gives me the guidance to react to situations as they arise. Though, therefore, I cannot say how exactly I will react in case of an invasion I know that God will give me the proper guidance.

Gandhiji had kept spinning all the time the meeting lasted, and at the end presented to Chiang the yarn he had spun. Gandhiji summed up the result of the meeting in a letter he wrote to Vallabhbhai Patel on 25 February:



He came empty-handed and left empty-handed. He had only one thing to say: Help the British anyhow. They are better than the others and will improve further hereafter.

Chiang, in his farewell message to the people of India, while calling upon them to help the allies in the war against Japan, expressed the sincere hope that "our ally Great Britain without waiting for any demands on the part of the people of India will as speedily as possible give them real political power, so that they may be in a position further to develop their spiritual and material strength". [Ibid, pp. 62, 76, 79-80, 92, 101-2, 113-14, 119-22, 143, 148-49, 153, 182-83, 190-91, 231-33; *C.W.M.G.*, LXXV, pp. 306, 311, 313, 330, 333-34, 342, 346, 359]

Jinnah immediately issued a statement referring to the hope expressed by Chiang that the British would as speedily as possible give the people of India political power and regretting that the Marshal should have indulged in generalities. India, he reiterated, was not one national State, its two major nations being Hindus and Musalmans. Besides one-third of India was under Princes. He in his turn hoped that the British Government and public would not be carried away by Chiang's generalities. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. I, p. 233]

10

All this time, in London, Churchill's brainchild, a representative National Defence Council, which would in the interim mobilize India for the war effort and after the war transform itself into a constitution-making body, had remained in incubation.

The proposal had to be dropped in the end. Amery and Linlithgow, supporting each other, put up a fierce resistance against the scheme. The Viceroy informed London that the Governors did not think much of it. He cited several grounds: (1) it would hinder war effort, (2) it had no chance of being accepted by the Congress, and (3) if the Congress accepted it the Muslims and the Princes would be antagonized. [Ibid, p. 215]

But the pressure being exerted on the Government not only by the deteriorating war situation, not only by the feelings being expressed by the U.S.A. and China that Britain was not doing all it could to associate the Indian masses with the war, but also by the growing criticism of the Government's India policy



in Britain itself: in the British press, in Parliament and inside the Government, persuaded Churchill that some move had to be made. Therefore, though the idea of a National Defence Council had not caught on, the idea of a broadcast declaration to India remained. The question was in what terms it should be framed and phrased.

The Muslims had to be kept happy and therefore the British Government could not go back upon its pledge to them contained in the August 1940 declaration. On the other hand the insistence upon agreement that that declaration envisaged had been taken as giving Jinnah a veto on all constitutional progress. Amery then came up with a bright idea — the idea that was to become the basis of Pakistan. On 25 February, referring to the matter, he wrote to Churchill:

There is only one way of meeting this criticism, and that is to couple with a reaffirmation of our pledge to the minorities, the positive affirmation that the majority can go ahead of itself if it wants to. Happily, the distribution of Muslims and Hindus is such that this can be done on a purely Provincial basis, by declaring that if a majority of Provinces agree upon a constitution, we will accept it so far as they are concerned, leaving dissident Provinces to stay out for the time being or even altogether. [Ibid, p. 240]

The War Cabinet Okayed the idea at its meeting the following day [Ibid, p. 252] and Amery produced a draft declaration for the War Cabinet to consider at its meeting on 28 February.

The declaration sought to lay down "in precise and clear terms" the steps proposed to be taken for the earliest possible realization of self-government in India. It reaffirmed the British Government's object of creating a new Indian Union which should constitute a Dominion, equal in every respect to other Dominions, and free to remain or separate itself from the British Commonwealth. The terms, finalised after several revisions which the first draft underwent, were as follows:

(a) Immediately upon the cessation of hostilities, steps shall be taken to set up in India, in the manner described hereafter, an elected body charged with the task of framing a new Constitution for India.



(b) Provision shall be made, as set out below, for the participation of the Indian States in the Constitution-making body.

(c) His Majesty's Government undertake to accept and implement forthwith the Constitution so framed subject only to:

(i) The right of any Province of British India that is not prepared to accept the new Constitution to retain its present constitutional position, provision being made for its subsequent accession if it so decides.

With such non-acceding Provinces, should they so desire, His Majesty's Government will be prepared to agree upon new constitutional arrangements on lines analogous to those here laid down.

(ii) The signing of a treaty which shall be negotiated between His Majesty's Government and the Constitution-making body. This treaty will cover all necessary matters of responsibility arising out of the complete transfer of responsibility from British to Indian hands; it will make provision ...for the protection of racial and religious minorities....

(d) The Constitution-making body shall be composed as follows....

Immediately upon the result being known of the Provincial elections which will be necessary at the end of hostilities, the entire membership of the Lower Houses of the Provincial Legislatures shall, as a single electoral college, proceed to the election of the Constitution-making body by the system of proportional representation. This new body shall be in number about one-tenth of number of the electoral college.

Indian States shall be invited to appoint representatives in the same proportion to their total population as in the case of the representatives of British India as a whole....

(e) While during the critical period which now faces India, and until the new Constitution can be framed, His Majesty's Government must inevitably bear the full responsibility for the defence of India, they desire and invite the immediate and effective participation of the leaders of the



principal sections of the Indian people in the counsels of their country, of the Commonwealth and of the United Nations. Thus they will be enabled to give their active and constructive help in the discharge of a task which is vital and essential for the future freedom of India. [Ibid, pp. 266-67, 292-93, 314-15, 357-58]

The draft was transmitted to Dominion Prime Ministers as "the final and definite scheme for ending present dead-lock". Smuts of South Africa was one of the first to see through the game.

He telegraphed to Churchill on 5 March:

Express opening left for partition may be taken as British invitation or incitement to partition and may lead to most unfavourable reaction in India as a whole or among majority of its people.... Unless Indian opinion has been prepared for an announcement of such a character it may come as a great shock and do more harm than good. [Ibid, p. 327]

Reactions from Governors of Provinces were not enthusiastic either, Glancy of the Punjab wrote to the Viceroy that granting of local option would have serious repercussions in the Punjab, which was not homogeneous but made up of communities antagonistic to each other and trouble would be unavoidable. He did not anticipate that the Punjab would accede. The Muslim League would gain great accession of strength and the Premier and his Ministers would probably resign. [Ibid, p. 321]

Linlithgow too was full of misgivings on the score of local option. He feared "immediate effect of great unsettlement which will probably become dangerous as communal struggle over these proposals develops. Local option will be interpreted as acceptance of Pakistan...." [Ibid, p. 328]

He in fact asked for local option to be removed from the declaration and a pledge to the minorities reaffirmed. On 6 March in a telegram to Amery he said:

A promise of local option by itself is no comfort to minority Muslims in the U.P. and Bihar, and must rouse gravest apprehensions and bitterest feelings among Sikhs in the Punjab unless accompanied by specific renewal of our pledge. [Ibid, p. 330]



The War Cabinet was not impressed by the criticism. In any case the work on the scheme was too far advanced. On 4 March Churchill reassuringly telegraphed to Roosevelt:

We are earnestly considering whether a declaration of Dominion Status after the war carrying with it if desired the right to secede should be made at this critical juncture. We must not on any account break with the Muslims.... We have also to consider our duty towards thirty to forty million untouchables and our treaties with the Princes' states of India, perhaps eighty millions. [Ibid, pp. 309-10]

The draft of proposed declaration having been finalized the timing and the method of making it public remained to be considered.

At the War Cabinet meeting on 9 March Churchill expressed the view that the immediate issue of the declaration, without any preliminary sounding of public opinion in India, would be most unwise and might lead to the rejection of the declaration by the Congress. The right course, he said, would be to accept the offer made by Cripps to visit India and discuss matters with the leaders of the main Indian political parties.

The War Cabinet approved the draft, approved the proposal for Cripps to visit India with authority to discuss the scheme embodied in the Declaration, asked the Secretary of State to inform the Viceroy, and agreed that the Prime Minister should announce the decision about the Cripps mission in Parliament on 11 March, the date decided for Cripps to set out on the journey. [Ibid, p. 379]

The Cripps mission thus was the combined outcome of the Bardoli resolution, the Sapru memorandum, the British reverses in Malaya and Burma, the pressure from the Allies and the insistence of Attlee and Cripps that some fresh move should be made to end the deadlock.



PART III
THE BRITISH RESPONSE



CHAPTER IX: THE CRIPPS MISSION

1

On 11 February 1942 Seth Jamnalal Bajaj, the great philanthropist, the most ardent champion of all causes dear to Gandhiji and accepted by Gandhiji as his "fifth son", died after a massive heart attack. At 2 p.m. that day Gandhiji received word on the phone that Jamnalal had been taken ill, that his blood-pressure had risen to 250/115 and that he was unconscious. Gandhiji rushed to Jamnalal's ancestral residence at Wardha in a car. But by the time he arrived all was over.

The night before there had been messages from Delhi that Chiang Kai-shek would be visiting Wardha to see Gandhiji, and Jamnalal had been full of enthusiasm and excitement at the prospect of receiving the Chinese leader. He had issued instructions for the guest house to be vacated and spruced up for the stay of the Generalissimo and his party. The blow, therefore, was unexpected and stunning. Janakidevi Bajaj was inconsolable and for once overtaken by the impulse to immolate herself with her husband's body in an act of *sati*. Gandhiji had a hard time dissuading her from the course.

He told her that the best way she could become a true *sati* would be to renounce her all for the sake of her husband's work.

Janakidevi complied. She not only made over all the money in her account — about 2 ½ lakh rupees — but also took a vow dedicating all her time and energies for the work of the Goseva Sangh, the first love of Jamnalal Bajaj.

Following her example and under Gandhiji's urging, her sons, too, who between them had a sum amounting to about 6 lakh rupees, given to them by their father to be spent on public causes, handed over the entire sum to Gandhiji. In addition they undertook to continue the practice, started by Jamnalal, of spending every year a sum of about Rs. 2,000 on hospitality to Congressmen and other workers in the national cause.

On 14 February Gandhiji addressed a circular letter to about 190 friends and co-workers of Jamnalal, summoning them for a meeting on 20 February to decide who would attend to Jamnalal's work and how. Gandhiji wrote:



You know how close Jamnalalji and I were. I seldom undertook an activity in which he did not cooperate with body, mind and wealth. I never fancied what goes by the name of politics, nor did he. He came into it because I was involved in it... I had hoped that after me he would completely take over all those activities which are regarded as peculiarly mine...But man's wish is fulfilled only by God.

Gandhiji then gave a list "in chronological order" of the activities in which Jamnalal had a special interest. These were: (1) Goseva, (2) *Nayee Talim*, (3) Village Industries, (4) Women's service, (5) Service of Harijan, (6) Gandhi Seva Sangh, (7) Khadi, (8) States' People's Conference, (9) Propagation of Hindustani, (10) Satyagraha Ashram and service of the villages, and (11) Marwari Education Society, established in 1910; and Navabharat Vidyalaya and College.

The workers duly assembled at Wardha on 20 February. Prominent among them were Rajendra Babu, Rajaji, Kaka Kalelkar, Satyanarayan and Shriman Narayan. The meeting was informal — Gandhiji said there was no need for a president. Gandhiji explained that the range of Jamnalal's activities was so vast that no single person could hope to carry them on all by himself. All would have to cooperate. There was first the work of cow-protection. There was enough money but not enough workers. There was need for taking over the *pinjrapols* and for setting up stud farms for improvig the breed. Then there was khadi. Gandhiji said he himself had only provided the mantra. It was Jamnalal who had given it the body. He had organized the work and provided it a sound footing. For the village industries he had given away Maganwadi. [C.W.M.G., LXXV, pp. 306, 308-10, 312-13, 315-16, 342-49, 351-53; The Diary of Mahadev Desai (unpublished), Book No. 43, pp. 280-87, 299-308]

2

On 15 February, Singapore, considered an impregnable fortress and the strongest British base east of Suez, fell to the Japanese. The Japanese army, comprising about 30,000 men, breached the causeway, landed along a ten-mile front, having crossed the strait in barges, and seized the water reservoirs in the heart of the island. Deprived of water, the defending force, comprising 90,000 men, a large proportion of them Indians, surrendered. [Percival Spear, *The Oxford History of Modern India*, p. 377]



The Japanese next advanced on Burma from Siam and were soon in control of lower Burma. Rangoon fell on 8 March.

The British rout in Malaya, Singapore and Burma appeared outwardly quite unexpected and incomprehensible. In Singapore they had many more men than the Japanese and more armour. In Burma, though relatively weaker, they had the support of two Chinese armies under Stilwell and the American voluntary group of "Flying Tigers". As the story of the debacle slowly unfolded, it became clear that British Imperialism, far from being invincible, actually had feet of clay. It had neither the material nor the moral resources to sustain itself. Opposed by the populations over which it ruled, it had long lost its *raison d'etre*. About the conditions in Burma *Daily Mail* of London wrote on 28 March 1942:

Numbers of Burmese went over to the enemy. The Jap formed them into Burmese bands with blue uniforms, and it is believed that these were in action against us. Certainly these were active in sabotage. The civilian population also to some extent were anti-British.

A pilot of the American group "Flying Tigers" reported:

Natives in many districts have rebelled and are killing unarmed Britishers. The Burmese are assisting the advancing Japanese in every possible way.... Rangoon is a horrible place. Foreigners risk their lives when they walk in the city, which is completely in the hands of the looters and killers who are running amok.

And a correspondent of the *New York Times*, giving reasons for the British defeat in Burma, wrote:

The open hostility of the people caused us to fight blindly.... Intelligence broke down almost completely. The Japs were led by the Burmese people through country paths, jungles, thickets, into the rear of our position again and again, causing numerous road blocks, clogging our supply lines, disrupting communications and causing an adverse psychological effect on the minds of men and officers.... Rail roads were wrecked, cars were fired upon in the dark.... The Japanese and small groups of active Burmese that were their allies, literally and devastatingly burned their way through Burma....



Every cottage was a machine-gun nest. They (our troops) have trampled over treeless, waterless hills, and been sniped at by Burman traitors and Japs posing as Chinese. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1942, Vol. I, pp. 114-16]

3

Foreigners settled in Burma, Englishmen and Indians, fled for their lives as conditions got worse and the Japanese stranglehold on the country tightened. In the Council of State a Government spokesman, making a statement on 23 February, said that so far 65,000 Indian civilians had left Burma. He mentioned two land routes from Burma to India, "both of which were freely used without any restrictions" and that the Government had made arrangements to provide shelter, food and medical aid along the routes. He said there had been no racial discrimination in the treatment of the evacuees. [*Ibid*, pp. 158-59]

The Government's claim that there had been no racial discrimination in the treatment of evacuees was far from the truth. According to the Government's own admission, made in a debate in the Central Assembly, 5,000 persons had been evacuated from Penang in Malaya, of whom not even one was an Indian. In the case of evacuees from Burma, too, such arrangements as had been made were meant principally for the European population and at every step racial discrimination had been in evidence. There was one route for the whites, another for the Indians, popularly known as the "White Road" and the "Black Road". A *Time* correspondent in his despatch wrote of the utmost misery that he witnessed. "Roads were lined with belongings abandoned by refugees", he reported. The day before a crowd of 20,000 evacuees had crossed the Irrawady, hoping to get to India, but their chances of reaching their destination were very slight. Those that managed to make the journey, he wrote, "were unanimous in complaining bitterly of the callous and insulting attitude of the evacuation officers and their principal subordinates".

A team of members of the Central Assembly visiting the border stations in Assam and Manipur said the Indian refugees were treated in such a way as to humiliate them and make them feel that they belonged to an inferior race. [*Ibid*, pp. 143-44]



Gandhiji expressed his distress at "the avoidable hardships and blatant discrimination" in the treatment of Britishers and Indians. He wrote:

I understand that there are over eight lakhs of Indians in Burma yet to be evacuated. Life for them in Burma is impossible. The question is too big to be tackled by any existing organization.... Let us hope that there are enough public-spirited men who will make it their business to form themselves into a committee and see this very humanitarian work through. [C.W.M.G., LXXVI, p. 55]

The All-India Congress Committee, at its meeting on 29 April could not but take note of the blatant racial discrimination in the treatment of European and Indian evacuees. In a resolution the Committee said:

Because of this and because of the utter incompetence, callousness and selfishness of those in authority, vast numbers of Indians in Malaya and Burma have not only lost all they possessed, but have also undergone unimaginable sufferings, many dying on the way from lack of necessities of life, from disease, or from attacks from anti-social elements.

Racial discrimination was shown at the base camps in Burma where special arrangements were made for Europeans and Anglo-Burmans while Indians were left almost uncared for.... In particular this was in evidence in the scandal of a safer and more convenient route being practically reserved for non-Indians, while Indians were forced to travel by a longer, more difficult and more dangerous route. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1942, Vol. I, pp. 292-93]

4

The impact on the morale in India of these events was most damaging. On 26 February Linlithgow was reporting to Amery:

There is widespread apprehension that Japanese attack on the land of India by sea, land and air cannot be long delayed. Reports from coastal towns indicate consternation and in one or two areas preparations were intensified for a large-scale dispersal to places of greater safety.

There was, too, fear of communal disturbances, the Viceroy said. The situation was made worse by Axis broadcasts and rumours being circulated by evacuees from Burma. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. I, p. 253]



The demoralization, both in the administration and among the people, was particularly marked in Orissa. Governor H. Lewis reported to the Viceroy on 14 March that the fall of Rangoon had resulted in a marked increase in the general uneasiness. The Ministers, he said, had suggested immediate adjournment of the Assembly to enable legislators to go home. There had been continuous reports of incendiarism from Puri in spite of police precautions. The Ministers, he said, had agreed that a notice should be put out that the coastal belt of Orissa was not immune from risk of air raid or even landings, and that, therefore, those who wished to leave for less exposed areas further inland had best take the first opportunity to do so. [Ibid, p. 418]

The British military brass shared the general feeling that Orissa might be the first victim of Japanese ravages in their advance into India. Wavell's view was that the next Japanese move would "probably be a creep forward from Burma along the coast under the shelter of their air umbrella", and that the all-important thing was to get sufficient air force into Eastern India to prevent this. The Navy on the other hand was anxious for as many bombers as could be spared to be made available for reconnaissance work in the Bay of Bengal. It saw a threat of Japanese attack on Ceylon and danger to the Indian Ocean west of Ceylon which was the main artery of supply both for India and the Middle East.

The politicians were divided in their assessment. While Churchill thought it more likely that the Japanese would first conquer Northern Burma in order to push into China over the Burma Road and thus bring about an early collapse of Chungking. Amery was inclined to the view that "the temptation of starting trouble and panic in India will appeal more to the Japanese and will also be more to the liking of their Axis allies." [Ibid, pp. 443-44]

The Governor of Orissa was most concerned about the vulnerability of the coastal districts of the Province, particularly of Cuttack, and with it of himself and his Government, all of whom could be taken prisoner by a small party of soldiers. He asked for help from the Viceroy, who quietly explained to him that because of the general military position he did not propose to squander troops for the protection of Orissa. Any facade of defence that might be put up would crumble if the Japs landed. [Ibid, pp. 298-99]

On 11 April the Government of Orissa in a communique warned the



public that Japanese successes in Burma and the Far East had made it necessary to face the possibility that the enemy might attempt landings on the coast of India. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1942, Vol. I, p. 70]

As the threat loomed nearer and nearer, the panic increased both among the rulers and the ruled. The rulers' first thought of course was how they could save their own skins.

Just one example, that of Madras, would suffice. On 10 April there was a scare in the Southern Command of the Army that a large Japanese force was about to invade South India. Troop movements followed. The Governor immediately took steps to move all the offices of the Government inland to Ootacamund and Chittoor. He found it "unthinkable" to have the whole administration involved in possible "street fighting" and run the risk of being captured. The result of his action was a great increase in the exodus from the city, which, as he later reported to the Viceroy, he had anticipated. He wrote:

I am sorry to say that some of the Europeans even in the hills, gave way to sheer terror and were demanding to be evacuated from Ootacamund of all places. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. I, p. 801]

Gandhiji appealed for calmness. There was, he wrote, not the slightest cause for alarm, certainly not for those who believed in non-violence and had cast out fear. Workers must steel themselves against cowardly panic and prevent its spread among the people. One of the best precautions was for people not wanted in the cities to migrate to the villages in an orderly manner. All must carry out instructions issued by the authorities from time to time. [C.W.M.G., LXXV, pp. 325-26]

A couple of weeks later he repeated the advice. He wrote in *Harijan* of 15 March 1942:

No one is obliged to stay against his will. In the event of bombardment, it is clear that non-combatants can only be a burden in every way. Successful defence against a powerful enemy requires exclusive concentration on holding the enemy at bay. The defender's attention must not be divided.



Having evacuated the cities and gone to the villages, the people must not reproduce city conditions in the villages. They must live like the villagers, Gandhiji wrote. They should serve the villagers, study their economic and other conditions and ameliorate their lot, not by giving them alms but by giving the villagers work of a permanent nature. In other words they should work the constructive programme in the villages. They would have to face the problem of loot and dacoities. These could be tackled by organizing armed defence with the cooperation of the villagers. They must not depend on the Government for their defence. [Ibid, pp. 401-2]

5

With the war situation fast deteriorating and the threat of invasion of India looming ever nearer, foreign soldiers had started pouring into India on their way to the Eastern front. American, British, Australian and other soldiers tramping the streets of cities had become a common sight. They tended to be wayward and unruly and their behaviour with the public was far from civilized.

Gandhiji was flooded with piteous letters from correspondents complaining of the misbehaviour of troops. They molested hawkers, helped themselves to eatables and assaulted salesmen who protested. [Ibid, p. 293]

When it came to the behaviour with the public Indian soldiers were no less uncivilized than the foreign. When they were about, women and girls were not free from fear of molestation. The wife of an official was criminally assaulted by Indian soldiers in a train. The official lodged a complaint with the police but was persuaded by his superiors to withdraw it. With the men in uniform loose on the streets, no woman's honour appeared to be safe. [Ibid, p. 416]

Gandhiji advised that women should leave the cities and migrate to the villages, where there was comparatively less risk of being assaulted. They must also cultivate fearlessness. A fearless woman, Gandhiji asserted, could never be assaulted. They must realize that every soldier was not a beast, just as every snake was not poisonous. Only a minority of them were bereft of a sense of decency. In any case, Gandhiji advised, when a woman was assaulted, she must stop thinking in terms of violence and non-violence. She must defend herself by



employing every method or means possible. She must use her nails and her teeth with all her strength and, if need be, die in the effort.

And what about a man who was witness to such a crime? He must protect the woman being assaulted. If in a train, he must not rest satisfied by merely pulling the chain. If he could not be non-violent he must use physical force to foil the assailant. Either way he must be ready to lay down his life. [Ibid, pp. 337-39]

Gandhiji continued to be flooded with complaints of soldiers' misbehaviour from all parts of the country. The Secretary of the Marwari Relief Society of Calcutta reported that a British tommy had seized a small child of an evacuee family from Burma and thrown him under the train. Every night, the correspondent wrote, groups of soldiers loitered on the platform and there was growing fear of clashes between them and the relief volunteers. [Ibid, pp. 420-21]

On 18 March in a fracas at Sarnath, soldiers beat up a group of 11 students so mercilessly that two of them died. The matter figured in the Central Legislative Assembly in an adjournment motion. The motion was, however, disallowed. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1942, Vol. I, pp. 65-66]

A serious consequence of the influx of foreign soldiers was the dislocation of the economic life of the country. Lines of transportation had to be reoriented to ensure uninterrupted flow of supplies to ports in Eastern India. The strain on the railways became heavy. Huge sums were diverted for construction of airfields and other preparations. Prices rose and shortages became chronic.

The writing on the wall had been there even before the British collapse in Singapore and Burma. The Congress was acutely aware of the grim days awaiting the country. An A.I.C.C. circular issued on 21 January had said:

During these times of stress and strain, owing to the great poverty, unemployment and scarcity prevalent in the land, there are possibilities of food riots and consequent looting of grain shops. Advantage may also be taken by anti-social forces of the prevalent uncertainty and scarcity to create internal confusion.

The circular called upon Congressmen to concentrate on the constructive programme to minimize the possibility of looting and rioting and form volunteer corps in villages to keep anti-social elements in check. [Ibid, p. 286]



Wheat in particular was in acute shortage and it was selling in most of the big markets at double the pre-war price. This was because large amounts of it were being exported out of the country for military purposes without any attention being paid to the needs of the civilian population in the country. The matter figured in a question being asked in the Council of State on 10 March. The Government said it was concerned at "the very unfortunate state of affairs" and assured the house that it would do everything possible to remedy things. [Ibid, pp. 163, 173]

6

When in the second week of March 1942 the British War Cabinet took the decision to send Cripps to India with the British Government's proposals for a settlement, the country was thus passing through one of the gravest crises of its history. The crisis was many-dimensional. It was ideological, political, economic, and military. While the menace of Japanese invasion crept nearer and nearer, the national will to resist it was absent. Political leaders and people they led were so distrustful of the British and so fed up with their rule that many of them wondered if the Japanese would not be a lesser evil. Food shortages and spiralling prices of commodities, the effect of which was further compounded by migrations from cities on the Eastern coast, such as Calcutta, Cuttack and Madras had added to the rigours of existence for the common man. Law and order in many areas appeared to be on the verge of break-down from the increase in dacoities and the plundering instincts of foreign troops, who appeared as an altogether new phenomenon on the Indian scene.

As mentioned earlier, it was on 9 March that the War Cabinet took the decision to send Cripps to India with the proposals, perfected after strenuous efforts of a month and a half. It had previously been contemplated that they should form the subject-matter of a speech by the Prime Minister in Parliament. But the Viceroy and the Commander-in-Chief warned that, as framed, the proposals had no chance of being accepted by India, especially the clause dealing with the option of non-accession to Provinces, and accordingly it was considered the wiser course that there should be some sounding of public opinion in India first.



The British politicians had made sure that the proposals offered nothing beyond what had already been offered by the Viceroy in his declaration of August 1940. On 2 March, Amery wrote to Linlithgow not to worry, for "it seems to me that the bark of the new declaration is in many ways more alarming than its bite", that it gave no more than the two of them had offered in August 1940. On 10 March, after the decision to send Cripps had been taken, Amery again tried to set the Viceroy's mind at rest with regard to the suitability of the person chosen for the task:

As for the Congress their adverse reaction may be all the greater when they discover that they are not going to get a Sapru type of Government and that the nest contains the Pakistan cuckoo's egg. [The Transfer of Power, Vol. I, p. 396]

On 2 March, when the declaration was at the penultimate stage of drafting, Amery forwarded it to the King through the King's Private Secretary, Hardinge, with the following observation:

As I said to you after lunch, I think its bark is really more formidable than its bite. Beyond setting up a procedure for creating the future constitution-making body, it adds very little to what Linlithgow and I were agreed upon in July of 1940. [Ibid, p. 282]

Again, in a prolix communication to the Viceroy on 10 March, Amery chuckled:

Once they [the Congress] have been definitely told in so many words, and by someone whom they regard as not unsympathetic, that their game is up and that they must either find ways and means of compromising with the minority elements, or face the disadvantages of a divided India, they may really, for the first time, take seriously into account ...the devising of some entirely new constitutional solution to meet the inherent difficulty of the situation.

Cripps, he further wrote, realized the prospect of being denounced by both the Congress in India and the Left Wing in Britain "for having lent himself to so reactionary and limited a policy". [Ibid, pp. 402-3]



The pressure from the U.S.A., the ally of Britain in the war and its chief supplier, continued. On 11 March Roosevelt telegraphed to Churchill:

It is merely a thought of mine to suggest the setting up of what might be called a temporary Government in India, headed by a small representative group, covering different castes, occupations, religions and geographies – this group to be recognized as a temporary Dominion Government. It would of course represent existing Governments of the British Provinces and would also represent the Council of Princes, but my principal thought is that it would be charged with setting up a body to consider a more permanent Government for the whole country.... [Ibid, pp. 409-10]

Churchill was aghast at the thought. Years later he thus recorded his horrified reaction: "I was thankful that events had already made such an act of madness impossible." [Winston Churchill, *The Hinge of Fate*, p. 219]

7

On 12 March Amery informed the Viceroy that Cripps would be arriving at Karachi by air about 21/22 March and suggested a tentative list of people he should see in Delhi. These included half a dozen leaders of the Congress, a few from the Muslim League, some non-League Muslims and representatives of the Hindu Mahasabha, Depressed Classes, Labour and Sikhs. Also included were half a dozen Princes. Amery did not include Gandhiji's name in the list. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. I, pp. 411-12]

Linlithgow added some more names to the list — including that of Gandhiji — "probably difficult not to see him?" he commented. [Ibid, pp. 428-29]

The Congress Working Committee met at Wardha on 17 March to decide on the approach to Cripps. Nehru referred to his talks with Chiang Kai-shek during the latter's visit to India in February and said the Chinese leader while urging the British Government to give in to the demand of nationalist India, had at the same time expressed the view that India should whole-heartedly participate in the war against Japan, whether or not the British conceded her demand.

Gandhiji asked the leaders what they wanted.



Jawaharlal said he wanted action — he wanted life. He saw no life around. He saw no life in Gandhiji. In that hour of crisis Gandhiji had not come out with anything that had life, that had grandeur. Gandhiji had suppressed himself and did not give the lead expected of him.

Gandhiji said that was because the Congress was not of one mind. The Congress did not faithfully pursue the programme he had placed before it. The Congress did not have the required amount of non-violence, nor did it have violence. The need was for revitalizing the Congress.

The question was asked what the Congress should do if Subhas Bose or Rash Behari Bose came at the head of a Japanese army. Should the Congress risk civil war and fight against them or accept them?

Maulana Azad, Nehru, Shankarrao Dev — all said they must be resisted. Rajaji said even British help should be taken in such resistance if it became necessary. It would not be the Congress's war but the whole nation's war.

Gandhiji said he could not think of taking help from the British. He would resist Japan non-violently. That would really mean resisting Japanese occupation after the invasion, Azad put in. Gandhiji agreed.

Jawaharlal said in Calcutta people — among them able scientists — had nipped him and tried to persuade him that it was folly to think of resisting Japan, that Japan was coming very soon. Wisdom lay in recognizing the fact and making up to Japan. It was sheer-exhibition of the psychology of fear. What would Gandhiji say to such people?

Gandhiji said if the Japanese came to Bengal he would ask Prafulla Babu not to bow to them, even to lay down his life, even if he should be the only one to do so.

Rajaji said: "You are conceiving the possibility of others resisting and your keeping quiet. How is it possible? Regiments descend on our bazars and want food. Shall we give them food? Then our resisting regiments come. Shall we give them food or not?"

Gandhiji: "I will offer resistance wherever possible."



Jawaharlal said the question was what they should tell the masses. Azad feared that people would not listen to the talk of resisting the Japanese.

Gandhiji: "We must nevertheless tell the people not to bow to the Japanese if they come. We must non-cooperate. Even violence would be preferable to cowardice. In that case we must give full support to the British."

The idea of helping the British did not go down well with Jawaharlal. The British did not know how to fight.

Gandhiji said they were nevertheless fighting and the country must assist them. In any case they were exploiting the material and human resources of the country to the fullest extent for the war. But that would be possible if the masses had been trained in violence. Indian masses had never been so trained. It had been the Muslims one day, then the Marathas the next day. India had never been for the masses. The masses had always remained inert, except for the soldier class. The Congress could speak up for non-violent resistance, but the Congress did not speak with one voice. Under the given conditions violence could avail nothing. On the other hand non-violence, while it could not prevent invasion, could be used in resisting the occupation forces after they had entrenched themselves in the country. Even in that case ten or twenty lakhs would have to lay down their lives.

Jawaharlal: "In China forty-five lakhs have perished. I am thinking what effective non-violent steps we can take."

There were only two alternatives, as he understood the situation: either to accept Japan's slavery or to take up the battle-axe and kill or get killed.

Rajaji expressed the view that in case resistance had to be offered, scorched-earth policy must be followed; they could not surrender their granaries to the enemy.

On 18 March the Committee met again to consider the approach to Cripps. Gandhiji expressed his disinclination to see Cripps. The Congress should be represented by Maulana Azad, he said, or by Azad and Jawaharlal, both having equal rights. Azad said though Jawaharlal could function as an ambassador of the Congress, the power to take decisions should rest with the Working Committee. [The Diary of Mahadev Desai (unpublished), Book No. 43, pp. 311-24]



Stafford Cripps arrived in Delhi on 23 March on schedule and immediately got into a huddle with the Viceroy and the Commander-in-Chief.

As if to lend an edge to the Cripps Mission, on the same day the Japanese occupied the Andaman Islands. On the following day Cripps met the members of the Viceroy's Executive Council and read out to them the Draft Declaration of the British Government, the contents of which were not made public till a week later. The Draft Declaration, published on 30 March after minor alterations to appease Jinnah and some others, read:

His Majesty's Government, having considered the anxieties expressed in this country and in India as to the fulfilment of the promises made in regard to the future of India, have decided to lay down in precise and clear terms the steps which they propose shall be taken for the earliest possible realization of self-government in India. The object is the creation of a new Indian Union which shall constitute a Dominion, associated with the United Kingdom and the other Dominions by a common allegiance to the Crown, but equal to them in every respect, in no way subordinate in any aspect of its domestic or external affairs.

His Majesty's Government therefore make the following declaration:

(a) Immediately upon the cessation of hostilities, steps shall be taken to set up in India, in the manner described hereafter, an elected body charged with the task of framing a new Constitution for India.

(b) Provision shall be made, as set out below, for the participation of Indian States in the constitution-making body.

(c) His Majesty's Government undertake to accept and implement forthwith the Constitution so framed subject only to:

(i) the right of any Province of British India that is not prepared to accept the new Constitution to retain its present constitutional position, provision being made for its subsequent accession if it so decides.



With such non-acceding Provinces, should they so desire, His Majesty's Government will be prepared to *agree upon a new Constitution, giving these the same full status as Indian Union, and arrived at by a procedure analogous to that here laid down.*

[The portion italicized was substituted by Cripps on Jinnah's demand for the following in the original document: "to agree upon new constitutional arrangements on lines analogous to that here laid down." Jinnah did not regard this sufficiently clear "as regards the possibility of a second Dominion being set up."]

(ii) The signing of a Treaty which shall be negotiated between His Majesty's Government and the constitution-making body. This Treaty will cover all necessary matters arising out of the complete transfer of responsibility from British to Indian hands; it will make provision, in accordance with the undertakings given by His Majesty's Government for the protection of racial and religious minorities; but will not impose any restriction on the power of the Indian Union to decide in the future its relationship to the other Member States of the British Commonwealth. Whether or not an Indian State elects to adhere to the Constitution, it will be necessary to negotiate a revision of its Treaty arrangements, as far as this may be required in the new situation.

(d) The constitution-making body shall be composed as follows, unless the leaders of Indian opinion in the principal communities agree upon some other form before the end of hostilities: Immediately upon the result being known of the Provincial elections which will be necessary at the end of hostilities the entire membership of the Lower Houses of the Provincial Legislatures shall, as a single electoral college, proceed to the election of the constitution-making body by the system of proportional representation. This new body shall be in number about one-tenth of the number of the electoral college.

Indian States shall be invited to appoint representatives in the same proportion to their total population as in the case of the representatives of British India as a whole, and with the same powers as the British Indian members.



(e) During the critical period which now faces India and until the new Constitution can be framed His Majesty's Government must inevitably bear the responsibility for and retain control and direction of the defence of India as part of their world war effort, but the task of organizing to the full the military, moral and material resources of India must be the responsibility of the Government of India with the cooperation of the peoples of India. His Majesty's Government desire and invite the immediate and effective participation of the leaders of the principal sections of the Indian people in the counsels of their country, of the Commonwealth and of the United Nations. Thus they will be enabled to give their active and constructive help in the discharge of a task which is vital and essential for the future freedom of India. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. I, pp. 565-66]

The members of the Viceroy's Executive Council received the proposals with some reservations. Feroze Khan Noon and Sultan Ahmed were anxious to know how the Provincial option provided for in the Draft would be worked. Would non-acceding Provinces have their own constitutions? Could they amalgamate? Noon brought out the point that in the Punjab and Bengal, though the Muslim population was in a majority, the Assemblies had less than 50 per cent Muslims on them and could be overruled by non-Muslims. Cripps said the option would belong to the Provincial Governments then existing. Noon said it would be letting down the Muslims. He then asked what the immediate gain would be from the declaration. When told that it could result in the mobilization of the energies of the country for the war, Noon said it might mean Congress Governments coming back to power in the Provinces and declared that unless coalition Governments were set up, the Muslims would never go back under Congress rule again. [*Ibid*, pp. 475-78]

Cripps started on his round of consultations with political leaders on 25 March. On that day Maulana Azad was the first to see him. According to the note of the talks prepared by Cripps the only point in the document that interested Azad was concerning Defence, featuring in paragraph (e). According to the Congress view, he pointed out, in order to mobilize Indian people for the



war it was necessary that Defence should be in Indian hands. Cripps said India had to be regarded as part of a much larger theatre of war — England itself, the Middle East, the Caspian Front, Africa, Ceylon, Burma and other places in addition to India – and decisions with regard to the movements of troops, air forces and naval vessels from one theatre to another must rest with the War Cabinet. Azad reiterated the need for some "great gesture" such as Indianization of the Defence Ministry.

Later in the day came the meeting with Jinnah. Cripps noted that Jinnah was rather "surprised by the distance the Draft Declaration went to meet the Pakistan case". He asked how the Provincial option would be exercised in the case of Bengal and the Punjab. Cripps suggested that Provincial Assemblies might decide the question by a three-fifths majority vote. Where the vote for non-accession was less than that the matter could be decided by a plebiscite.

It was at this meeting that Jinnah asked for alteration of the wording of paragraph (c)(i), which was promptly accepted by Cripps. [Ibid, pp. 479-81]

The control of Defence, which the British had made up their mind not to transfer to Indian hands, was not the control of just one department of Government's activity. It meant control of almost all activity of the Government and rendered the possibility of any independent action on its part into a nullity. Amery in a telegram to the Viceroy on 26 March explained this further. He said even the operations against Japan on Indian soil had to be treated as part of those against the Axis powers elsewhere and the control of them must therefore rest with the War Cabinet and the U.S.A. It followed that the Commander-in-Chief in India must be responsible to His Majesty's Government. It would not be incumbent upon him to consult the Governor-General's Executive Council on anything he proposed to do though he would inform them "betimes". It might be found necessary by him to suppress civil authority by military in any part of India. All that the Executive Council could do would be to make representation against the proposed action to the Government in London. [Ibid, p. 491]

Gandhiji travelled to Delhi on the invitation of Cripps on 27 March and remained there till 5 April to be available to the Working Committee for advice. The Working Committee, it may be mentioned, remained in session from 29 March to 11 April.



Gandhiji formally met Cripps only once — on 27 March and there is no other record of the conversation except the official note prepared by Cripps. According to Cripps, Gandhiji made it clear that he was not representing the Congress, and whatever he said represented only his personal views. He then gave it as his opinion that the Congress was likely to object to the Draft Declaration on a number of grounds. One ground would be that "the document envisaged the continuance in perpetuity" of the tyrannical Princely rule in Indian States, in that it was contemplated that the States' representatives in the constitution-making body would be nominees of the Princes and not elected by the States' people. Then, the document was "an invitation to the Muslims to create a Pakistan". Gandhiji also, "in a rather vague way, questioned the point as regards the retention of Defence in the British hands". Cripps found this curious. [Ibid, pp. 498-500]

But it was not only a Pakistan that the British envisaged, but also a sort of Princistan. Cripps told the delegation of the Chamber of Princes on 28 March that the paramountcy treaties with the rulers would remain unaltered under the new arrangements contemplated. That in addition to a Governor-General heading the new Dominion, there would be a Viceroy who would have his seat in "some extraterritorial place in one of the States". There would be a treaty with the Indian Union for the passage of British troops that might be required in the States. The British Government could also undertake the defence of the States. Ceylon would still be there as a naval base and aerodromes could be built in one or more States. [Ibid, p. 510]

All this of course did not flow from the Draft Declaration as phrased. But it was clear that Cripps was not merely indulging in some loud thinking on what might happen in a hypothetical situation. Much thought, it would appear, had been given to the subject at India Office. Amery in a private telegram to Linlithgow on 24 March thus gave expression to his views on the future constitutional plan for India:

The more I think of it the more probable it seems to me that in some form or other the Viceroy will have to remain, not merely as a constitutional Governor-General, but as representative of broader Imperial aspects of Government, for a good long time to come.... After all,



supposing that Pakistan does come off, there will be possibly two Muslim areas, the whole of the States, Hindu British India (if that does not divide itself up!) and finally at least one important primitive hill tribe area.

The Viceroy, who would see to the governance of all these different segments of an India suitably divided in "broad Imperial aspects" would have, Amery thought, "a central reserve area of his own". There would be no legislature to restrict his authority, only delegations from different legislatures. But he would have cantonments, aerodromes and ports. [Ibid, p. 469]

On 29 March at a press conference Cripps further elucidated the British Government's thinking behind the Draft Declaration. Asked when the Indian Union contemplated in the Draft could be set up, Cripps said it could be done immediately after the termination of hostilities, not the end of the war. Asked how Provincial option in regard to accession or non-accession would be exercised in an area where in one part one community was in majority and in another part another community, Cripps said there would have to be rearrangement of boundaries as between the two Unions and exchange of populations.

The procedure for accession or non-accession would be, Cripps explained, first of all for all the Provinces and all the States to send representatives to the constitution-making body. In this regard there could be no exceptions. After the Constitution had been framed and passed by a simple-majority vote, Provinces and States which felt that they could not adhere to the Constitution could exercise the option of staying out. Whether, having joined the Union once, a Province or a State could secede, would be a matter to be decided by the Constitution. The Constitution could provide, or not provide, for the right of secession.

Elaborating on paragraph (e) of the document, Cripps said so far as the defence of India was concerned it must remain the responsibility of the British Government. The defence of one front could not be divided from the defence of any other front. But so far as the organization of military, moral and material resources of the country was concerned it would be the responsibility of the Government of India, i.e., of the Governor-General, and the British Government would not attempt to take away that responsibility from him. In inviting the participation of the Indian people in "the counsels of their country, of the



Commonwealth and of the United Nations", Cripps said, the British Government meant participation in the Council of the Governor-General, the War Cabinet and the Pacific War Council in that order. Though the constitution could not be changed during the war, the conventions of the Constitution could be. "You can turn the Executive Council into a Cabinet," Cripps declared. [Ibid, pp. 537-51]

On 30 March Jawaharlal Nehru dined with Cripps. According to the note prepared by Cripps, Nehru was worried. Cripps gathered from him that anti-British feeling in the country had been exacerbated. The principal reasons were, one, racial discrimination in the treatment of evacuees from Burma. Secondly, the growing unemployment. Thirdly, food shortages, associated with rumours that wheat was being exported to Persia. Fourthly, the growing disbelief in the British capacity to put up an effective defence against Japan. Fifthly, a reversion of sympathy for Japan. There might be a general breakdown of administration in the country. Could the British deal with it while at the same time holding back the Japanese attack? [Ibid, pp. 557-58]

Cripps realized that the Draft Declaration had not evoked any great enthusiasm among any section of Indians. The Congress, according to the impression he had gained, while having serious misgivings as regards the long-term proposals, such as option of non-accession for the Provinces, non-representation of the States' people in the constitution-making body, and description of the contemplated Indian Union as a "Dominion", would not reject the document on that account. However, it insisted on India being given a substantial voice in defence matters even while conceding that military defence of India must remain the responsibility of the British Government. He was inclined to look for a formula that would have a chance of satisfying the Congress. To this end he drafted a letter to the Congress President and showed it to the Viceroy. In the letter he mentioned the willingness of the Viceroy to discuss with Indian leaders, in keeping with the division of responsibilities stated in paragraph (e), the creation of a Ministry of Defence or Defence Coordination.

Linlithgow, who was more in tune with the thinking at the India Office than was Cripps, objected. How could such a proposal be discussed with one party without knowing "who the members of the Cabinet were going to be"? The revised draft of the letter to Azad accordingly mentioned an Indian being



designated "to some office connected with the Government of India's Defence responsibilities" without in any way impinging on the functions and duties of the Commander-in-Chief either in his capacity as Supreme Commander (responsible through the Chiefs of Staff to the War Cabinet) or as the Member of the Executive Council in charge of Defence. [Ibid, pp. 561-63]

10

By the end of March Cripps had managed to see representatives of almost all political interests in India, including, besides the leaders of the Congress and the League, the Princes, the Sikhs, the Depressed Classes, Labour, students, Indian Christians, Europeans and many individuals.

The Sikhs objected to the proposals, first, because of the provision of Provincial option in regard to accession to the Union and, secondly, because of the lack of guarantee of protection for the rights of minorities.

In a memorandum submitted to Cripps Baldev Singh, Tara Singh and some others drew his attention to the communal composition of the population of the Punjab, pointing out that the two Western districts of the Province were predominantly Muslim, the two Eastern districts were predominantly non-Muslim, and the three districts in between had a mixed population. In the Province as a whole the Muslims enjoyed a statutory majority. That being so, the provision of plebiscite which would determine the question of accession by a bare majority was wholly unjust.

The memorandum asked for immediate transfer of power, including Defence, to Indian hands, with the widest possible autonomy being given to the Provinces without weakening the Centre. As for Provincial self-determination in the matter of accession, the right to stand out should be exercised by a majority of at least 65 per cent of the members of the Legislature. A plebiscite on the issue was certain to lead to communal riots of a most serious character and magnitude. The signatories to the memorandum declared: "We shall resist however by all possible means separation of the Punjab from All-India Union. We shall never permit our Motherland to be at the mercy of those who disown it."

As for the Treaty proposed to be negotiated between the constitution-making body and the British Government for protecting racial and religious minorities, it would not have any sanction behind it. Besides, any such Treaty



would cover only cultural and religious rights. How could it deal with the political rights of the minorities? [Ibid, pp. 582-88]

The Depressed Classes were represented, in the consultations with Cripps by Dr. Ambedkar and M. C. Rajah. They first met Cripps on 30 March and obtained from him an assurance that the Depressed Classes would be treated as a racial and religious minority and their rights would be protected by treaty. Some of their representatives, Cripps further assured them, might also be included in the Viceroy's Executive Council. Nevertheless they received the Draft Declaration with the greatest misgivings. In a memorandum submitted to Cripps on 1 April they said:

We are all of us absolutely convinced that the proposals are calculated to do the greatest harm to the Depressed Classes and are sure to place them under an unmitigated system of Hindu rule. Any such result which takes us back to the black days of the ancient past will never be tolerated by us, and we are all determined to resist any such catastrophe befalling our people with all the means at our command. [Ibid, pp. 552-53, 603]

Roger Lumley, Governor of Bombay, writing to the Viceroy on 24 April informed him that Ambedkar felt bitterly disillusioned and humiliated by the Draft Declaration, that he felt disgruntled and that the disgruntlement had been noticeable in him ever since he had not been taken in the expansion of the Executive Council of the Viceroy. Lumley further informed the Viceroy that Ambedkar had for some time been worried by his financial position — he owed money to certain people — and gave the impression of a man who was no longer really interested in the work he was doing for his own followers. Lumley hoped that if a further expansion of the Executive Council was possible, Ambedkar would be included. [Ibid, p. 847]

Linlithgow told Lumley that he had Ambedkar very much in mind and hoped it would be possible to do something for him — "he has behaved very well so far as I am concerned". [Ibid, p. 873]

Dr. Ambedkar became a member of the Executive Council, in charge of Labour, when the Viceroy reconstituted the Council on 2 July 1942. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. II, pp. xix, xx]



Cripps had also been in touch with the national Press and had gauged the under-current of dissatisfaction, despair and hostility towards British rule. He had, further, taken measure of the official preparedness, or the lack of it, for meeting the Japanese invasion when it came. The conclusion that he arrived at as to the uselessness of his mission was not a cheering one.

On 1 April 1942 he wrote to Churchill:

From all appearances it seems certain that Congress will turn down the proposals....

There has been almost unanimous protest from representatives including the European community as to the complete retention of the existing control of Defence by His Majesty's Government.... This protest arises ...partly because people feel that the maximum of appeal must be made to the Indian people by their leaders if they are to be galvanized to their Defence, and that unless those leaders can claim some control over the Defence of India they cannot make their appeal effective to the Indian people....

The anti-British feeling is running very strong and our prestige is lower than it has ever been owing to events in Burma and more particularly in Singapore....

Unrest is growing amongst the population, and unemployment is developing in certain centres. The food situation is causing disquiet and the refugee problem ...is a source of serious intensification of anti-British feeling. The outlook so far as the internal situation goes is exceedingly bad and if we cannot persuade the Indian leaders to come in now and help us we shall have to resort to suppression which may develop to such a scale that it may well get out of hand.... I give you this picture so that you may judge as to the importance from a Defence point of view of getting the Indian leaders into the job of controlling, encouraging and leading the Indian people. This cannot be done under existing circumstances by any Britisher....

Cripps suggested that he should be free to settle the question of Defence



with the Congress subject to agreement of the Viceroy and the Commander-in-Chief. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. I, pp. 600-602]

Cripps was told that the War Cabinet was unwilling to contemplate any departure from the published text of the Declaration. However as long as the Commander-in-Chief, as member of the Executive Council, retained full control of Defence, there was no objection in principle to the appointment of an Indian member on the Council to ensure cooperation in military organization.

In parallel correspondence with London, Linlithgow expressed the view that the Congress actually found the non-accession clause as the more serious stumbling-block and that Defence had been chosen because it had better propaganda value. [*Ibid*, pp. 613-14]

12

On 2 April the Working Committee of the Congress passed a resolution rejecting the Draft Declaration. The resolution was handed to Cripps by Azad and Nehru on the afternoon of the same day, but was not made public. The resolution *inter alia* said:

The British War Cabinet's new proposals relate principally to the future, upon the cessation of hostilities. The Committee, while recognizing that self-determination for the people of India is accepted in principle ...regret that this is fettered and circumscribed and that certain provisions have been introduced which gravely imperil the development of a free and united National Government and the establishment of a democratic State. Even the constitution-making body is so constituted that the people's right of self-determination is vitiated by the introduction of non-representative elements....

The complete ignoring of ninety millions of people in the Indian States, and their treatment as commodities at the disposal of their Rulers, is a negation both of democracy and self-determination.... Such States in many ways may become barriers to the growth of Indian freedom, enclaves where foreign authority still prevails, and where the possibility of maintaining foreign armed forces has been stated to be a likely contingency....



The acceptance beforehand of the novel principle of non-accession for a Province is also a severe blow to the conception of Indian unity and an apple of discord likely to generate growing trouble in the Provinces.... Each territorial unit should have the fullest possible autonomy within the Union consistently with a strong National State.

...This proposal ...presumably made to meet the communal demand ...will have other consequences also and lead politically reactionary and obscurantist groups among the different communities to create trouble and divert public attention from the vital issues before the country.

On the question of Defence, the resolution proceeded as follows:

It has been made clear that the Defence of India will in any event remain under British control. At any time Defence is a vital subject; during war-time it is all-important and covers almost every sphere of life and administration. To take away Defence from the sphere of responsibility at this stage is to reduce that responsibility to a farce and nullity....

...What is most wanted is the enthusiastic response of the people, which cannot be evoked without the fullest trust in them and the devolution of responsibility on them in the matter of Defence. It is only thus that even in this grave eleventh hour it may be possible to galvanize the people of India to rise to the height of the occasion. It is manifest that the present Government of India, as well as its Provincial agencies, are lacking in competence and are incapable of shouldering the burden of India's defence. It is only the people of India, through their popular representatives, who may shoulder this burden worthily.... The Committee are therefore unable to accept the proposals put forward on behalf of the British War Cabinet. [Ibid, pp. 616-18, 745-48]

Cripps proposed, on the suggestion of Shiva Rao, that there should be a meeting between himself, the Commander-in-Chief and Azad and Nehru to determine what functions an Indian Defence Member of the Viceroy's Council, in charge of the portfolio of Defence Coordination, could perform. On receiving the green signal from London, Cripps invited the Congress leaders for the meeting. Linlithgow was much concerned at the development, and had a



message sent to the Commander-in-Chief that he, the Viceroy, "had committed himself to no weakening, or sharing, or diminution of the powers and responsibilities of the Commander-in-Chief, and no modification of the constitutional position". [Ibid, p. 623]

On 4 April, Cripps telegraphed to Churchill that a majority of members of the Working Committee were in favour of fighting the Japanese and would participate in the war, given conditions which in their view could make their participation effective. Others, who were under Gandhiji's influence (and therefore against participation in the war on grounds of non-violence) were against the scheme altogether. If the Congress accepted the scheme the non-violent group would probably retire from all participation during the war and would leave the others. (Maulana Azad, Nehru and Rajagopalachari) to carry on.

Cripps informed the British Prime Minister that if the Congress accepted the scheme, all others, including the Muslim League, would accept. On the other hand, if the Congress should reject the scheme, no one would dare to state that they would accept it.

Nothing could be done to meet the Congress on the question of non-accession and the Indian States. The only point for negotiations was the content of clause (e). In this connection, so far as the functions of the Commander-in-Chief were concerned, there could be no question whatever of taking any existing power away from him.

It would be in the Commander-in-Chief's capacity as Defence Minister that any question could arise. "Under the new arrangement," Cripps wrote, "whereby the Executive Council will approximate to a Cabinet, any question coming within the competence of the Government of India will be for decision by the Government of India as a whole and not by any particular Minister.

Cripps suggested three courses: (a) to make no compromise, (b) to hand over the Defence Ministry to an Indian, subject to a convention that he would not in a matter affecting the prosecution of the war act contrary to the policy laid down by the British Government and (c) to make the Commander-in-Chief War Member instead of Defence Minister and set up a Defence Coordination Department to be headed by an Indian.



Cripps said he personally preferred the course set out in (b), but he could undertake negotiations on the basis of (c) though the chances of success were much less. [Ibid, pp. 636-39]

Linlithgow disagreed with Cripps in the "diagnosis of present morale in India" as well as in his "gloomiest forebodings of the consequences of rejection". The line taken by Cripps that the Executive Council should be treated as Cabinet would preclude any possibility of the Muslim League coming in unless it was given a majority of seats in the Cabinet. [Ibid, pp. 642-43]

The War Cabinet rejected Cripps's recommendation for the appointment of an Indian Defence Minister, but it authorized him to negotiate on the basis of the creation of a Defence Coordination Department under an Indian Member, the duties of which should be such as commended themselves to the Viceroy, the Commander-in-Chief and himself. [Ibid, pp. 663]

On 7 April Cripps wrote to Azad, communicating to him the following proposal:

(a) The Commander-in-Chief to retain his seat on the Viceroy's Executive Council as War Member and to retain full control over all war activities of the Army in India subject to control of the War Cabinet, which would have on it a representative Indian with equal powers in all matters relating to India.

(b) An Indian Member to be added to the Executive who would take over those functions of the Department of Defence which could be separated from the War Department. He would also be in charge of the Defence Coordination Department then directly under the Viceroy.

Cripps expressed the hope that the arrangement proposed would enable the Congress to come in.

Matters to be transferred to the Defence Coordination Department would be (a) Public relations, (b) Demobilization and post-war reconstruction, (c) Petroleum officer, (d) Indian representation on the Eastern Group Supply Council, (e) Welfare of troops and their dependents, (f) All canteen organizations, (g) Certain non-technical educational institutions, (h) Stationery and printing, (i) Social arrangements for foreign missions. Certain other matters which had



bearing on Defence would also be transferred to the Department, such as the denial policy, signals coordination and economic warfare. [Ibid, pp. 683-84]

The Congress Working Committee considered the matter and decided that the subjects sought to be transferred to the Defence Department were all relatively unimportant and hence the formula could not be accepted.

Colonel Louis Johnson, who had just arrived in Delhi as President Roosevelt's Personal Representative, then decided to use his good offices in an attempt to avert a break-down in the negotiations. In consultation with Nehru and Cripps he worked out a formula and got the approval of the Viceroy and the Commander-in-Chief for it. In consultation with Nehru it was again revised and sent to the Working Committee for its consideration. The revised Cripps-Johnson formula provided for a Defence Department in the charge of a representative Indian and a War Department under the Commander-in-Chief to be in charge of war activities. These activities were defined. In case of disputes arising as regards new functions between the Defence Department and the War Department, they would be settled by His Majesty's Government. [Ibid, pp. 699-700]

The Viceroy told London that the formula had been revised behind his back. Moreover it conceded too much. He also objected to the proviso in the formula that in the event of any dispute arising as between the Defence Department and the War Department, it should be referred to His Majesty's Government.

Churchill told Cripps that Colonel Johnson had no *locus standi* in the matter. He was Roosevelt's representative to deal with military matters, not to interfere in the politics of the country. He also told him not to do anything which would weaken the position of the Viceroy and the Commander-in-Chief.

Cripps wired his view that if the Congress could be brought into a National Government (by which he meant a Government composed of representative Indians) the Muslim League too would join, and so would the Hindu Mahasabha, the Sikhs and the Depressed Classes. However, if his colleagues could not trust him over the matter he was prepared to hand over charge of the negotiations to someone else. [Ibid, pp. 713-17]



Churchill said there was no question of negotiations. What had been agreed was that there would be no negotiations, that Cripps was to try to gain acceptance, with possibly minor variations, of "our great offer".

The Congress Working Committee, for its part, found that even the new formula was not acceptable. In his letter to Cripps of 10 April, rejecting the whole of the Draft Declaration, the Congress President wrote that even the revised formula "was so widely and comprehensively framed that it was difficult for us to know what the actual allocation of subjects and departments as between the Defence Department and the War Department would be", that no lists had been supplied, and that when the Congress asked for one "you referred us to the old list for the Defence Department which you had previously sent us and which we had been unable to accept".

Maulana Azad also pointed out that during the negotiations and in his public statements Cripps had often mentioned a National Government and Cabinet consisting of Ministers, which had given the impression that the new Government would function with full powers as a Cabinet, with the Viceroy acting as a constitutional head. Now the Congress had been told that the new Government would not be very different from the old, that the difference would be one only of degree not of kind. It would be just the Viceroy and his Executive Council. Azad went on:

The picture of the Government which was so like the old in all essential features is such that we cannot fit into it.... The peril that faces India affects us more than it can possibly affect any foreigner and we are eager and anxious to do our utmost to face it and overcome it. But we cannot undertake responsibilities when we are not given the freedom and power to shoulder them effectively.

The Congress, Azad further said, was prepared to put aside for the time being all questions about the future. But there must be a Cabinet Government. It was not only the Congress demand, it was the unanimous demand of the nation.

Cripps answered that without a change of the constitution a National Government with full powers as demanded by the Congress could not be brought into existence. A nominated Cabinet responsible to no one but itself would



constitute an absolute dictatorship of the majority and would never be accepted by the minorities. In a country like India, where communal divisions ran so deep, an irresponsible majority Government of the kind was not possible. [Ibid, pp. 726-33]

13

The rejection by Cripps of the whole idea of a Cabinet Government, to which he had appeared to be wedded throughout the negotiations, pained and surprised the Working Committee. Azad wrote to Cripps on 11 April:

It seems that there has been a progressive deterioration in the British Government's attitude as our negotiations proceeded. What we were told in our very first talk with you is now denied and explained away. You told me then that ...the position of the Viceroy would be analogous to that of the King of England vis-a-vis his Cabinet....

We are convinced that ...the British Government attaches more importance to holding to its rule in India as long as it can and promoting discord and disruption here with that end in view, than to an effective defence of India against the aggression and invasion that overhang it. [Ibid, pp. 743-45]

The Muslim League Working Committee, too, now came out with its rejection of the British proposals. In the resolution passed on 11 April it said that while the Draft Declaration recognized by implication the demand for Pakistan, the main object of His Majesty's Government appeared to be the creation of one Indian Union. The solution of India's problems, the resolution said, lay in the partition of India into independent zones, but the Draft Declaration contemplated a constitution-making body whose aim would be to create a new Indian Union and which would take decisions by a bare majority. The method and procedure provided for the exercise of the right of non-accession was not satisfactory. Also, in the Provinces where there was less than 60 per cent vote for accession and a plebiscite became necessary, it had been suggested that the whole adult male population should vote in the plebiscite and not the Muslims alone. This too was unacceptable. [Ibid, pp. 748-51]



President Roosevelt, who was kept informed by his representative Louis Johnson of the negotiations as they developed from day to day, was alarmed at the failure of the Cripps mission and made what he thought was a last-minute bid to stave off the break-down of talks, not realizing that the last minute had already passed. His personal intervention took the form of a communication to Churchill, conveyed through Harry Hopkins on 12 April. Roosevelt's message said:

The feeling is held almost universally that the deadlock has been due to the British Government's unwillingness to concede the right of self-government to the Indians notwithstanding the willingness of the Indians to entrust to the competent British authorities technical military and naval defence control. It is impossible for American public opinion to understand why, if there is willingness on part of the British Government to permit the component parts of India to secede after the war from the British Empire, it is unwilling to permit them to enjoy during the war that is tantamount to self-government.

In a tone that in diplomatic exchanges would be considered unusual for its sharpness, Roosevelt continued:

I feel that I am compelled to place before you this issue very frankly ...should the current negotiations be allowed to collapse ...and should India subsequently be invaded successfully by Japan with attendant serious defeats of a military or naval character for our side, it would be hard to overestimate the prejudicial reaction on American public opinion.

Roosevelt requested Churchill, if possible to have the departure of Cripps from India postponed and personally to instruct him to make a final effort to find a common ground for understanding. [Ibid, p. 759]

In reply Churchill informed the President that Cripps had already left India. In any case, he said, he did not feel that he could take responsibility for the defence of India if everything had to be thrown into the melting-pot again. [Ibid, p. 764]

Before his departure, Cripps took up with the Viceroy, by way of personal intervention, the question of the large number of students in prisons. On 1 April



he had been approached by representatives of the Students Federation, a front organization of the Communist Party of India, with a request that the students imprisoned be released so that they could participate in the war effort against Japan. On 11 April in a written request to the Viceroy Cripps said:

May I make a parting request to the Government of India through you? I would dearly appreciate it if they could see their way to liberate all the students now detained as a gesture of their goodwill to the young people of India. I am certain that the great majority of them will be most valuable helpers in the Defence of India....

I shall be most grateful if this can be done. [Ibid. p. 752]

Linlithgow obliged. In a communication addressed to all Provincial Governors on 16 April, he wrote:

I am writing to you personally to explain that I gave a definite undertaking to Cripps.... May I ask you therefore to ...see that every possible step is taken to honour my undertaking ...it was literally a last-minute request from Cripps and one that I felt that I ought to go as far as possible to meet. [Ibid, pp. 791-92]

14

Why did the Cripps mission fail? British spokesmen put out the story that mainly it was Gandhiji's opposition that wrecked the negotiations, that Gandhiji believed that wrecking was the best policy, that he had described the British proposals as a post-dated cheque on a bank of doubtful solvency, that he threw all his influence into the scales against an agreement. [Ibid, pp. 632, 762, 872]

This was certainly not the case. Gandhiji no doubt had been opposed to the proposals on moral and political grounds. On moral grounds in so far as it would involve the country in violent resistance – as against non-violent resistance – against Japanese aggression. On political grounds because the proposals appeared to concede nothing and could only prepare ground for further conflict. But on both counts he had chosen to yield to the majority of the Working Committee. In fact he had had only one sustained talk with Cripps and had left Delhi long before things came to a boil. The people in the Working Committee who had finally rejected the proposals were the people who had been most



anxious to arrive at an arrangement with the British which would make it possible for nationalist India to be galvanized for armed resistance against the Japanese menace, viz., Azad, Nehru and Rajaji.

After the failure of the Cripps mission Gandhiji commented in *Harijan*:

It is a thousand pities that the British Government should have sent a proposal ...which, on the face of it, was too ridiculous to find acceptance anywhere. And it was a misfortune that the bearer should have been Sir Stafford Cripps, acclaimed as a radical among radicals and a friend of India. I have no doubt about his goodwill.... But he should have known that at least the Congress would not look at Dominion Status even though it carried the right of secession.... He knew too that the proposal contemplated the splitting up of India into three parts, each having different ideas of governance.... And last of all, it gave no real control over Defence to responsible Ministers.

The fact is that Sir Stafford Cripps, having become part of the Imperial machinery, unconsciously partook of its quality. Such is its strength. [C.W.M.G., LXXVI, pp. 28-29]

While Cripps personally perhaps meant well the rulers in London looked upon the Cripps mission as no more than a propaganda ploy to satisfy the American and to some extent Chinese opinion. Throughout the negotiations Churchill, Amery and Linlithgow, assisted by a team of bureaucrats in Whitehall, kept a sharp watch to see that Cripps did not deviate from the line and did not do anything that would in the slightest degree diminish the authority of the Viceroy and the Secretary of State. They succeeded.

Amery in a telegram to Linlithgow on 11 April exclaimed:

What a relief now that it is over! It is clear from the telegrams that the bearings between you and Cripps must have been getting pretty heated during the last few days, and indeed they were getting pretty heated between him and the Cabinet.

He then let himself indulge in some loud thinking and asked: "Will Congress drift into a position of definite antagonism, with a fifth-columnist outer wing, in which case we shall have to be absolutely firm in locking them up...?" And



Linlithgow noted in the margin of the telegram: "My fear is that Nehru and Rajagopalachari will shout 'forward' while the back rows do the fifth-column stuff!" [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. I, pp. 756-58]



CHAPTER X: THE CRISIS DEEPENS

1

The failure of the Cripps mission shattered the hope that the coming of Cripps had aroused that at least for the duration of the war it might be made possible for the Congress to postpone its demand for full independence and mobilize its energies for the defence of the country against Japanese invasion. For, notwithstanding its distaste for having anything to do with the apparatus of British Imperialism, notwithstanding its rejection in principle of the British proposals as regards the future constitution of India, as set out in the resolution handed to Cripps on 2 April, the Working Committee had been keen to arrive at an understanding with Cripps. Explaining the causes of the failure, Jawaharlal Nehru, who had been, along with Azad, the chief negotiator on behalf of the Working Committee, said on 12 April:

While it was my extreme desire to find a way out and make India function effectively for defence and make the war a popular effort – so great was my desire that some things I have stood for during the last quarter of a century, things which I could never have imagined for a moment I would give up, I now gave up — I am convinced personally that it was impossible for us to agree to proposals as they eventually emerged from the British Government’s mind.

Jawaharlal said he had been amazed by the sudden change of attitude on the part of Cripps on the question of the character of the Government to be formed. He had first talked of a “National Government”, a “Cabinet”, and then, as the negotiations progressed he had begun talking of the Viceroy’s Executive Council, saying the law could not be changed in the middle of the war.

Dealing with the question of Defence, on which the negotiations foundered, Nehru said Cripps proposed an Indian Defence Minister who would have nothing to do with Defence. It was an absurd situation. At the instance of a third party a formula had been suggested, which the Working Committee thought could be made the basis for arriving at an agreement. But the real point had been what would be the subjects to be transferred to the Defence Minister.



The lists had not been supplied and the Working Committee had been referred to the Army Manual.

Nehru continued:

That is not the way to bring about a settlement. That is not the way to fight a war — not the lackadaisical way of the Viceroy's House and the Government of India. If there is a National Government everybody will have to work or get out. It is an evening-dress war. It is work, work, work. Those who sit to dinner in evening dress at 8-15 are not going to win this war....

The whole approach [of the Working Committee] was one of lighting a spark in hundreds of millions of minds in India. It was not an easy responsibility for anyone to undertake. Nevertheless we felt that circumstances demanded it, and whatever the past history of our relations, we could not allow that to come in the way of what we considered our duty to our country at present....

...The fundamental factor today is distrust or dislike of the British Government. It is not pro-Japanese sentiment. It is anti-British sentiment. That may occasionally lead individuals to pro-Japanese expression of views. This is short-sighted.... It distresses me that any Indian should talk of the Japanese liberating India. The whole past history of Japan has been one of dominating others. Japan comes here either for imperialist reasons straight out or to fight with the British Government ...it does not come here to liberate.

Cripps had enjoyed personal friendship of Nehru, and the two had shared radical political beliefs. But at the end of two weeks of talks they found themselves at the opposite ends of a pole. The bitterness that it left in Nehru's mouth could be gauged by his following statement:

We agreed to things which in the last 22 years we would never have dreamt of agreeing to or coming near.... For the first time in these 22 years, I swallowed many a bitter pill, when I said I was prepared to agree too many things so as somehow to come to an agreement. I did want to throw



all my sympathy and all the energy I possess in the organization of the defence of India. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1942, Vol. I, pp. 238-41]

Cripps thus left, at the end of his two-week long sojourn in India, political parties bitter and the political crisis deeper. As a result of his visit fears and anxieties to which the country had been prey, became more pronounced.

Even while Cripps had been doing his act in Delhi the threat of Japanese invasion had come dangerously near. The Japanese navy was in complete control of the Bay of Bengal. Vizagapatam, Cocanada, Trincomalee and Colombo had been bombed. Possible landings by Japanese troops in Orissa or in South India were already giving the British military sleepless nights, while in Burma Japanese armies were relentlessly pressing north towards the borders of Assam. But the country was far from a state of preparedness to meet the invasion. Even civilian defence measures remained at sixes and sevens. An idea of how hopeless the Air Raid Precautions were can be gathered from a telegram Cripps sent to Churchill on 30th March. Cripps said:

From the general atmosphere here I gather that the India Office requires urgent shaking up and should be told that an immediate war threatens India.... In brief the position is that –

(i) Regular fire brigades and fire-fighting appliances exist only in a very few large towns and are completely lacking in other large towns containing as many as 250,000 people....

(ii) Rudimentary A.R.P. measures exist in 102 towns forming part of the "threatened area", total population of these towns being about 13 million.

Cripps asked, by way of fire-fighting personnel, 10 to 20 officers and at least 200 fully trained firemen and by way of equipment, trailer pumps and one million feet of hose.

Cripps complained that repeated attempts of the Government of India to get even one fire-fighting expert from England had met with failure. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. I, pp. 559-60]



Amery in a telegram to Linlithgow dated 1 April expressed his inability to meet India's demand in this respect "while attacks on cities in Britain were still intense and trained men at a premium". [Ibid, p. 560]

The needs of England had priority!

Food shortage all over the country had become chronic and in certain areas scarcity was acute, bordering on famine conditions. Prices soared. According to a Government statement the price index had risen from 100 in 1939 to 157 in April 1942 and 169 in May. Diversion of the means of transport to meet the requirements of war further compounded the hardships of the people, making the movement of men and goods arduous. No fewer than 200 locomotives and 12,000 wagons were reported to have been diverted to the Middle East from India. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1942, Vol. I, pp. 152 (1-m)]

Commenting on the famine conditions that had gripped just one area – Hissar – Gandhiji wrote:

There is so much distress everywhere, and with the terrible spectre of war much more is to be expected. Therefore everywhere local charity has to be depended upon.

He appealed to moneyed men to come to the rescue of the starving poor. [C.W.M.G., LXXVI, p. 21]

In Bengal, where the food situation was growing worse with each passing day, Gandhiji added his voice to the appeal of the Marwari Relief Society for avoiding waste of food. He wrote:

The millions are living in a state of perpetual semi-starvation. For them it is like living in a chronic state of war. Day in and day out they know not what a square meal is. For men who have no margin the pressure of the present war can better be imagined than described.

Gandhiji suggested that if the rich could get over the horrible superstition that their dishes should always be over-full and their plates piled high, a lot of food could be saved for distribution among the poor. [Ibid, pp. 169-70]



But the scarcity of food and clothing was not the end of the trouble for the poor. In areas in East Bengal perceived to be under threat of Japanese occupation village after village was being evacuated. People were being unceremoniously ejected from their hearths and homes. Their crops, wells, tanks and houses were being destroyed; their boats, cycles and other means of conveyance were being taken away, lest they fell into Japanese hands. According to a report sent to Gandhiji by Satis Chandra Das Gupta, in an area near Chittapore, thirty-three villages had thus been evacuated under short notice. The compensation ranged from Rs. 10 to Rs. 100. Gandhiji in great anguish wrote in *Harijan* of 3 May 1942:

Money taken through taxation has not been felt so keenly as is the direct deprivation of thousands of homesteads as in Feni. No promise of compensatiun can be any comfort for the dispossession of the present tenements. To the poor people it is like taking away their bodies. The dispossession of the country boats is almost like that of the tenements.

Again reverting to the theme on 11 May in his appeal "To Every Briton", he wrote:

Before the Japanese menace overtakes India, India's homesteads are being occupied by British troops – Indian and non-Indian. The dwellers are summarily ejected and expected to shift for themselves.... Their occupation is gone. They have to build their cottages and search for their livelihood.... People in East Bengal may almost be regarded as amphibious. They live partly on land and partly on the waters of the rivers. They have light canoes which enable them to go from place to place. For fear of the Japanese using the canoes the people have been called upon to surrender them. For a Bengali to part with his canoe is like parting with his life.

Great Britain has to win the war. Need she do so at India's expense? Should she do so? [Ibid, pp. 33, 71, 99]

With the Europeans the story was different. Even as civilian Indian population vacated one coastal town after another and scampered to what they considered places of relative safety in the countryside, the European Sahebs in those very towns went their merry ways undisturbed. Their luxuries and



amusements continued as before. Horse-racing remained a favourite pastime. Their ostentatious life-style drew comment from the Press and was echoed in the corridors of British Parliament where it became the subject of a Parliamentary question.

Linlithgow, always the correct Burra Saheb, defended them, In his telegram to Amery he said the Parliament question ignored differences between England and India "of climate, transport facilities and conditions of social life". The need for relaxation in India, he argued, was greater. As for racing, though controlled largely by Europeans and Australians, it was also supported by the indigenous population and was a source of revenue. Besides, if professional football and greyhound racing could be tolerated in England, the Viceroy could not understand why racing was objected to in India. The problem, as he saw it, was not one of further curtailment of amusements but of finding means to avoid, for lack of reasonable relaxation, depression and demoralization. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. I, pp. 605, 765]

3

On 12 April, the day that Cripps left India, Bengal Governor Herbert called on Linlithgow and gave him a message to be transmitted to the India Office and the Prime Minister. The purport of the message was that the popular distrust in Britain's ability to hold Japan had steadily grown, that there was a strong tendency "to hedge against Japanese victory", so that donors to the War Fund preferred to remain anonymous to avoid victimization by the invader and that the subversive groups were attempting amalgamation in the hope of gaining Japanese recognition as the predominant party.

Sounding a warning against the abandonment of Calcutta, the Governor said the action would be tantamount to losing India and might well be followed by a state of widespread chaos completely interrupting lines of communication and destroying any prospect of retirement to a western strategic line. He requested the War Cabinet to provide adequate defence for Calcutta by land, sea and particularly air. If enough forces were not made available, he said, he could not guarantee the whole-hearted support of his Ministry. [*Ibid*, pp. 762-63]

But there lay the difficulty. The War Cabinet, and especially Churchill, could not be brought to accord a high enough priority to the defence of India. When



Vizagapatam had been bombed, there had been no anti-aircraft guns or aeroplanes around to engage the Japanese bombers. Both the guns and the planes had arrived at Vizagapatam, according to the report of Governor Hope to the Viceroy, but were immediately taken away for use elsewhere. Defence of British strategic interests in the west held paramount importance.

Linlithgow in a telegram to Amery of 14 April gave expression to his fear that the Japanese might at any moment land somewhere in South India and emphasized the need for more support by way of aeroplanes. Were the excursions over the Rhur, he asked, usually pretty expensive in terms of losses, really of such vital significance in the existing conditions? Would it not be better to push out to India? The effect of the collapse in India as a result of misapplication of available resources would be incalculable, he said. [Ibid, pp. 778, 780]

As for the way the campaign was being conducted, even with such meagre military hardware as could be spared from the Western front, Amery in a telegram to the Viceroy wondered whether "the whole machine as spread over India" had become oriental in its notions of time and energy. In this connection he mentioned a letter received by President Roosevelt from an American correspondent and forwarded by him to Churchill, "damning everything in Burma to heaps, from Dorman-Smith [Governor of Burma] downwards". [Ibid, p. 871]

The hard truth about the situation, as correctly appraised by the widest sections of Indian political opinion, was that the purpose of the British military effort in the east was the defence of British strategic interests, British economic interests and British lives and not the defence of Indian homes and hearths. India and Britain did not have any commonality of interests in the war. The Indian Army remained an instrument of British Imperialist policy. In the tug of war between the British side and the Congress over the control of Defence, during the Cripps negotiations, lay the question as to how the Indian Army would be used, whether for the defence of British strategic interests or for the defence of India.

The Congress Working Committee, which represented the largest segment of Indian public opinion, gave open and forcible expression to its distrust of British willingness and ability to defend India. But it had no plans to organize the defence of India on its own. Jawaharlal Nehru spoke of guerilla warfare and of scorched-



earth policy. But there was no way these activities could be pursued parallel to or independently of British military activity. In practice any forces that the Congress raised would only serve as auxiliaries of the British Army.

When Cripps left, therefore, the Congress leaders were bitter and angry, but it was impotent anger. In the pervading gloom they had not the faintest glimmer of a policy to light their path. They found themselves between the devil and the deep sea, torn by divided antipathies — some being more hostile to the Japanese than to the British and vice versa.

Gandhiji, who was hostile neither towards the British nor towards the Japanese, but would resist both non-violently to secure and sustain the freedom of India, was not faced with such a dilemma. He saw his way clear. On 19 April, while commenting on the influx of American soldiers into India, he wrote:

I see no Indian freedom peeping through all this preparation for the so-called defence of India. It is a preparation pure and simple for the defence of the British Empire, whatever may be asserted to the contrary. *If the British left India to her fate as they had to leave Singapore, non-violent India would not lose anything. Probably the Japanese would leave India alone. Perhaps India, if the main parties composed their differences as they probably would, would be able effectively to help China in the way of peace and in the long run may even play a decisive part in the promotion of world peace. But all these happy things may not happen if the British will leave India only when they must.* How much more creditable, how much braver it would be for Britain to offer battle in the West and leave the East to adjust her own position....

"Whatever the consequence, therefore, to India, her real safety, and Britain's too, *lie in orderly and timely British withdrawal from India.* [C.W.M.G., LXXVI, pp. 49-50]

The sentences in italics were the first enunciation by Gandhiji of the doctrine that became the subject-matter of debate in the Congress and that was adopted, after some three months of internal disputations, as the official policy by the Congress to be pursued under the leadership of Gandhiji.



Three days later, on 22 April, Gandhiji, writing to Hoarace Alexander, expressed himself in the same vein, He told Hoarace Alexander:

My firm opinion is that the British should leave India now in an orderly manner and not run the risk that they did in Singapore and Malaya and Burma. That act would mean courage of a high order, confession of human limitations and right-doing by India. Britain cannot defend India, much less herself on Indian soil with any strength. The best thing she can do is to leave India to her fate. [Ibid, p. 61]

4

This, it may be pointed out, did not represent the existing policy of the Congress, if the Congress had an existing policy at all. Making the immediate withdrawal of British power from India a rallying cry envisaged acceptance by the country of the policy of non-violence for resisting the impending Japanese invasion. As we saw, throughout the debates over the years on the war situation in the Working Committee Gandhiji had been pressing for acceptance of the policy by the Congress, but had Working Committee were not inclined to agree. But with the failure of the Cripps mission and increased danger of Japanese invasion, Gandhiji judged that the country was now faced with a now-or-never situation and decided to assert his authority.

Maulana Azad, the Congress President, had summoned the A.I.C.C. to meet at Allahabad at the end of April and it would have to take a clear stand on how it would deal with the grave situation that faced the country. It could not satisfy itself with passing, as it had done at Bardoli and Wardha, a resolution that each Congressman could interpret in his own way. The policy to be adopted must be clear and unambiguous.

Gandhiji did not at all like the way Jawaharlal had been going about, since the departure of Cripps, preaching guerilla warfare and scorched-earth policy to resist Japanese invasion. He wrote to Vallabhbhai Patel on 13 April:

Jawaharlal now seems to have completely abandoned ahimsa. You should go on doing what you can. Restrain the people if you can. [Ibid, p. 31]

On 15 April, writing to Nehru he complained:



Whereas we have always had differences of opinion it appears to me that now we also differ in practice. What can Vallabhbhai and others do in such a situation? [That is to say, Vallabhbhai and others could have no role in the Working Committee.] If your policy is accepted the Committee should not retain its present shape.

The more I think of it the more I feel that you are making a mistake. I see no good in American troops entering India and in our resorting to guerilla warfare. [Ibid, p. 40]

Someone asked Gandhiji how he liked the idea of his "legal heir" advocating guerilla warfare, Gandhiji said he had never described Nehru as his "legal heir". But he was virtually his heir. He had the drive that no one else had in the same measure. Gandhiji said he was sorry that Jawaharlal had developed a fancy for guerilla warfare, but he was sure it would be a nine days' wonder. It would have no effect. Jawaharlal and Rajaji took the view they did because they felt that India must have a course of violence before coming to non-violence. Gandhiji said he had no doubt that they would return to non-violence with renewed zest.

Non-violent non-cooperation, Gandhiji repeated, was the most effective substitute for every kind of violent warfare. It could be more effective against the Japanese than it had been against the British who had struck roots in the soil. He hoped the A.I.C.C. would revert to the non-violent method and give the clearest possible instructions about non-violent non-cooperation. [Ibid, p. 52]

Gandhiji himself did not plan to go to Allahabad for the A.I.C.C. meeting. He was not fit for travel, he told Nehru, and besides he had nothing to offer but "the same one thing". But he was firmly of the opinion that the A.I.C.C. should opt for non-violence. He wrote to Vallabhbhai Patel on 14 April, and again on 22 April, that if the A.I.C.C. should adopt the policy of violence and not adopt "an unambiguous resolution on non-violent non-cooperation", his duty would be to resign. He must also oppose the scorched-earth policy and any suggestion to invite foreign troops.

He informed Sardar that in Orissa while on the one hand Communists were said to be preparing for guerilla warfare, on the other hand members of the Forward Bloc were said to be preparing to help Japan. [Ibid, pp. 36-37, 61]



Rajaji, of all the members of the Working Committee, was the most disappointed by the failure of the Cripps mission. Cripps, he thought, had made a sincere effort, but could not prevail against the dead-weight of resistance. The task now, as he saw it, was the arming of the coastal people as swiftly as possible, and giving them training. [The Transfer of Power, Vol. I, p. 790]

Immediately after the conclusion of the Cripps negotiation in Delhi he proceeded direct to Madras, not even bothering to break his journey at Wardha to see Gandhiji, especially in view of the fact that, as it turned out, he had decided to break with Gandhiji and the Congress on the question of support to the war. Gandhiji was pained. He wrote to Rajaji on 17 April:

So you could not give me a day!!! Supposing you had to give one more day to Delhi. But you know best what to do at a given moment. [C.W.M.G., LXXVI, p. 44]

The very first thing Rajaji did on arriving in Madras was to summon a meeting of the Executive of the Madras P.C.C., which met on 20 April for a marathon session lasting nine hours and decided to ask the Congress legislators of both Houses of the Madras Legislature to initiate moves for a coalition Government in Madras. The coalition contemplated would be a broad-based one, including the Justice Party, the Muslim League, Christians, Scheduled Castes and even one European. Should the All India Congress Committee not permit such a move, it was suggested the Madras P.C.C. would break away from the parent organization. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol I, p. 802]

The Madras Congress Legislature Party accordingly met on 23 April. Rajaji presided. Two resolutions were passed. The first said:

The Madras Congress Legislature Party regrets that attempts to establish National Government for India have failed and in consequence nationalist India has been placed in a dilemma. It is impossible for people to think in terms of neutrality or passivity during invasion by enemy power. Neither is it practicable to organize any effective defence independently and uncoordinated with defence measures of Government. It is absolutely and urgently necessary in the interests of the country to do all that the



Congress can possibly do to remove every obstacle in the way of establishment of national administration to facilitate present situation; therefore inasmuch as the Muslim League has insisted on the recognition of the right of separation of certain areas from United India upon ascertainment of the wishes of the people of such areas as the condition precedent for united national action at this moment of grave national danger, this party recommends to the All India Congress Committee that to sacrifice chances of formation of National Government for the doubtful advantage of maintaining controversy over unity of India is the most unwise policy, and that it has become necessary to choose the lesser evil and acknowledge the Muslim League's claim for separation, should the same be persisted in when the time comes for framing a constitution for India....

The Second resolution ran:

Whereas the Province of Madras is seriously threatened with enemy invasion and life is subjected to growing dislocation, it is suicidal for the present and disastrous for the future for the people's elected representatives to remain passive and let the people suffer, ...and whereas participation in Defence is possible only if the people are armed ...the Madras Congress Legislature party voices the general feeling in this part of the country that there should be at this critical moment popular Government in this Province.... To facilitate united and effective action the Muslim League should be invited to participate in popular Government.

The first resolution was passed by 37 votes against 6, 3 remaining neutral; the second resolution by 39 votes against 2, 5 remaining neutral. [Ibid, pp. 842-43]

The meeting of course was not a representative one. For the total strength of the Congress Legislature Party in Madras was 197, of whom only 46 attended.

The Congress leadership took strong exception to the proceedings. In a statement issued on 25 April, Azad expressed his pain and astonishment that Rajagopalachari, though a member of the Working Committee, had chosen not to consult the Working Committee before taking the action he did. He also pointed



out that in the Congress organization only the P.C.C. was the competent body to represent provincial views, not the Legislature Party. It could not therefore be assumed that the resolutions passed had the backing of the majority of the Congress in the Province. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1942, Vol. I, p. 77]

6

On 24 April Gandhiji wrote to Jawaharlal Nehru, enclosing the draft of a resolution he wished the A.I.C.C. to consider. He said:

I do not think it necessary to give arguments in support of the resolution. If you do not like my resolution I really cannot insist. The time has come when each of us must choose his own course.... I am now certain that if this Government goes we shall be well able to deal with Japan. It is another matter that after the Government is removed we may fight among ourselves. Even if that should be so, do we want to save ourselves from internal quarrels through the good offices of this Government? [*C.W.M.G.*, LXXVI, p. 66]

Mirabehn, who shared Gandhiji's view as to the necessity of immediate British withdrawal from India, volunteered to carry the text of the resolution to Allahabad. The resolution read:

Whereas the British War Cabinet's proposals sponsored by Sir Stafford Cripps have shown up British Imperialism in its nakedness as never before, the A.I.C.C. has come to the following conclusions:-

The A.I.C.C. is of opinion that Britain is incapable of defending India. It is natural that whatever she does is for her own defence. There is an eternal conflict between Indian and British interests. It follows that their notions of defence would also differ. The British Government has no trust in India's political parties. The Indian army has been maintained up till now mainly to hold India in subjugation

Japan's quarrel is not with India. She is warring against the British Empire.... If India were freed her first act would probably be to negotiate with Japan. The Congress is of opinion that if the British withdrew from India, India would be able to defend herself in the event of Japanese or any aggressor attacking India.



The A.I.C.C. is therefore of opinion that the British should withdraw from India. The plea that they should remain in India to protect the Indian Princes is wholly untenable....

The question of majority and minority is a creation of the British Government and would disappear on their withdrawal.

For all these reasons the Committee appeals to Britain, for the sake of her own safety, for the sake of India's safety and for the cause of world peace to let go her hold on India even if she does not give up all Asiatic and African possessions.

This Committee desires to assure the Japanese Government and people that India bears no enmity either towards Japan or towards any other nation. India only desires freedom from all alien domination. But in this fight for freedom the Committee is of opinion that India while welcoming universal sympathy does not stand in need of foreign military aid. India will attain her freedom through her non-violent strength and will retain it likewise. Therefore the Committee hopes that Japan will not have any designs on India. But if Japan attacks India and Britain makes no response to its appeal the Committee would expect all those who look to Congress for guidance to offer complete non-violent non-cooperation to the Japanese forces and not render any assistance to them....

1. We may not bend the knee to the aggressor or obey any of his orders.

2. We may not look to him for any favours nor fall to his bribes. But we may not bear him any malice nor wish him ill.

3. If he wishes to take possession of our fields we will refuse to give them up even if we have to die in the effort to resist him.

4. If he is attacked by disease or dying of thirst and seeks our aid we may not refuse it.

5. In such places where the British and Japanese forces are fighting our non-cooperation will be fruitless and unnecessary.... Therefore not to put any obstacles in the way of the British forces will often be the only way of demonstrating our non-cooperation with the Japanese. Neither may we



assist the British in any active manner. If we can judge from their recent attitude, the British Government do not need any help from us beyond our non-interference. They desire our help only as slaves.

...If, in spite of our non-violent resistance any part of the country falls into Japanese hands we may not destroy our crops, water supply etc.... The destruction of war material is another matter and may under certain circumstances be a military necessity. But it can never be the Congress policy to destroy what belongs to or is of use to the masses.

Whilst non-cooperation against the Japanese forces will necessarily be limited to a comparatively small number, and must succeed if it is complete and genuine, the true building up of swaraj consists in the millions of India whole-heartedly working the constructive programme ...whether the British remain or not it is our duty always to wipe out unemployment, to bridge the gulf between rich and poor, to banish communal strife, to exorcise the demon of untouchability, to reform dacoits and save the people from them

FOREIGN SOLDIERS

The A.I.C.C. is of opinion that it is harmful to India's interests and dangerous to the cause of India's freedom to introduce foreign soldiers in India. It therefore appeals to the British Government to remove these foreign legions and henceforth stop further introduction.... [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. I, pp. 66-70; C.W.M.G., LXXVI, pp. 63-65]

The meetings of the All-India Congress Committee duly began at Allahabad on 29 April and concluded on 2 May. Of the total strength of 390 members 170 were present. The Committee passed a number of resolutions –some indeed were of vital political importance, including the one on the war situation.

The first resolution related to the happenings in Burma on the eve of and during the Japanese invasion of that country. The resolution noted that even before the actual military operations the civil administration had collapsed and those in charge of it had abandoned their posts of duty and run away. Private vehicles had been commandeered for use of Europeans, habitual criminals had been freed from prisons, the police had been withdrawn and the city of Rangoon



left at the mercy of hardened criminals, lunatics and other anti-social elements. The resolution went on:

As war approaches India, the lessons of Rangoon and Lower Burma are full of meaning for this country, for the same type of official wields authority here.... It is the misfortune of India at this crisis in her history not only to have a foreign Government, but a Government which is incompetent and incapable of organizing her defence.... As no reliance can be placed on Central or Provincial Governments functioning in India to act effectively and intelligently in times of emergency, it becomes the special duty of people to rely upon and organize themselves for this purpose.... In particular all panic should be avoided even though those in authority give way to it. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. I, pp. 3-4]

Publication of the resolution was banned by the authorities on the ground that it brought Government into hatred and contempt, undermined public confidence in the Government's ability to defend the country and encouraged establishment of parallel administration. [Ibid, p. 6]

The second resolution related to the evacuation of villages by military authorities and misbehaving of soldiers. The resolution, while recognizing that evacuation might in times of war be a military necessity, regretted the summary manner in which the evacuations had been carried out, often at 24 hours' notice, making it impossible for families "to do anything but to walk out, camp under the trees, become destitute and starve". Such happenings were highly undesirable and led to widespread resentment among the people.

The resolution noted with dismay that frequent and well-authenticated reports had been received of molestation of women by soldiers in railway trains and evacuated and other places, leading to disastrous consequences, including the shooting of people who resisted. The resolution asked for immediate steps to be taken to check and put an end to such molestation, which must be resisted by people at all costs.

The publication of part of this resolution too, that dealing with the molestation of women by soldiers, was banned. [Ibid, pp. 5-6]



Gandhiji's draft resolution on the war was worked on by Rajendra Prasad, who took out bits and pieces from it here and there and modified the language where he considered it necessary. The Working Committee then considered both the original draft as sent by Gandhiji and Rajendra Babu's amended version, which did not really differ in any significant respect from the original.

The debate by the Working Committee on the draft was prolonged, spread over several days; starting on 27th April. Two schools of thought contended: one consisting of the votaries of out-and-out non-violence, which whole-heartedly supported Gandhiji's draft resolution as amended by Rajendra Babu, and the other consisting in the main of Jawaharlal Nehru and Maulana Azad, whose support for non-violent non-cooperation was qualified by consideration of the exigencies of the situation which, in their view, called for all-out resistance against the threatened Japanese invasion. Rajaji, who had struck out a new line of his own, as expressed in the resolutions passed earlier by the Madras Congress Legislature Party, did not intervene to any significant extent in the debate beyond registering his total opposition to the resolution which, he said, would fail in its purpose of making the British to withdraw. Besides, should the British withdraw, Japan would fill the vacuum thus created and there would be no scope left for organizing any resistance against it. Rajaji later resigned from the Working Committee.

Jawaharlal Nehru said so far as action was concerned he had no difficulty in supporting Gandhiji's draft. But it posed certain problems. It might easily be interpreted as favouring Japan. The demand for the withdrawal of British power was a proper demand, but British withdrawal implied also the withdrawal of the British Army from India and that, under the situation then existing, seemed unreal. Even if the British were to recognize India's independence, they could not reasonably withdraw their Army.

Besides, even though Japan might recognize India's independence following British withdrawal, she might lay down certain terms which might mean "a large measure of civil control by us, a certain measure of military control by them, passage of armies through India, etc."



The exigencies of war, Jawaharlal argued, would compel the Japanese to make India a battle-ground. They would walk through the country and no non-violent non-cooperation would be able to stop them, if only because the civilian population at large would not be affected.

Govind Ballabh Pant raised the question whether the approach in the draft resolution was consistent with the previous Congress resolutions on the subject. As for non-violent non-cooperation, surely it was not meant as a demonstration. It had to be seen whether it would prevent invasion and resist occupation. And what about armed resistance? – should they assist it or at least not hamper it?

Sarojini Naidu thought the appeal in the resolution was a rhetorical gesture. It was an expression of India's extreme disgust and dislike and hatred of the British Government. The appeal to Japan was a useless gesture. India was part of the map Japan had drawn.

Acharya Narendra Dev expressed his disagreement with the view that the issue in the war was one between the Allies on one side and the Axis powers on the other. The war was not one and indivisible. The aims of Russia and China were not the same as those of Britain and America. Had they been, he would have had no difficulty in siding with Britain in the war.

At the invitation of the President, Jawaharlal Nehru then prepared for the Committee's consideration an alternative draft resolution. This read:

In view of the imminent peril of invasion that confronts India and the attitude of the British Government, as shown again in the recent proposals sponsored by Sir Stafford Cripps, the All-India Congress Committee has to declare afresh India's policy and to advise the people in regard to action to be undertaken in the emergencies that may arise in the immediate future.

The proposals of the British Government and their subsequent elucidation by Sir Stafford Cripps ...have demonstrated that even in this hour of danger, not only to India but to the cause of the United Nations, the British Government functions as an Imperialist Government and refuses to recognize the independence of India or to part with any real power.



India's participation in the war was a purely British act imposed upon the Indian people without the consent of their representatives. While India has no quarrel with the people of any country, she has repeatedly declared her antipathy to Nazism and Fascism as to Imperialism. If India were free she would have determined her own policy and might have kept out of the war, though her sympathies would, in any event, have been with the victims of aggression. If, however, circumstances had led her to join the war, she would have done so as a free country fighting for freedom, and her defence would have been organized on a popular basis with a national army under national control and leadership, and with intimate contacts with the people.... The present Indian Army is in fact an offshoot of the British Army and has been maintained till now mainly to hold India in subjection.

...It is significant and extraordinary that India's inexhaustible manpower should remain untapped while India develops into a battleground between foreign armies fighting on her soil or on her frontiers, and her defence is not supposed to be a subject fit for popular control. India resents this treatment of her people as chattels to be disposed of by foreign authority.

The All-India Congress Committee is convinced that India will attain her freedom through her own strength and will retain it likewise.... Not only the interests of India but also Britain's safety and world peace and freedom demand that Britain must abandon her hold on India. It is on the basis of independence alone that India can deal with Britain or other nations.

The Committee repudiates the idea that freedom can come to India through interference or invasion by any foreign nation, whatever the professions of that nation may be. In case an invasion takes place it must be resisted. Such resistance can only take the form of non-violent non-cooperation as the British Government has prevented the organization of national defence by the people in any other way. The Committee would therefore expect the people of India to offer complete non-violent non-cooperation to the invading forces and not to render any assistance to



them.... In places wherein the British and invading forces are fighting our non-cooperation will be fruitless and unnecessary. Not to put any obstacle in the way of British forces will often be the only way of demonstrating our non-cooperation with the invader. Judging from their attitude the British Government do not need any help from us beyond our non-interference.

The success of such a policy of non-cooperation and non-violent resistance to the invader will largely depend on the intensive working out of the Congress constructive programme and more especially the programme of self-sufficiency and self-protection in all parts of the country. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1942, Vol. I, pp. 293-94; *The Transfer of Power*, Vol. II, pp. 66-70]

In substance Nehru's draft did not differ in any significant respect from Gandhiji's draft. In tone and temper, however, it was pronouncedly more anti-Japanese, and the division in the Working Committee persisted. In the voting on the morning of 1 May, Gandhiji's draft as amended by Rajendra Babu was carried. Those who voted for it were Rajendra Babu, Sardar Patel, J. B. Kripalani, Shankarrao Dev, Sarojini Naidu, P. C. Ghosh, Jairamdas Doulatram, Narendra Dev, Achyut Patwardhan, Gopinath Bardoloi and Biswanath Das (the last five being invitees). Those who voted for Nehru's draft were Nehru himself, G. B. Pant, Bhulabhai Desai, Asaf Ali, Satyamurti and Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit (the last two being invitees).

Azad was unhappy that a resolution of such crucial importance should be passed by a majority vote. Accordingly, at the afternoon meeting of the Committee on the same day he pleaded with the members unanimously to pass Nehru's draft for presentation to the A.I.C.C. The supporters of Gandhiji's draft yielded and Nehru's draft was unanimously passed by the Working Committee.

At the A.I.C.C. the resolution was moved by Govind Ballabh Pant. After a few amendments, moved by Communist members, had been rejected, the resolution was passed. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1942, Vol. II, pp. 200-204; *The Transfer of Power*, Vol. II, pp. 158-64]

The A.I.C.C. also debated for three hours a resolution moved by Rajagopalachari acknowledging the Muslim League's claim for separation – this



was identical to the one passed by the Madras Congress Legislature Party on 23 April, summarized earlier — and another, moved by Jagat Narayan Lal, which said:

The A.I.C.C. is of opinion that any proposal to disintegrate India by giving liberty to any component State or territorial unit to secede from the Indian Union or Federation will be highly detrimental to the best interests of the people of the different States and Provinces and the country as a whole, and the Congress, therefore, cannot agree to any such proposal.

The two resolutions were then voted upon. Jagat Narayan Lal's resolution was passed by 92 votes against 17, while Rajaji's resolution was defeated by 15 against 120 votes. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1942, Vol. I, pp. 294-95]

8

The negotiations with Cripps, which ended in such a dismal failure, represented a last desperate effort on the part of the Congress to wrest from the British control over the affairs of the country, to set up a National Government and to organize armed national defence in cooperation with the British. They marked the end of the policy which the Congress had been pursuing, notwithstanding the disapproval of Gandhiji, ever since the beginning of the war in 1939.

The Allahabad A.I.C.C. ended the dilemma and confusion of the preceding three years. The policy was now clear. The British power must withdraw from India unconditionally and if Japan should invade India, as was widely apprehended, Indian masses must resist it by offering non-violent non-cooperation to the invading hordes. This policy was to remain effective throughout the war years, inviting barbaric reprisals from the British Government.

It also marked the final parting of company between Rajaji and the Congress. For Rajaji now openly advocated a policy diametrically opposed to that of the Congress. His aggressive advocacy of Muslim separatism and a National Government with the cooperation of Jinnah and under British aegis in order to fight the Japanese menace caused widespread resentment among the rank-and-file Congressmen. Hindu passions were roused.



Immediately after the conclusion of the A.I.C.C. meeting at Allahabad Rajaji addressed a Press conference at Delhi on 4 May, giving public expression to his views. He called for a National Front against Japanese invasion to be symbolized by a National Government, which, he said, could only be brought into being if there was a settlement with the Muslim League. On 10 May at a public meeting in Madras he repeated the same views. On 17 May in a message to a youth conference he said: "India will lose nothing if she gives the uttermost freedom to the Musalman areas even as the British Empire has lost nothing by giving the Westminster Statute to her Colonies." This was an unacceptable argument, to say the least!

Then speaking at a public meeting at Madurai Rajaji said Britain must not add to her many crimes by the crowning offence of leaving the country in chaos to become certain prey to foreign ambition. There was "no reality in the fond expectation that Britain would leave India in simple response to the Congress slogan and in the vacuum thus created fundamental national organization could be taken in hand. Every inch vacated by Britain would be occupied by Japan." Was anything more urgent than a settlement between the Congress and the League? Gandhiji's position, Rajaji said, was out of the question. Nehru and Jinnah should come together and save the nation. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1942, Vol. I, pp. 82-84; *The Transfer of Power*, Vol. II, p.228]

Rajaji's whirlwind campaign in the cause of Muslim separatism and anti-Japanese National Front in collaboration with the British Government invited upon his head the wrath of sections of Congressmen and others. Disturbances at his meetings became a common feature. Gandhiji condemned the phenomenon. He wrote in *Harijan* of 31 May in defence of Rajaji:

He is entitled to a respectful hearing. His motive is lofty. It is a noble thing to strive for Hindu-Muslim unity, equally noble to strive to ward off the Japanese intrusion. In his opinion the two are intertwined.

Hooliganism is no answer to his argument. The disturbances at his meetings are a sign of great intolerance.... If intolerance becomes a habit, we run the risk of missing the truth....



The reader knows that I hold Rajaji to be in the wrong. He is creating a false atmosphere. He does not believe in Pakistan, nor do the Nationalist Muslims and others who concede the right of separation or succession* ...I see nothing but seeds of further quarrel in it. [C.W.M.G., LXXVI, pp. 142-43]

As for Rajaji's plan for a National Government under British aegis, Gandhiji wrote:

Rajaji's plan is, in my opinion, wholly unnatural. He wants to thrust himself on the British power which does not want him, for as the possessor by right of conquest it gets all it wants. In order to thrust himself on the British he gives the League the right of self-determination which every single individual has whether the others recognize it or not. [Ibid, p. 167]

Azad and Nehru were equally cross with Rajaji. Addressing a public meeting at Lahore on 22 May Jawaharlal said the step taken by Rajaji was detrimental to the interests of the country, that he was breaking to pieces the weapon which the Congress had fashioned after twenty-two years of innumerable sacrifices. [The Indian Annual Register, 1942, Vol. I, p. 86]

British rulers on their part were watching closely the unfolding of Rajaji's apostasy. They would if they could use Rajaji to break up the Congress. Immediately after the A.I.C.C. Amery, in a telegram dated 6 May to Linlithgow, wondered what hope there was of Rajagopalachari getting together enough men to form a Government in Madras. It would be a great beginning of a break-up in the Congress. The only hope of progress in India, in Amery's view, lay in a revolt in the Congress. [The Transfer of Power, Vol. II, p. 42]

Linlithgow, answering Amery on 9 May, said C.R. continued to talk "manfully" and to hint that he might break away, that he would be willing to let Jinnah form a Government in Madras and be ready to serve under him in any capacity. But, the Viceroy reported, he was not very optimistic about anything very great coming out of C.R.'s latest move. [Ibid, p. 61]

Amery was all for C.R. taking office in Madras. On 12 May he suggested to the Viceroy that Hope, the Governor, might even let him assume office without a definite majority and give him any help that was required. He felt sure that once



in office, Rajagopalachari would manage to win round not a few waverers. [Ibid, p. 79]

Amery then asked the Viceroy, in view of the fact that Rajagopalachari had "shown great courage" and was "speaking out boldly on the right lines", whether it was altogether beyond hope to have him and Jinnah, or him and Sikandar Hyat Khan, into the Executive Council.

Linlithgow answered that C.R. showed no signs of wanting a place. Nor did he think that he would be much good unless he brought in some public support, of which commodity, the Viceroy said in parenthesis, C.R. appeared to be markedly short. [Ibid, pp. 88, 191]

* Asaf Ali, Mian Iftikharuddin, Pir Illahi Baksh of Sind and some others had spoken praising Rajaji's motives.

9

Another section of political opinion, which functioned as a group inside the Congress, but had been pulling in a direction away from the policy authorized by the A.I.C.C., was the Communist Party of India. This party, which had its following among students, industrial workers and kisans in certain pockets, had been banned soon after the Meerut Conspiracy Case but had continued to pursue its programme through its front organizations. It had earlier actively opposed Britain's war, calling it an Imperialist war, a war brought on by the heightening of the general crisis of capitalism. They had accordingly declared that Indian people, and above all, the workers and peasants, must oppose the war. In Britain, too, the Communist Party advocated the same line about the war, and had therefore been banned.

In the middle of 1941, however, the development in the war situation impelled the Communist Parties in Britain as well as in India to stage a *volte face*. The invasion of the U.S.S.R. by Germany, in their view, changed the entire character of the war. From a conflict between groups of Imperialist powers for colonial expansion and aggrandisement, it became a conflict between socialism, as represented by the U.S.S.R., and Fascism, as represented by the Axis powers. From an Imperialist war it had become a People's war, inasmuch as the U.S.S.R.



represented the aspirations of the toiling millions of the world as well as of nations fighting for their freedom. In the opinion of the Communist Parties both of Britain and of India it was now the duty of nationalist forces everywhere and of the workers, peasants and intelligentsia to join hands with the Allies to defeat the Fascist powers.

Overtures were soon made to the authorities in India that Communist cadres in prisons, in particular members of the Students Federation of India, a front organization of the Communist Party, should be released so that they could devote their energies to helping the war effort. It was as a result largely of these overtures, made through the Ministers in London, that Cripps prevailed upon the Viceroy to examine the cases of imprisoned students with a view to their release. One such case was that of Dr. Subbarayan's son Mohan Kumaramangalam, who had been an accused in the Madras Conspiracy Case, had been convicted on 19 November 1941 and awarded a term of 3½ years' imprisonment. As a result of the intervention of Cripps he was unconditionally released from prison on 17 June 1942. [Ibid, p. 28]

In keeping with the new line Communist members of the A.I.C.C., viz., K. M. Ashraf, Sajjad Zaheer and S.G. Sardesai, had argued for unconditional support to the war and even moved amendments to the main resolution. The A.I.C.C. had given them short shrift.

On 4 May Roger Lumley, Governor of Bombay, forwarded to the Viceroy a memorandum on behalf of the Communists. Though, he said, the document was unsigned, he had reason to believe that it came from P. C. Joshi and G. Adhikari, underground leaders of the Communist Party. The memorandum made the point that there should be general release of Communists from jails so that they could help in the recruitment to the Army and the Police.

Lumley expressed the view that while release of Communists might become unavoidable there was danger in their becoming definite allies of the Government. There would be consternation among employers and capitalists and while the Communists said they would avoid strikes, they might well ask for large increases in wages, saying that such increases were necessary for the war effort. Middle classes might also be alarmed, for they were all terrified of



communism and proletarian rule. In short Communist support was likely to raise many imponderable issues. [Ibid, pp. 21-22]

In June 1942 the Government decided to lift the ban on the Communist Party of India and requested the Secretary of State to approve the action. Amery went along. He telegraphed to Linlithgow on 7 July:

I believe there may be much to be said for giving much more open encouragement to Roy and every kind of left wing, Communist, student, peasant or trade union organization that declares itself anti-Fascist. That is, after all, the line that Winston took whole-heartedly the moment Russia was attacked.... It may be that the elements we encourage now may not be reliable in the future, but they may be influenced in a better direction in the sunshine of official favour. [Ibid, p. 350]

The ban on the Communist Party and its organs, *The National Front* and *New Age* was formally lifted on 23 July. [Ibid, p. 394]

Curiously, the line now vigorously pursued by the Communist Party "in the sunshine of official favour" and by the trade unions, kisan sabhas and student organizations that it controlled, was almost exactly the same as advocated by Rajaji, viz., a settlement with the Muslim League on the of recognition of the right of self-determination of Muslim majority areas, and all-out help to the British in the war against Japan.

For instance Indulal Yagnik, presiding at the All-India Kisan Conference at Bihta near Patna on 30 May most enthusiastically commended Rajagopalachari's "diagnosis of the cancer" of communal disunity and asked for the adoption of the remedy he had suggested. How could communal unity be achieved, Yagnik asked, "by denying to anybody the right to partition the family estate if they are determined to do so?" Asking the peasantry to repudiate the "idealistic but utterly futile doctrine of non-violent non-cooperation" against the invaders as also the demand raised by the Congress for the withdrawal of foreign troops from India, he called upon them to organize an anti-Fascist front to fight the Japanese menace. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1942, Vol. I, pp. 350-51]

Various other individuals and groups, motivated less by considerations of national interests than by their own special interests and ambitions, also willingly



lent their cooperation to the British Government in its war against the Congress. There was, for instance, M. N. Roy, in whom Cripps had found "an unreliable and self-seeking politician" not having "any real influence in India". [Ibid, p. 340] Even before the arrival of the Cripps mission in India Roy had expressed himself against the transfer of power to a National Government. In an article published in his paper *Independent India* he had said: "Under a National Government, the Defence of India Act would no longer be in operation, if not formally repealed. There would be no check on anti-war propaganda and Fifth Column activities." [Ibid, p. 784] After the Cripps negotiations broke down, he expressed the view that the talks had failed because though the Cripps offer had visualized transfer of real power to wage war for the defence of the country, it had not conceded the power to make peace with the invader which the Congress leaders really wanted. [Ibid, p. 767] His services were fully utilized by the rulers. He as well as the Communists were provided financial help in producing leaflets and propaganda literature. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol II, p. 435]

10

The Cripps initiative having collapsed, to the profound satisfaction of the Secretary of State and the Viceroy, the rulers in India saw no need to be considerate to the Congress. And immediately after the A.I.C.C. session at Allahabad, the I.C.S. brotherhood which had been in a state of nervous tension during the Cripps negotiations, started to bare its fangs.

The plan that was debated in the subsequent days was based on the principle that while the Congress should be isolated, vilified and subjected to punitive action, as wide a section of anti-Congress interests and opinions as possible should be appeased through official favours of various kinds.

There was Jinnah, first of all, and there was the Hindu Mahasabha and the minor minorities such as the Depressed Classes, the Europeans and the Sikhs. Cripps, before his departure from the country, had suggested to Linlithgow to try and explore the possibilities of including Jinnah and some one from the Hindu Mahasabha in his Executive Council. Cripps had thought that Jinnah might agree.

Linlithgow took "soundings". Jinnah, he reported to his superior in India Office, would be delighted to come in, but there were certain conditions. These



were: Executive Council of 15 – eight from the Muslim League, probably two from the Hindu Mahasabha to be nominated by the Viceroy, in addition to Depressed Class and Sikh representatives to be approved by Jinnah. This would in effect give Jinnah a minimum of two-thirds of the Council. [The Transfer of Power, Vol. I, pp. 761-62]

The conditions were too preposterous to be considered.

In the rewarding of the smaller minorities, however, there were no such difficulties. The Council was expanded from twelve to fifteen to give places to their representatives and Ambedkar, Mohammed Usman, Sardar Jogendra Singh, Edward Benthall and C. P. Ramaswami Aiyar were duly accommodated (Benthall and Aiyar filled vacancies caused by transfer of Clow and death of Akbar Hydari). The new Council took office on 2 July, though the new appointees joined on different dates afterwards.

In the British ruling elite in India at the time the most ardent advocate of the line of rewarding friends and taking a strong line with the Congress was perhaps Sir Maurice Hallett, the Governor of the U.P. He pleaded with the Viceroy that "to appease our well-wishers more of them must be taken in at the Centre". This turned out not to be a feasible proposition, first, because of the attitude of Jinnah, the friend primarily to be appeased, and secondly because at the Centre there was not room enough for all. He then suggested that politicians might be taken in as additional Advisors (non-official) to Governors in the Section 93 Provinces. The Viceroy put the proposition to the other Governors for their opinion. They explored the possibilities. The Bombay Governor spoke to K. M. Munshi. Munshi offered the view that it was better to rely on official Advisors and that non-officials, from whichever party they came would be useless. He himself would not be inclined to accept the offer. In the Central Provinces, N. B. Khare was sounded. The Governor thought that while he could be roped in, he could not be relied upon. All other Governors were agreed in the view that non-official Advisors would only be a drag. Only second-rate people would be coming in, they would be inefficient and politically of no importance. The idea was dropped. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. II, pp. 1-2, 19, 24-25, 35, 55, 84, 298 and ff.]



But if there was hesitation as regards the best way to reward friends, there was none about hounding the Congress, with Maurice Hallett leading the pack.

Gandhiji and Jawaharlal Nehru were the chief *betes noirs* of Hallett. Immediately after the Allahabad A.I.C.C. he wrote to the Viceroy advising stern action against Gandhiji. He referred to Gandhiji's article "Foreign Soldiers in India", appearing in *Harijan* of 26 April, and mentioned that the Berlin radio had broadcast it in Hindustani two days later, showing that "Congress had some means of communication with the Axis powers". He asked the Viceroy to get the Director, Intelligence Bureau, to investigate the matter. There had been some clashes between Indians and British troops, which might be the result of the Congress attitude. A note he enclosed said:

...Alarm, despondency and defeatism over the war situation have if anything increased. District reports attribute this in part to enemy broadcasts ...but there is no doubt that, in much larger measure, the deterioration ...is due to Congress propaganda of the most virulent fifth column type.... The resist-the-Japanese slogan has simply served to create confusion ...its falsity and absurdity have already been exposed by many speakers ...the whole cry of resistance to the enemy would still be pure and arrant nonsense even if it were not accompanied and preceded in every case by rabid vilification of the British ...by anti-war and anti-recruitment propaganda.

It is difficult to imagine what possible benefit can be hoped for by any further delay in taking action against fifth columnists in general and against Congress in particular. [Ibid, pp. 23-26]

On 10 May Hallett reported to the Viceroy that his C.I.D. had intercepted the first draft of the A.I.C.C. resolution which Sadiq Ali had despatched by post to Rajendra Prasad, who had asked for it. Hallett thought its having been sent by post was curious, "for Congress know well our power of interception" and offered the view that perhaps it had been done deliberately by Sadiq Ali, who was friendly towards Communists, so that the Government might realize the pro-Japanese policy of the Congress or some members thereof.

If the draft was Gandhiji's Hallett said, "then clearly he is a fifth columnist or a Quisling" and D.I.B. would do well to go into the question of its authorship. Possibly they might be able to identify the typewriter.



As for Nehru, Hallett said, he suffered from a conflict of impulses in which "now the anti-British, now the anti-Japanese prevailed". Hallett concluded: "If Gandhi and his followers ...really hold that they should first by some measures, not indicated, get rid of us, it is certainly dangerous.... We hear a good deal of fifth column activities in Burma and it looks to be as though we must be prepared for similar behaviour by the Hindu population in this country."

The Viceroy noted that it was a very important document and the Secretary of State should be "completely informed" about it. [Ibid, pp. 63-65]

Amery on 15 June raised the question of action to be taken against Gandhiji and the Congress at the War Cabinet. In discussion it was emphasized that quick and decisive action should be taken as soon as it was clear that Gandhiji's activities must be prevented. [Ibid, p. 208]

Amery informed the Viceroy that his own leaning was towards putting Gandhiji in an aeroplane and taking him to Uganda. [Ibid, p. 216]

The planning for assault on the Congress and Gandhiji had started.

11

The Princely States continued to simmer with discontent and repression mounted. In Travancore and Mysore the local State Congress organizations were prevented from carrying on their legitimate activities and their leaders were arrested. In Jodhpur things were worse.

Jodhpur, like the various other Rajputana States, was divided up in numerous feudatories, called *jagirs*. The jagirdars controlled 83 per cent of the territory of Jodhpur while the Maharaja's Government directly administered only 17 per cent of it. From 1938 onwards the Marwar Lok Parishad had been carrying on a movement for responsible government in the State.

When the war came the British rulers put screws on the Maharaja and the jagirdars for the War Fund. The Jagirdars in turn squeezed the peasantry to raise the money. Their high-handedness led to clashes. When the Lok Parishad leaders sought intervention from the State authorities, they were arrested and imprisoned, including their leader Jainarayan Vyas; One of the Lok Parishad workers, Bisa, even died in jail.



The movement continued for several months, beginning in May. Gandhiji expressed the hope that the people of Jodhpur, having resolved upon achieving their purpose through suffering, would not rest till they had reached their immediate goal. [C.W.M.G., LXXVI, pp. 84, 220-23, 258-59, 356-57]

The British never tired of asserting that the Princes had to have a say in the shaping of the future constitution of India. Gandhiji repeatedly expressed the view that the Princes were a British creation and had no freedom of action independently of the British, and that, therefore, they would act as the British wished them to act, so long as the British were in power in India. The truth of this was rudely brought home to Maharaja Holkar of Indore when he tried to voice a political opinion of his own.

On 28 May he issued an open letter to Roosevelt, suggesting to the President that the U.S.A. along with the Governments of China and the U.S.S.R., should intervene and arbitrate in the differences between India and Britain.

Linlithgow had the Maharaja summoned to his presence and administered to him a severe reprimand. The Viceroy said:

I have observed, with pain and astonishment, that you have made yourself responsible for the issue of an open letter to President Roosevelt....

The substance of the letter is an invitation to the President of the U.S.A. to arbitrate between his Majesty's Government and "the various groups in India"....

I cannot suppose that you are ignorant of the rule and practice by which the Rulers of Indian States are required to avoid "connections, engagements, or communications with foreign powers"....

I feel bound to add that Your Highness takes upon yourself an immense responsibility in writing, before the public, that you are prepared to do in and with Indore, that which certain arbitrators may recommend you to do.... Did you ask yourself whether this ...was compatible with that vital instrument which has been the prized charter of your State for these 124 years? . . .



How unwise, how ill-advised then has Your Highness been in allowing yourself to be betrayed by some sudden impulse into committing the grave indiscretion of which it is my duty now most formally to complain. I hope to hear from your lips before Your Highness withdraws this morning not only any explanation which you may wish to offer, but also the expression of your firm resolve not again to venture into any irregularity of this kind.

What the Maharaja had to say by way of an explanation of his conduct before he withdrew has not been recorded, but a few weeks later a letter of repentance followed, in which the Maharaja assured the Viceroy that he had meant no harm and that no actual communication had been sent. It had not occurred to him, he explained, that his action might be construed as a breach of his Treaty Obligations. He ended the letter with a promise of his most earnest and continuing support in the war effort. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. II, pp. 174-75, 285-86]

12

The wholesale suppression of civil liberties and the feeling of general uncertainty as regards the future at the prospect of the war coming into India had resulted in a marked deterioration of the law and order situation in the country. The Congress, claiming to be the only truly representative organization of the masses had been hard put to it to stem the demoralization and help to restore the feeling of security among the people. Nowhere was this task more urgent than in Sind.

That unfortunate Province had been for long a victim of depredations of Hurs, a fanatical religious brotherhood owing allegiance to the Pir of Pagaro (the turbaned Pir). The criminal activities of the Pir, who was a depraved character, had led to his arrest in October 1941, causing serious unrest among the Hurs. [Ibid, p. 439]

The unrest manifested itself in disturbances on so wide a scale that they threatened ordered life all over Sind and in parts of Khairpur. The disturbances began as a campaign of vengeance against the Government in Upper Sind. Officials were murdered, Government property looted, railway stations and



P.W.D. bungalows were attacked, telephone and telegraph wires were cut and canals were breached. On 1 April 1942 Martial Law was proclaimed in the affected areas, which only added fuel to the fire. The Hur depredations spread to more areas and threatened not only the Government but all civil life. No one was spared: zamindar or *sethia*, Hindu or Muslim, rich or poor, man or woman. The police was wholly powerless to deal with the criminals, who were equipped with firearms and attacked their targets in military fashion. They levied taxes and organized their own government. The police, the revenue officials, magistrates went in fear of their lives. The military simply patrolled various areas from time to time as a routine procedure, with no appreciable impact on the situation.

Gandhiji wrote:

The Government machinery has evidently broken down. The real remedy is for Congress members to withdraw from the Assembly and Khan Bahadur Allah Baksh and his fellow ministers to resign. These should form a peace brigade and fearlessly settle down among the Hurs and risk their lives in persuading these erring countrymen to desist from the crimes.... The resignations are necessary.... If they remain in the Assembly they cannot give undivided attention to their task.... Nothing short of such heroic action will bring the Hurs to their senses. Frightfulness will only make matters worse. [C.W.M.G., LXXVI, pp. 122-27]

Hostile critics challenged Gandhiji to do it himself. They said in effect: "You have an army of satyagrahis in your Ashram. Why do they not go and meet the Japanese menace in the east and the Hur menace in the west? Will you act only when the danger reaches the Ashram?"

Gandhiji answered that had he been younger he would certainly have gone to Sind himself and he might even have been successful. He had done such things when he had been younger. But now he was too old for such missions. Besides, he was storing up his energies for what promised to be the last fight of his life. Then he added:

I have not conceived my mission to be that of a knight-errant wandering everywhere to deliver people from difficult situations. My humble occupation has been to show people how they can solve their own



difficulties.... If I had adopted the role my critic has suggested, I would have helped people to become parasites. Therefore it is well that I have not trained myself to defend others. I shall be satisfied if at my death it could be said of me that I had devoted the best part of my life to showing the way to become self-reliant and cultivate the capacity to defend oneself under every conceivable circumstance.

An armed man, Gandhiji argued, relied upon his arms. A man who was intentionally unarmed, relied upon the unseen force called God. Non-violence without reliance upon God would be ineffective. Twenty-two years which he had spent in training the country in non-violence was too short a period. Even so, Gandhiji expressed the hope that a large number of people would come forward and show the strength of non-violence in facing the danger that confronted the country. The occasion to test non-violence had arrived. [Ibid, pp. 231-32]



CHAPTER XI: THE BRITISH ASKED TO WITHDRAW FROM INDIA

1

In the closing days of April 1942, when the Congress leaders were busy debating the future political course, Gandhiji was at Sevagram, where the workers of the Harijan Sevak Sangh had gathered to seek guidance from him on the various problems they faced in their work. There had grown a feeling among the workers that the Harijan movement had not been proceeding with the required speed, that it had been showing signs of exhaustion. The work needed to be revitalized.

Should not the Harijan Sevak Sangh enlarge the area of its service, Gandhiji was asked, by taking in its scope also the Harijans who had embraced Islam or Christianity?

Gandhiji's reply was that untouchability was the curse of Hinduism. The assumption was that those who went out of the Hindu fold ceased to be untouchables. It was the responsibility of Christians or Muslims to look after the untouchables who had become Christians or Musalmans and remove their disabilities. If the Harijan Sevak Sangh were to go after them the service of genuine untouchables would suffer. True, there had been a lull in the work of the Sangh, as there had been in all national activities. But it was not correct to say that no progress had been made. If workers did their duty with faith and devotion there was no need for anything spectacular. Giving education to Harijan children was not spectacular work, but it was work of great importance. What an achievement it would be if more Harijans could be produced who had the attainments of Ambedkar. Ambedkar had vowed to destroy Hinduism. He believed that untouchability lay at the root of Hinduism and therefore Hinduism deserved to be destroyed. It could be that this belief of Ambedkar was the result of an inadequate study of Hindu scriptures. But even if that should not be the case, even if he were an apostate, it was the Hindu society that was responsible for it. Hinduism would be redeemed when someone with the intellectual calibre of Ambedkar was thrown up from among the untouchables that the Harijan Sevak Sangh was educating. That was what he had set his sights on, said Gandhiji. That was why he had given his approval for the scheme of scholarships for Harijan



students put up by Thakkar Bapa with the financial support of Ghanshyam Das Birla. Harijan boys must have the opportunities for education that middle-class Hindu boys had.

Eradication of untouchability, Gandhiji said, was a task much more difficult than that of securing swaraj. It could not be achieved without an awakening in the Hindu society. It was therefore bound to take a long time.

Securing admission of Harijan boys to schools was a difficult matter. Recourse to law for the purpose would only poison the atmosphere and lead to bitterness. But District Boards could make it a rule that a school would be run only when there were Harijan boys in it, and enforce the rule even if it should result in only Harijan boys going to the school.

Improving the methods of scavenging and ensuring cleanliness among scavengers was also a crying need. This could be achieved only when Harijan Sevaks became scavengers. If they did so, they would not go about the job in the way the scavengers did. They would not soil themselves with excreta as scavengers did. They would have to find a cleaner way of doing their work. [The Diary of Mahadev Desai (unpublished), Book No. 43, pp. 325-29]

2

With the advance of summer the Japanese threat to India had become more menacing, with disastrous results for the morale of the people both in towns and villages. From Bihar Chief Secretary to the Government reported: "Believing that the Government intended to commandeer all standing wheat crop, cultivators in parts of the Northern districts are reported to have harvested the crop before it was time to do so." Almost everyone, he said, was concerned simply with saving himself and his family.

On 10 and 16 May the Japanese carried out raids on Imphal which put the morale of the entire province of Assam to a severe test. The Chief Secretary of Assam reported: "*Prima facie* it appears likely that the number of persons who stuck to their posts after the second raid was in most departments exiguous, and the accounts of eye-witnesses show that a large and motely stream of



labourers probably accompanied by demoralized subordinate officials has been passing down the road."

The fortnightly report of the Government of Bihar for the first half of May thus described the situation in that Province:

There is no improvement to report in the general public feeling.... The unfavourable impression caused by the passage of trains through North Bihar containing sick and wounded from the Burma front is now likely to be strengthened by the unexpected return of labour which had only recently been recruited for the military roads in Assam. These labourers are returning in many cases with sores on their feet in a condition which shows that they have not been well cared for on the journey. And on their return the tale is spreading that many of them are victims of the Japanese air raids in Assam.

Describing the reluctance of the people to go anywhere near the war zone the report related a few incidents as instances. At Samastipur Indian engine-drivers had refused to obey orders to take engines to Katihar, and they had to be driven there by British foremen and drivers. At another place near Ranchi when a military officer came to inspect the village water tank, the villagers promptly drained the tank for fear that troops might camp in the locality and harass the villagers. [Francis G. Hutchins, *Spontaneous Revolution*, Manohar Book Service, Delhi, 1971, pp. 232-34]

In Bengal the population was gripped by intense nervousness and fright. Linlithgow, who paid a visit to Calcutta on 15 May, reported to Amery:

Life was also considerably diversified by a variety of alarms, and the first night I was there I was turned out of bed unceremoniously at 12.30 a.m. and despatched to Barrackpore 14 miles away, in view of a signal suggesting that a Japanese air division might be expected in Calcutta at 5.30 the next morning! That particular piece of intelligence seemed to me and to all others concerned on the face of it perfectly absurd and nothing in fact came of it; but the matter was not one that those concerned were prepared to run any risks over. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. II, pp. 101-2]



On 4 May a number of Congress leaders, among them Vallabhbhai Patel and Rajendra Prasad came to Sevagram to give Gandhiji an account of the deliberations of the A.I.C.C. at Allahabad and to discuss with him the implications of the main resolution passed. Gandhiji was satisfied.

He said:

I do not believe that anyone can be worse for us than our present masters. I admit I am taking the risk of Japanese domination by asking them to go, but I take it willingly.... What arises out of this is jail-going. We must say there is no room for any understanding now between Britain and us except the former's withdrawal from here.

It is no use criticizing Jawaharlal or Rajaji or anyone. There is a psychology of fear which makes people feel that if England goes we are finished.... Things are boiling up inside me now. Today I feel that we must wipe out this domination.... If we die fighting against them, well and good. If we die fighting amongst ourselves it will be a matter of shame, but it must be borne.... Will you proclaim this? Are you ready for this? No reins on your tongues except those of ahimsa.... The only hope of victory for Britain is their withdrawal from here. We can bring about this result if we are strong enough....

We have to be fearless. We do not want enquiries regarding atrocities by soldiers. We want them to go. If they go, Japan probably won't come. If she comes we must deal with her too.... We may not fear internal strife or external aggression now. Everything changes with this outlook – even the time sense.... If India demands it with one voice they can't resist. Even the Princes will subside without a word.

In the present circumstances I see nothing but perpetual domination for India and so long as we look for help to others to defend us we shall remain slaves. [The Diary of Mahadev Desai (unpublished), Book No. 43, pp. 330-32]

Gandhiji hoped the Muslims would join the movement, but he was prepared to face the likelihood of their making common cause with the British and the Princes to fight the Congress. If they won they could even have their



Pakistan. Then there were the Princes. Hyderabad had already got a plan for a kingdom that would extend from Masulipatam to Berar.

Rajendra Babu expressed the view that the Hindus would prefer British rule to the Nizam's rule.

Gandhiji said he himself would prefer Muslim rule to British rule, for it could be dealt with. People feared the Nizam's rule because it was backed by the British.

Gandhiji said he had told Chiang Kai-shek that he was not scared by the prospect of the Axis powers winning the war and that this statement of his had shocked Chiang and Jawaharlal. But it was his firm view that the British were in no way better than the Japanese. Germany, Japan, Britain – they were all alike.

Rajendra Babu asked what should be done if the Japanese sent into India contingents of Indian soldiers, or if the advancing army was of a mixed composition. They would be engaged by American and British armies of mixed composition.

Gandhiji said the duty of the people would be to offer them non-violent non-cooperation. They must resist if their boats and other property should be taken away. If the British pursue the scorched-earth policy they too should be opposed.

The question, Gandhiji proceeded, when the leaders met him again on 6 May, was no longer that of seeking power. It was one of getting rid of the British Empire. There might be anarchy. He was prepared to countenance even that. That was the message the Congress must take to the people. If the atmosphere of the Dandi March could be produced, a great deal could be achieved. People had been overcome by fear. They feared going to jail; they feared to die. They must be freed from the fear.

Rajendra Babu said that Congressmen were not clear how far they could go. Many in the A.I.C.C. wanted the British to lose. But there it was their anger that spoke and so they flinched from any thought of helping the British.

But was it not humiliating that while on the one hand people wanted the British to lose, on the other hand they wanted the British to remain in the



country? The need was for making people understand that the country did not need anyone to defend it, said Gandhiji.

But if anarchy followed, Rajendra Babu asked, and a foreign power took advantage of it to occupy the country, what preparations were there to meet the situation? Gandhiji said while anarchy could not be ruled out, the Congress should be able to assume power and establish order. Hindus and Musalmans could then unite. [Ibid. pp. 340-45]

On 8 May some Congress workers from the Central Provinces called on Gandhiji. Gandhiji told them that he had been hoping against hope that the British would arrive at some settlement with India. But now he had given up the hope. There could be a settlement only on the basis of British withdrawal from India. He had accordingly forwarded a draft resolution to the A.I.C.C. The draft had not been passed as it was Nevertheless the resolution as it was passed by the A.I.C.C. provided him enough basis to go on.

When he asked the British to withdraw he did not mean that others should come in their place, for then India would not be free.

What was the worst that could happen if the British withdrew from India? If the Hindus and the Muslims did not compose their differences, there might be communal carnage, with millions of men and women being slaughtered. Congress workers must not then try to save their own lives. They must not be witnesses to the conflagration. They must offer themselves to be consumed in it.

If the Japanese should invade the country they too would be resisted and when they came to realize that they were not wanted they would have to go. Gandhiji said he was not prepared to assert that the British were preferable to the Japanese. He had therefore come to the conclusion that the British must leave India with their whole system of administration, from the police patel to the collector. Jawaharlal and Maulana Azad still wished for a settlement with the British. But that way lay perdition. Gandhiji said he was not prepared to pay such a heavy price for the victory of the British.

The demand for British withdrawal might well provoke opposition from the Muslim League and the Princes and the Congress would have to be prepared to meet their opposition.



Congressmen must speak up – not in subdued tones, but loudly and clearly. Of course they must not abuse the British, they must not bear them ill will. They must prepare themselves for suffering much greater than that involved in jail-going. For even in jail they would be meted out barbaric treatment. There was now no question of a settlement with the British.

Vinoba Bhave expressed his doubt as regards non-violence in Congress workers. Many, he said, looked forward to the state of anarchy that might follow and would not hesitate even to welcome Japan. Would it be right to depend on such people in the movement that Gandhiji contemplated?

Gandhiji asserted that British rule in India was the most violent thing imaginable and yet the country had been putting up with it. All through the preceding twenty-two years the Congress had remained wedded to ahimsa, even though the workers did not have in them the required degree of ahimsa. There were very few people who would deliberately resort to violence. Most of them knew that nothing could be achieved through violence. Besides, however weak the British Government might be, it still had the strength to deal with any manifestations of popular violence. [Ibid, pp. 346-54]

4

On 9 May Rajaji paid his long awaited visit to Sevagram. In the conversation that followed Gandhiji told Rajaji that even though he disapproved of the mission he had undertaken, he must pursue his own path and must not suppress himself.

The National Government that Rajaji sought, Gandhiji said, would be National Government only in name. Things were going from bad to worse. He had been told, Gandhiji continued, that most Congressmen felt the way C.R. did. They were tired, they would not go in for sacrifices. They were not capable of either violence or non-violence. The taste of office had been rich and they hankered after ministerships. That might be so, but whether the country was with him or not he must move.

Jawaharlal was mentioned and Rajaji said it appeared that Jawaharlal did not feel the need to suit action to opinion. Gandhiji agreed that that was so and regretted that "one of the finest men should be so paralysed". He could not give any lead, had no judgment and talked and talked.



Rajaji told Gandhiji that he could not fight against two evils at the same time. If he fought against the British the Japanese were sure to come in. And if he was prepared to take such a risk, which was a near certainty, he might as well have the programme that Subhas had, which was more direct and quick.

Gandhiji said Subhas was in league with Japan and would not mind Japanese rule in India. He did not want that mentality in the country. He would prefer anarchy. His own feeling was that if the British withdrew from India probably the Japanese would not come. [Ibid, pp. 355-68]

On 10 May Gandhiji proceeded to Bombay to collect donations for the Deenabandhu Andrews Memorial and remained there for a week.

On 11 May Gandhiji wrote an appeal "To every Briton", which was published in *Harijan* of 17 May. He wrote:

I ask every Briton to support me in my appeal to the British at this very hour to retire from every Asiatic and African possession and at least from India. That step is essential for the safety of the world and for the destruction of Nazism and Fascism.... Acceptance of my appeal will confound all the military plans of all the Axis powers and even of military advisers of Great Britain.

If my appeal goes home I am sure the cost of British interests in India and Africa would be nothing compared to the present ever-growing cost of the war to Britain. And when one puts morals in the scales, there is nothing but gain to Britain, India and the world.

Gandhiji pointed out that India had been made a participant in the war without having been consulted and was being plundered through a variety of taxes being levied to finance the war. Even he, an all-war resister, had to pay two pice as war tax on every letter he wrote, one pice on every post-card and two annas on every telegram he sent. India's homesteads were being occupied by British troops. Gandhiji concluded:

This appeal is being written during my silence day. I am just now concerned with Britain's action. When slavery was abolished in America many slaves protested, some even wept. But protests and tears notwithstanding, slavery was abolished in law....



I am asking for something much higher. I ask for a bloodless end of an unnatural domination and for a new era, even though there may be protests and wailings from some of us. [C.W.M.G., LXXVI, pp. 98-100]

A newspaper correspondent asked Gandhiji if he thought it was possible for the British to withdraw from India all at once in the given circumstances and to whom they should hand over the administration.

Gandhiji replied:

They and we are both in the midst of fire. If they go there is a likelihood of both of us being safe. If they do not, Heaven only knows what will happen. I have said in the plainest terms that in my proposal there is no question of entrusting the administration to any person or party ...they have to leave India in God's hands, but in modern parlance to anarchy, and that anarchy may lead to internecine warfare for a time or to unrestrained dacoities. From these a true India will rise in the place of the false one we see.

Asked what advice he would give to the Indian people in the event of the Japanese invading India, Gandhiji said the likelihood was that, with the British having withdrawn, Japan would not invade India. But in case she did, he would advise people to offer stubborn non-violent non-cooperation. [Ibid, pp. 105-6]

5

On 15 May a few prominent Bombay suburban and Gujarat Congressmen met Gandhiji to seek elucidation on the policy he wished the Congress to pursue. Among those present were Vallabhbhai Patel, Bhulabhai Desai, B. G. Kher and Morarji Desai. The meeting, which lasted for about 85 minutes, was private. Nevertheless a report of the proceedings, sent by a Communist worker present at the meeting to P. C. Joshi, General Secretary of the Party, was intercepted by the Government. Explaining his demand for British withdrawal Gandhiji said it was as much in England's interest to leave India as it was in India's interest. In India the British were far from their shores and lacked the capability to face Japan. Of course if they did not heed the advice, satyagraha would have to be offered. About the nature of the contemplated satyagraha Gandhiji said:



I do not think it can be individual satyagraha this time. No, it will be mass satyagraha – an all-out satyagraha against the British demanding their withdrawal forthwith.

Gandhiji made it clear that he was not pro-Japanese. Japan was too much of an aggressor: But if the British withdrew he had a feeling that Japan would not invade India. Her fight was against England. Besides, even if Japan had to be fought, only a free India could take up the fight. British withdrawal, or the mass satyagraha to achieve British withdrawal, might of course result in anarchy. Gandhiji said he would put up with that. He was asking the British to give the gift of anarchy to India.

Gandhiji was at pains to emphasize that his demand for British withdrawal did not mean inviting the Japanese, who would have to be resisted. Subhas Bose, "if he means to set up a Government in India under the Japanese", would have to be resisted. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol II, pp. 128-32]

On 16 May Gandhiji gave an interview to the Press. Some sixty newspapermen grilled him for more than an hour.

Answering a question on the communal problem Gandhiji said the question could not be solved so long as the British remained in India, because all parties would be looking up to the foreign power. Real heart unity between Hindus and Muslims was therefore an impossibility unless British power was withdrawn and no other power took its place.

Asked if he had devised a plan to resist Japan if she invaded India, Gandhiji said he had not. There would be unadulterated non-violent non-cooperation and if the whole of India offered it, he was certain Japanese arms, or any combination of arms, could be sterilized. Of course India would have to be ready to risk the loss of several millions of lives. But he would consider the cost cheap and victory won at that cost glorious.

But what hope was there of India offering such a non-violent non-cooperation to Japan on such a scale? — Gandhiji was asked. Gandhiji said a similar question might be asked about India offering armed resistance to Japan. Several attempts had been made and they had not succeeded against the British. They were not likely to succeed against Japan either. Must then India remain a



slave for ever? Gandhiji refused to subscribe to such a proposition. He must try and try again.

Would he advise non-violent non-cooperation against the scorched-earth policy? Gandhiji said:

I would certainly advise it, for I think it is ruinous, suicidal and unnecessary — whether India believes in non-violent non-cooperation or in violence. And the Russian and Chinese examples make no appeal to me. If some other country resorts to methods which I consider to be inhuman, I may not follow them.

Of course he would tolerate the destruction of munitions factories, because in any case if he had his way he would not tolerate munitions factories in free India.

The immediate demand was of course for British withdrawal. Gandhiji said he was moving cautiously, watching his every step. He would do nothing in haste, but there was a fixed determination that the British must go. He had mentioned anarchy, said Gandhiji, and explained:

I am convinced that we are living today in a state of ordered anarchy. It is a misnomer to call such a rule as is established in India a rule which promotes the welfare of India. Therefore this ordered, disciplined anarchy should go, and if there is complete lawlessness in India as a result, I would risk it.

With whom did he sympathize in the war? – Gandhiji was asked. He said he would side with none though his sympathies were with Russia and China. He had earlier said that he would give moral support to Britain, but now his mind refused to give them that support after Amery's performances and the Cripps mission. As for America, she had not used the opportunity she had to work for peace. America could have kept out of the war, but in the intoxication of her immense wealth she had not done so. Both England and America, unless they put their own houses in order and withdrew from Africa and Asia and removed the colour bar, lacked the moral basis for engaging in the war. Until the canker of white superiority was destroyed they had no right to talk of democracy and human freedom. [C.W.M.G., LXXVI, pp. 111-16]



The demand for British withdrawal, Gandhiji wrote in *Harijan* of 31 May 1942, did not imply that Congressmen and others should prepare themselves to take over the administration. In non-violent technique it was unthinkable to take over power. In an anarchical state all turbulent elements would make a bid for power. Those who served the people and evolved order out of chaos would spend themselves in the effort and if they survived, popular will would make them administrators. The central point was non-violence. The chief thing was to educate the people to resist injustice, no matter how and by whom perpetrated. Such resistance would not be a preliminary step towards gaining power. He wanted thousands to resist injustice. If they were to do so to seize power, they would never succeed.

Self-protection should be organized: against officials, against dacoits and possibly against the Japanese. This would be done through gymnastics, drill, lathi play and the like. The authorities were not likely to interfere in this, but if they did, they should be defied and the consequences faced. [Ibid, pp. 132-33]

Someone wrote to Gandhiji that though "ideologically" most people would agree with him that the British must immediately withdraw from India, enough ground had not been prepared for enforcing the demand. There had been insufficient education of people. Many looked to Japan for help. Enough efforts had not been made to secure Muslim support. Gandhiji replied:

I am taking every care humanly possible to prepare the ground. I know that the novelty of the idea, and that too at this juncture, has caused a shock to many people. But ...I had to tell the truth if I was to be true to myself. I regard it as my solid contribution to the war and to India's deliverance from the peril that is and the peril that is threatening. . . .

Of course the people must not, on any account, lean on the Japanese to get rid of the British power. That were a remedy worse than the disease. But, as I have already said, in this struggle every risk has to be run in order to rid ourselves of the biggest disease.... The cost of the cure, I know, will be heavy. No price is too heavy to pay for the deliverance. [Ibid, p. 138]



Jawaharlal Nehru, who, tired in body and mind, had proceeded on a short vacation to Kullu-Manali, returned from there in the last week of the month and proceeded to Sevagram. On 27 May he spent the whole day with Gandhiji, exchanging views with him. He did not find himself in sympathy with the step Gandhiji contemplated, seeing in it many pitfalls, risks and dangers, above all the risk of being seen as favouring the Japanese. He said so to Gandhiji. First, it would amount to a betrayal of China. Even though this was not intended, it would have that effect. Secondly, Gandhiji and the Congress would be seen as pro-Japanese by the Americans, the British and the Chinese. Thirdly, his call to the British to quit India would have an opposite effect on American opinion to that desired. In England, perhaps in peace time some idealists might approve of what Gandhiji said, but in the midst of the war that had been raging no one could be found to lend support to the proposition.

Gandhiji said it was a matter of surprise that something should be imputed to him which he had not entertained even in his dreams. If the British wanted India's help in the war what was preventing them from giving India her freedom? The Cripps mission had failed not because Indian parties had not been able to unite but because the British did not want to part with power. If India were free the British could secure India's help in the war under a treaty. If they could have a treaty with Russia, why not with India?

Nehru told Gandhiji that Col. Johnson, President Roosevelt's representative in India, was under the impression that Gandhiji was pro-Japanese. He attached great importance to whatever Gandhiji wrote, for, in his view it was bound to have a profound effect on the war effort.

On the other hand the Government considered him a spent force and thought the Americans were fools to overestimate him. The reason they did not take action against *Harijan* was that it suited them to have the Americans see for themselves the way Gandhiji had chosen to act.

Gandhiji said the step he contemplated could not be postponed till the time the country was ready for it. That would mean waiting indefinitely. He did not fear large-scale violence. He had been preaching non-violence throughout



his life and it was bound to have had some effect. He could not very well prevent use of violence by those who were disposed to violence. He would not be able to prevent it if slaughter should ensue. What he sought was a kind of anarchy. The anarchy that already prevailed in the country was much more serious. The violence that might be generated to get rid of that anarchy would be small violence. After all, how much violence were unarmed people capable of? Even from that violence non-violence would arise. The task was to end the terrible violence that was going on in the country. He could not shut his eyes to it and pretend that it was not there. [The Diary of Mahadev Desai (unpublished), Book No. 43, pp. 369-76]

7

In the first week of June 1942 Sevagram was host to Louis Fischer, American writer and commentator. From 4 June to 9 June Gandhiji gave him an hour every day, answering his questions. The questions ranged over a wide variety of topics: the Cripps offer and its rejection by the Congress, the communal disunity and the role of the British regime in aggravating it, the class composition of the Congress, its dependence on capitalists in financial matters and the extent of its concern with social problems, such as poverty, unemployment, usury, landlessness etc., the problem of rising population and the way it could be tackled, Gandhiji's views on life and death and rebirth, etc. What Fischer was most troubled about was Gandhiji's proposal that the British should withdraw from India forthwith. How did Gandhiji see such withdrawal step by step?

Well, said Gandhiji, first there were the Princes, some of them with large armies. They might make trouble. There might be anarchy. He had asked the British to go in an orderly fashion and leave India to God. The resultant anarchy and disorder could be got over by the Congress, the Muslim League and the Princes, the three principal elements in the Indian political situation, coming together and forming a Provisional Government. The Congress, being the most powerful, might claim the largest share of power.

Fischer objected saying that the demand for immediate withdrawal would never be conceded by the British, nor would the United States approve. For



immediate withdrawal of the British would mean making a present of India to Japan. Did Gandhiji mean that the British should also withdraw their armies?

Gandhiji said he was not asking the British to go bag and baggage. Britain and America and other countries too could keep their armies in the country and use Indian territory as a base for military operations. He did not want Japan or the Axis powers to win. But the British could not win the war unless India was made free.

But keeping the armies involved many other things, Fischer pointed out, such as controlling the railways.

Gandhiji said the United Nations could control the railways. They would also need order in the ports. They would have to ensure that there were no riots in such cities as Bombay and Calcutta. These things would require common effort and there could be written agreement with England.

"Why have you never said this?" Fischer asked, surprised. "Why have you not communicated your plan to the Viceroy? He should be told that you have no objection now to the use of India as a base for Allied military operations."

"No one has asked me," Gandhiji answered. "I have written about my proposed civil disobedience movement in order to prepare the public for it."

Gandhiji emphasized that India could not wait for her national freedom till after the war. He said: "England is sitting on an unexploded mine in India and it may explode any day. The hatred and resentment against Britain are so strong here that Britain can get no help for her war effort."

Answering another question of Fischer two days later Gandhiji said:

I do not want India to be in the same predicament as China. That is why I am saying I do not want American and British soldiers here. I do not want Japanese or German soldiers here. The Japanese broadcast every day that they do not intend to keep India – they only propose to help us win our freedom. I do not welcome their sympathy or help. I know that they are not philanthropists. I want for India a respite from all foreign domination. I have become impatient. I cannot wait any longer. Our condition is worse than China's or Persia's. I may not be able to convince Congress. Men who have held office in Congress may not rise to the



occasion. I will go ahead nevertheless and address myself directly to the people. But whatever happens, we are unbendable. We may be able to evolve a new order which will astonish the whole world.

Would Gandhiji consider withdrawing the movement if in the course of it violence developed? — Fischer asked. Gandhiji said while it would be incorrect to say that no circumstances might arise in which he would consider calling off the movement, nevertheless he would not be overcautious as he had been in the past.

Would there be any chance of a compromise between what he asked and what the British Government were willing to offer?

No, said Gandhiji. There could be no halfway house between withdrawal and non-withdrawal. Nothing along the lines of the Cripps proposals would be acceptable. He would not insist on complete physical withdrawal, but he would insist on immediate transfer of power from the British to Indian hands. Any promise of transfer of power after the war would not do, because in that case India would not be able to help China and Russia which she wished to do. He did not want India's independence for the sake of India alone, said Gandhiji.

Had he any organization with which to carry on the struggle? — Fischer asked.

Gandhiji said the Congress was his organization. But if it failed him, he had his own organization – himself. He was a man possessed by an idea. If such a man could not get an organization, he himself became an organization. [*C.W.M.G.*, LXXVI, pp. 427-51]

On 10 June Gandhiji granted an interview to yet another American correspondent, Preston Grover of the Associated Press of America. Gandhiji explained to Grover how the immediate British withdrawal from India could advance the cause of the United Nations. India, as a free country, could make her contribution to the cause. As a nation prostrate at the feet of Britain, indeed at the feet of the Allies, India was only a burden.

Gandhiji again asserted that once the British withdrew, American and Allied troops would be able to use India as a base for their operations.



There was, Gandhiji said, great discontent in India and there was not that active hostility against Japanese advance. The moment India became free, she would be transformed into a nation prizing her liberty and defending it with all her might and therefore helping the Allied cause.

The difference would be what happened in Burma and what was happening in Russia. Britain did not give independence to Burma after she was separated from India. Consequently there was little cooperation from the Burmans. They fought neither for their own cause nor for the cause of the Allies. The same sort of thing might happen in India. If, as a possible contingency, the Japanese compelled the Allies to retire from India to a safer base, it could not be said that the whole of India would rise up in arms against Japan. Gandhiji said he wanted India to oppose the Japanese to a man. Free India would do so. In twenty-four hours her mind would be changed. All parties would then act as one man. Gandhiji concluded:

Think of 400 million people hungering for freedom. They want to be left alone. They are not savages. They have an ancient culture, ancient civilization, such variety and richness of languages. Britain should be ashamed of holding these people as slaves ...it is not right for any nation to hold another in bondage. [Ibid, pp. 207-12]

On 11* June two other American correspondents, Chaplin of the International News Service and Jack Belden of *Daily Herald* called on Gandhiji. He explained to them what India could do to face the Japanese invasion if the British withdrew. He said:

Supposing England retires from India for strategic purposes, and apart from any proposal – as they had to do in Burma — what would happen? ...We have then no army, no military resources ...and non-violence is the only thing we can fall back upon. In non-violent technique, of course, there can be nothing like preventing an invasion. They will land, but they will land on an inhospitable shore. They may be ruthless and wipe out all the 400 millions....



We may not be able to stand that terror and we may have to go through a course of subjection worse than our present state. But we are discussing the theory.

Gandhiji explained that he did not want the British to withdraw under Indian pressure, nor driven by force of circumstances. He wanted them to withdraw in their own interest, for their own good name.

But what if the British should decide to fight to the last man in India? Would not his non-violent non-cooperation help the Japanese?

Gandhiji said he did not want to help the Japanese. When the British were offering violent battle, India's non-violent struggle, or activity, would be neutralized. Those who believed in armed resistance would continue to help Britain as they were already doing. So, non-violent activity would find expression at best in silence — not obstructing the British forces, certainly not helping the Japanese. The railways and other services would be allowed to function.

As for the American troops, they were not in India at India's request or with India's consent. For the British to have brought American forces to India was to have made their stranglehold on India all the tighter.

The only solution for India's problems, Gandhiji said, was for the British to go. That moral act would save Britain and America. If they must keep their armies in India they could do so under a compact with free India. Then India, instead of being sullen, would become an ally. Gandhiji asked the correspondents to remember that he was more interested than the British in keeping the Japanese out. For Britain's defeat in Indian waters might mean *only the loss of India*. But if Japan won, India would lose *everything*.

Gandhiji said he could not look with philosophic calmness on the frightful things that were happening in India. Areas being vacated and turned into military camps. Hundreds, if not thousands, on their way from Burma perishing without food and drink. There was racial discrimination. One route for the whites, another for the blacks. Provision of food and shelter for whites, none for the blacks. India was being ground down to dust and humiliated even before the Japanese advent, not for India's defence — and no one knew for whose defence. And so one fine morning he had come to the decision to make the honest demand to the British:



"For Heaven's sake leave India alone. Let us breathe the air of freedom. It may choke us, suffocate us, as it did the slaves on their emancipation. But I want the present sham to end."

Gandhiji had spoken of an alliance between free India and the Allies, following the British withdrawal. How would such an alliance fit in with India's non-violence? – the visitors asked.

Gandhiji said the whole of India was not non-violent. His kind of non-violence was represented possibly by a hopeless minority, or perhaps by India's dumb millions who were temporarily non-violent. They might act when the supreme test came, or they might not. He did not have the non-violence of the millions to present to Britain. He was making the appeal to them on the strength of bare inherent justice. It was being made from a moral plane. They must declare India's independence irrespective of India's demand.

And to whom were the British to say that India was free?

To the world, Gandhiji answered. Automatically the Indian Army would be disabanded and the British could start packing up. Or they might declare that they would pack up only after the war was over, but they would expect no help from India, impose no taxes, raise no recruits. British rule would cease from that moment, no matter what happened to India afterwards. "Today it is all hypocrisy, unreality. I want that to end."

America, since she had become the predominant partner in the Allied cause, was also a partner in Britain's guilt. She could insist that Britain should meet India's demand. She could make it a condition of financing Britain and keeping her supplied. [Ibid, pp. 192-97]

A representative of *The Hindu* asked Gandhiji why he had changed his stance on the question of Hindu-Muslim unity. While formerly he had been saying that there could be no swaraj without Hindu-Muslim unity, he now said that there could be no Hindu-Muslim unity without swaraj.

Gandhiji said he claimed to be one of the oldest lovers of Hindu-Muslim unity. But every attempt made to bring about that unity had failed, and failed so completely that he himself had fallen from grace and was described by Muslim newspapers as the greatest enemy of Islam. He had asked himself why it was so.



He could find no reason for it except the fact that the third power, even without deliberately wishing it, would not allow real unity to come about. He had therefore come to the conclusion that the communities would come together almost immediately after the British power came to an end in India. If independence was the goal both of the Congress and the League, then, without needing to come to any terms, all parties would fight together for independence and having secured it make full use of the liberty gained in order to evolve a National Government suited to the genius of India. [Ibid, p. 243]

In *Harijan* of 21 June Gandhiji again explained for the readers the meaning of his appeal to Britain to withdraw from India. He wrote:

British authority should end completely irrespective of the wishes or demand of various parties. But I would recognize their own military necessity. They may need to remain in India for preventing Japanese occupation. That prevention is common cause between them and us.... Therefore I would tolerate their presence in India not in any sense as rulers but as allies of free India.... The terms on which the Allied powers may operate will be purely for the Government of the free State to determine. The existing parties will have dissolved into the National Government.

Gandhiji wrote he could not say definitely whether the National Government of India would be non-violent. If he survived he would advise adoption of non-violence to the utmost extent possible. But with the existence of so many martial races in India, all of whom would have a voice in the Government, it was more likely that the national policy would incline towards militarism of a modified character. In every case a free India in alliance with the Allied powers would be of great help to their cause. [Ibid, pp. 215-16]

A questioner mentioned Gandhiji's statement that chaos might follow British withdrawal from India and asked how he proposed to deal with it. Gandhiji wrote:

If such a situation arises I myself and my co-workers will take such steps as are necessary to overcome the chaos. That is to say we shall plead with those who are responsible for creating the chaos and dissuade them. If in doing so we have to die, we shall die.... I am afraid ...non-violence alone



will not operate. Some other agencies will have appeared which will engage themselves in subduing by force those who indulge in looting and plundering. When there is chaos it will be a test for everyone.

And what did he propose to do, and what would he advise the people to do, if in the course of the movement he and the other leaders of the Congress should be arrested? Gandhiji's answer was:

The conditions which are imposed every time will not be there this time. There will be only one condition, that of ahimsa, and that is indispensable.... So when the leaders are arrested every Indian will consider himself a leader and will sacrifice himself, and will not worry if his action results in anarchy.... Our ahimsa will remain lame as long as we do not get rid of the fear of anarchy. [Ibid, pp. 219-20]

* The date is as given in *The Transfer of Power*, Vol. II, pp. 236-37. Chandulal Dalal in his *Chronology* gives the date 6 June.

8

The British authorities, as evidenced by the exchanges between the Governors and the Viceroy and the Viceroy and the India Office in London, were considerably agitated by Gandhiji's call, repeated stridently through the columns of *Harijan* and through interviews to Indian and foreign Press correspondents, and were considering ways of dealing with it.

To keep the War Cabinet informed of Gandhiji's writings from day to day the Viceroy regularly sent to the India Office by cable not only summaries of all of Gandhiji's writings in *Harijan* with his comments but also copies of *Harijan* by bag. The Viceroy at this stage expressed himself of the view that while action against Gandhiji and those in the Congress supporting him might become inevitable, such action should not be precipitated, lest there be adverse reaction in America and questions raised in Parliament. On 12 June the Home Department, Government of India, reported to the Secretary of State that it had under preparation an official paper on Congress policy, based on both published and secret documents and a popular pamphlet along the following lines: (1) that the Congress always aimed to establish Congress-Hindu-Bourgeois domination



supported in power by British Army or Congress-controlled Indian Army, (2) that it was because the British would not lend themselves to this course that the Congress was hostile to the British, (3) that the Congress always looked forward to a world war which would give it a chance of obtaining a bargain under pressure, (4) that by opposing the war it hoped to achieve its object through Japan, and (5) that the Cripps proposals had been rejected by it because they did not give it control over Defence so that it could make independent terms with Japan. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. II, pp. 187-90]

On 15 June Linlithgow in a communication to Amery told him that in his view Gandhiji was not likely to move till he had got a sufficient degree of substantial support. "On the other hand," he wrote, "I think him still as I have always thought him, the one man capable of uniting all the various threads of thought in Congress, and I find it difficult to conceive of circumstances in which any lengthy resistance to him on the part of Congress leaders, however prominent, can be looked for." Rajagopalachari's violent attempt to escape, the Viceroy said, had been getting less and less important each day. Nehru had lined up completely with Gandhiji.

He had been under pressure from Governors, the Viceroy wrote, to declare that if the Congress misbehaved, the British would stop doing business with it. This, he said, would not be wise policy. However obnoxious a political party might be, if it was powerful enough to speak with authority for a vast proportion of the electors, its views could not be ignored. Of course if it appeared that Gandhiji was going too far and interfering with the war effort, drastic action would have to be taken against him. [*Ibid*, pp. 212-14]

On 16 June the Secretary of State submitted to the War Cabinet a memorandum saying that Gandhiji was abandoning his policy of non-embarrassment and planning to lead Congress into some widespread movement to compel the British to withdraw from India. It was not yet clear, the memorandum said, what support he was likely to receive from Nehru and the Working Committee, though there was no possibility of a substantial breakaway from him. The threatened mass civil disobedience might take the form of a no-tax campaign, or resistance to military measures in Eastern India. The Government had to be prepared for a movement instigated by Gandhiji to defy



the law and to obstruct the war effort. In view of the hold that Gandhiji had on world opinion, steps would require to be taken to prepare the opinion in America and elsewhere before measures were taken to restrain Gandhiji. [Ibid, pp. 217-18]

Hallett, the U.P. Governor, was suggesting that "if Gandhi goes off the deep end", prompt action must be taken against him. When Gandhiji had been arrested in the past heavens had not fallen. In fact the mistake in 1930 had been that he had not been arrested quickly and in consequence the movement had grown. [Ibid, p. 222]

On 17 June Amery instructed British Ambassadors in Chungking and Moscow to inform the Chinese and U.S.S.R. authorities that circumstances might shortly arise which would compel the Government of India to take drastic measures against Gandhiji and the Congress.

On the same day he cabled to the Viceroy that he was asking the Cabinet for a free hand being given to the Viceroy to take action against Gandhiji and the Congress. He repeated his suggestion for Gandhiji and possibly Nehru to be flown to Uganda to join the Burmese leader U Saw there. For as long as Gandhiji remained in India the Press would be talking about him daily. [Ibid, pp. 224-25]

9

On 14 June Gandhiji penned a letter to Chiang Kai-shek, informing the Chinese leader about his plans. Gandhiji wrote:

I am anxious to explain to you that my appeal to the British power to withdraw from India is not meant in any shape or form to weaken India's defence against the Japanese or embarrass you in your struggle. India must not submit to any aggressor or invader and must resist him. I would not be guilty of purchasing the freedom of my country at the cost of your country's freedom.... Japanese domination of either India or China would be equally injurious to the other country and to world peace. That domination must therefore be prevented and I should like India to play her natural and rightful part in this.



I feel India cannot do so while she is in bondage. India has been a helpless witness of the withdrawals from Malaya, Singapore and Burma.... I do not want a repetition of this tragic tale of woe....

Unless we make the effort there is a grave danger of the public feeling in India going into wrong and harmful channels. There is every likelihood of subterranean sympathy for Japan growing simply in order to weaken and oust British authority in India.... We have to learn self-reliance and develop strength to work out our own salvation. This is only possible if we make a determined effort to free ourselves from bondage....

To make it perfectly clear that we want to prevent in every way Japanese aggression, I would personally agree that the Allied powers might, under treaty with us, keep their armed forces in India and use the country as a base for operations against the threatened Japanese attack.

My heart goes out to the people of China in deep sympathy and in admiration for their heroic struggle and endless sacrifices in the cause of their country's freedom and integrity against tremendous odds. I am convinced that this heroism and sacrifice cannot be in vain; they must bear fruit. [C.W.M.G., LXXVI, pp. 223-26; *The Transfer of Power*, Vol. II, pp. 346-48]

Chiang Kai-shek's response to the letter was not favourable. He was reluctant to send any answer at all, according to a report of the British ambassador in Chungking to the Foreign Office, but later decided to have a message sent to Gandhiji in the following terms: "Situation in Egypt appears to be at critical stage and Chiang Kai-shek's fervent wish is that nothing should take place in India to harm the prosecution of the war and which would also harm India in those countries sympathetic to her." [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. II, pp. 351-52]

It was on 6 June that Gandhiji first mentioned the possibility, in conversation with Louis Fischer, of foreign troops being permitted to stay on in India even after the British withdrawal, to carry on operations against Japan. This marked a definite change of attitude on Gandhiji's part on the question, for earlier he had insisted that simultaneously with British withdrawal from India



foreign troops must also leave the country. This led to some confusion in the minds of people and Gandhiji was repeatedly called upon to explain and amplify his statement.

A correspondent pointed out that permitting foreign troops on Indian soil would have grave implications. India would be transformed into a vast arsenal and supply base for the United Nations.

Gandhiji appreciated the difficulty. Neither the masses nor the classes, he said, could recognize the necessity of the military operations of the Allied powers after the declaration of withdrawal. But if the necessity was proved the public might be expected to reconcile themselves to the inevitable.

He wrote:

I could not be guilty of asking the Allies to take a step which would involve certain defeat. I could not guarantee foolproof non-violent action to keep the Japanese at bay. Abrupt withdrawal of the Allied troops might result in Japan's occupation of India and China's sure fall. I had not the remotest idea of any such catastrophe resulting from my action. Therefore I feel that if in spite of the acceptance of my proposal, it is deemed necessary by the Allies to remain in India to prevent Japanese occupation, they should do so, subject to such conditions as may be prescribed by the National Government.

This position, Gandhiji asserted, was not for him a descent from non-violence. Non-violence in fact dictated it. Neither Britain nor America shared his faith in non-violence. He himself was unable to state that non-violent action would make India proof against Japanese aggression. He could not claim that the whole of India was non-violent in the sense required. In the circumstances it would be hypocritical on his part to insist on the immediate withdrawal of the Allied troops as an indispensable part of his proposal. [C.W.M.G., LXXVI, pp. 238-41]

Gandhiji argued that it was altogether premature and wrong to pore over the weakest points of a very difficult project (that of persuading the British to withdraw from India forthwith) which might not be accepted even with the troops remaining in India. The virtue of the withdrawal, which would be an act



of renunciation on the part of the British, would not be diminished, because the Allied troops would be operating in India with the sole object of preventing Japanese attack.

Doubters, Gandhiji said, must not dread the prospect of the presence of foreign troops in India for the purpose indicated, but regard their presence as an inevitable part of the proposal, so as to make it not only justifiable but foolproof. Gandhiji explained the implications of the proposal as follows:

- (1) India becomes free of all financial obligation to Britain;
- (2) The annual drain to Great Britain stops automatically;
- (3) All taxation ceases except what the replacing Government imposes or retains;
- (4) The dead weight of an all-powerful authority keeping under subjection the tallest in the land is lifted at once;
- (5) In short, India begins a new chapter in her national life and can hope to affect the fortunes of the war with non-violence as her predominant sanction. [Ibid, pp. 353-54]

But surely, objected a reader of *Harijan*, if non-violence could be effective in making the British withdraw from India, it could equally be effective in preventing Japanese invasion. Where then was the need for foreign troops?

Gandhiji answered that if British withdrawal should take place it would not be due merely to the non-violent pressure. And in any case what would be enough to affect the old occupant would be wholly inadequate for keeping off the invader. Thus, people could disown the authority of the British rulers by refusing to pay taxes and in a variety of other ways. But such measures would not be enough for preventing the Japanese onslaught. [Ibid, pp. 255-56]

To what extent would the Congress organization as a whole commit itself to the new parameters of policy evolved by Gandhiji, at the centre of which was the demand that the British should withdraw from India right away and let Indians defend the country themselves? The indications were that those comprising the



Working Committee would go along, though with different degrees of enthusiasm, if only because no other course appeared possible. Even for the committed anti-Fascists such as Jawaharlal Nehru, it was unthinkable to accept the analysis of Rajaji and take the position he had taken, that of acceptance of the two-nation theory of Jinnah to get over communal differences, and acceptance of British rule for the time being in the hope of Britain conceding India's demand for freedom at some future date. On the other hand, taking up an exclusively anti-British agitational attitude without at the same time affirming the nation's resolve to resist Japanese aggression might easily be misunderstood and misconstrued and identify the Congress with the forces aiding and abetting Japanese militarism, represented in India by Subhas Bose and the Forward Bloc.

In the first half of June Jawaharlal Nehru and Maulana Azad, the two leaders in the Working Committee most apprehensive of the Japanese threat and also the most authentic official spokesmen of the Congress, had extensive talks with Gandhiji. Given the critical military situation in the East they were doubtful of the wisdom of asking for immediate and unconditional British withdrawal.

Azad had just come from Bengal and was full of the most gloomy thoughts. As he wrote in his book *India Wins Freedom*:

I was disturbed to see the deterioration in the situation on all hands. The majority of people were now convinced that the British would lose the war and some seemed to welcome a Japanese victory. There was great bitterness against the British which at times was so intense that they did not think of the consequences of a Japanese conquest of India.

Azad had gathered from talks with various people in Calcutta that the Government expected the Japanese to advance upon the city from Diamond Harbour. The officials were planning to abandon the city and retreat along prepared lines to the west, after blowing up bridges and destroying factories and industrial installations like Jamshedpur. [Tara Chand, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Vol. IV, pp. 366-67]

Azad told Gandhiji that his call to the British to withdraw from India and his plan to start a mass civil disobedience movement to enforce the demand was likely to have the effect of strengthening the already prevalent pro-Japanese



feelings among the people. In Bengal, he told Gandhiji, it was already being said that he had come round to the position taken by Subhas Bose.

Gandhiji said the pro-Japanese feelings among the people were a manifestation of their desire for freedom and that once the country was free there would be no cause left for them to incline towards Japan. Only the course proposed by him could rid the people of the pro-Japanese tendency that was in evidence. Of course if the Maulana was unable to share his view the best course for him would be to join hands with Rajaji.

The Maulana said it was not his view that all that was going on in the country should not be opposed, but he felt that to launch a mass civil disobedience movement to enforce British withdrawal from the country would be inviting Japanese invasion.

Jawaharlal said things could not be allowed to drift. Some action was needed to revitalize the country. He said he had had doubts as regards the wisdom of the programme Gandhiji had enunciated, but that those doubts had been removed to a considerable extent. He intended to watch the reaction of the people for a few more days and then make up his mind. He said: "My position is this. However fiercely I may oppose you in the Working Committee, I shall never say a word in opposition to you outside." He asked Gandhiji to issue statements addressed to Japan, China, America, etc., clarifying his position. [The Diary of Mahadev Desai (unpublished), Book No. 44, pp. 22-23]

On 15 June Gandhiji wrote to Amrit Kaur:

Maulana left this morning and Jawaharlal will leave for Bombay this evening.... In one sentence Maulana is not satisfied with my demand or the manner of enforcement; he needs time for thought. Jawaharlal not quite so dissatisfied as Maulana but not quite convinced either. [C.W.M.G., LXXVI, p. 227]

Certainly many of Jawaharlal's doubts as regards the correctness of the proposed move had dissolved after his talks with Gandhiji. In his speeches at various public meetings he addressed in Bombay he appeared to be quite sure of himself. He told the gatherings how gratified he had been to find that he and Gandhiji were so near to each other in spite of different approaches and



occasional differences of opinion. He said: "I saw and heard the passion in the Mahatma's eyes and words. That is the passion that is moving vast numbers of Indians today; and before it petty arguments and controversies become small and meaningless."

Rajagopalachari in his speeches had been telling Congressmen in effect to bypass Gandhiji, whose position, he felt, it was out of the question to countenance. Let Jawaharlal Nehru and Jinnah meet and save the nation, he counselled.

Nehru referred to Rajaji's campaign with disapproval. He said he and other Congressmen were willing to meet Jinnah, but there would have to be a common subject of discussion on which a measure of agreement could be reached. There was no point in discussing Pakistan, because there was no common ground on that. The only thing that could be profitably discussed was the means of eliminating foreign authority so that the problems of the country could be tackled without foreign interference.

Jawaharlal noted that of late there had been a general looking up to the Congress even among those who had nothing to do with the Congress and that there was every hope that masses in large numbers would join any future movement under Gandhiji's leadership, for Gandhiji reflected to a large extent the passion of India.

Free India, Nehru asserted, would defend herself to the utmost and align herself with others who helped her in doing so. The question of remaining neutral hardly arose. The Congress had never been neutral in its attitude to the war. The Congress and nationalist India had always had sympathies for certain causes and certain countries.

Nehru's meetings were often disturbed by Communists shouting that it was people's war. Jawaharlal shouted them down. It was not people's war, he said, out of 400 million people they would hardly find a few thousand on their side. Although the Congress would fight against Fascism and Nazism, it could not leave aside the fight for freedom. A free India could put up a much stiffer resistance to the Japanese aggression than India in her present state. With the whole country offering resistance, not only non-violent but with the sword, the



invader could not subjugate the country. The only issue before India was elimination of foreign domination. The whole world was in the throes of a gigantic struggle and he would not want India to be a mere spectator.

The presence of the American troops in India had to be seen in the larger context of the war. India occupied a strategically vital place. If India fell, China would also fall and even Russian resistance might be affected. That was why Gandhiji had said that he would not object to foreign troops operating from the Indian soil with the consent of free India.

Nehru stressed the importance of villages being organized on the basis of self-sufficiency and self-protection programme as laid down by the Working Committee. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol II, pp. 229-30, 238-39]

11

Before the end of June Gandhiji had finalized the strategy for the coming movement. He now waited for the Working Committee to deliberate upon it before recommending it to the country. [*C.W.M.G.*, LXXVI, p. 246]

The British were keenly watching for any indications of the shape the movement might take and assessing the preparedness of their administrative apparatus and propaganda machinery to tackle it. The Governors were regularly keeping the Viceroy posted with the rise and fall of political temperatures in their Provinces and likely response from the public to any possible call for mass civil disobedience.

Cunningham of the N.W.F.P. reported on 9 June that Gandhiji's call to the British to quit India had been discussed in the political circles but had not created much excitement, though he feared Dr. Khan Saheb might say something foolish. In any case "it would not be difficult to represent Gandhi's move as a threat to Muslim interests," he said. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. II, p. 194]

Governor Herbert of Bengal reporting on 19 June said the indications were that the movement would not be successful in Bengal. Though *Amrita Bazar Patrika* had made a half-hearted attempt to support Gandhiji, the nationalist Press as a whole had not been in favour. Nor were the leaders, judging by the conversations between Kiran Shankar Roy and Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy, very enthusiastic. A certain amount of danger could be expected in areas where



villagers had been evacuated for military reasons, leading to hardships. The Governor said he proposed to tour the area and take steps to ensure goodwill between the military and the civilian population. [Ibid, pp. 241-42]

In the Central Provinces, Governor Twynam expressed the hope in his report to the Viceroy on 24 June that "any subversive movement launched by Gandhi" would not be successful. Berar would be wholly aloof. In the Nagpur division the large Marathi-speaking population could be expected to follow Berar. Jabalpur division had large pockets inhabited by aboriginals. The Chhatisgarh division was not friendly with the Government, but only the bourgeois elements were likely to support the movement. Another factor that was sure to go against it was the timing. The monsoon was already on and the cultivators were busy and the demand for labour enormous. [Ibid, pp. 264-65]

Roger Lumley, Governor of Bombay, reporting in the first week of June, expressed the view that any movement launched around that time was not likely to meet with much response. Of course, Gandhiji could change the whole situation in a week. The movement would have the support of the Congress Socialists, who did not count for much, and of Vallabhbhai Patel and Shankarrao Dev. The latter was not very important and Patel was rumoured to be not at all well and believed to be dying. Bhulabhai Desai and even Morarji Desai, Lumley said, were expected to oppose the movement. Bhulabhai Desai in fact would want nothing so much as to break away from the Congress and be given a place on the Viceroy's Executive Council. [Ibid, pp. 186-87]

Bhulabhai Desai in fact soon afterwards tendered his resignation from the Congress Working Committee and the Presidentship of the Bombay Provincial Congress Committee on grounds of health.

On 19 June Lumley reported that Jawaharlal Nehru had been meeting Walchand Hirachand and various other businessmen and soliciting support for the movement. The *Banias* had expressed their disinclination to do so, though they were willing to contribute financially at a later stage. [Ibid, pp. 240-41]

In U.P. Sir Maurice Hallett had been carrying on his crusade against the Congress ruthlessly and determinedly. Eight Congress leaders of the Province, including two ex-Ministers, Rafi Ahmed Kidwai and S.K.D. Paliwal, had been



imprisoned on the charge of having delivered anti-war speeches security of *National Herald* had been forfeited and the offices of the Congress had been raided and records and documents seized.

On 2 July Hallett reported to the Viceroy that the Province was quiet and that if any movement was started he did not anticipate any difficulty in dealing with it. [Ibid, p. 304]

Stewart reported from Bihar that the movement in that Province might take the form of civil disobedience over the question of compensation for land requisitioned for aerodromes. He said that the Government, anticipating such an eventuality, had decided to arrange for prompt payment of compensation on a liberal scale and in cases where assessment was disputed, by the tender of 75 per cent of the proposed compensation pending arbitration. Whatever happened, the Governor expressed the view that Gandhiji was alone in his convictions though he might find considerable following. [Ibid, p. 246]

The Viceroy was of the view that one of the factors influencing Gandhiji in contemplating a "dramatic" move, such as a civil disobedience movement to force the British to get out, was the fact that at the back of his mind there was the feeling that the Japanese were going to get, at least, Eastern India. On 6 June he told Wavell that much the best propaganda for the purpose of steadying Gandhiji would be to take the line that the Japanese were going to do nothing of the kind. He suggested that the Commander in-Chief might "take a little risk" and say categorically that the British were going to defeat the Japanese. [Ibid, p. 184]

On 8 June the Viceroy reported to the India Office that in Assam, Bengal and Orissa a number of women had been working for Gandhiji, including Mirabehn, who had been in Orissa. Whether their intention was to collect information needed for the starting of the movement or to launch a definite campaign of obstruction, was not yet clear. Local authorities had been told that taking any action against the ladies, e.g., prohibiting their entry into operational areas, would precipitate conflict with Gandhiji and should therefore be avoided. On the other hand if it should be found that they were inflaming popular opinion by false or exaggerated statements, counter-propaganda measures should be taken. [Ibid, p. 192]



Towards the end of June the Government of India had decided on the broad lines of policy to be adopted in case a movement came involving mass or individual civil disobedience throughout the country, or refusal to pay land revenue, or individuals in operational areas getting in the way of military arrangements for evacuation, occupation of buildings and denial policy.

On 26 June the Viceroy informed the Secretary of State that in the above eventuality the Government contemplated the arrest of Gandhiji and other leaders (though the Viceroy attached relatively little importance to other leaders, Gandhiji being a special case). In case he had to be arrested he would have to be interned in a comfortable house in the Bombay Presidency, where he would be shown due consideration.

In that eventuality the Home Government would have to prepare the ground in England and America by way of active propaganda. The Viceroy also expected His Majesty's Government to provide full backing to him in the action that might have to be taken. [Ibid, p. 273-74]

May and June 1942 were thus months of the hotting up of the political climate in the country. The people at large, the grass-roots workers of the Congress and of other political parties, as well as the leaders, were aware of the nearness of a movement that would involve large masses of people and perhaps change the destiny of the country. Those who were impatient for the country's freedom awaited its coming with expectancy, the Government with a great deal of foreboding. But none knew when it would come and what shape it would take.

All awaited the results of the deliberations of the Congress Working Committee which was to meet early in July.



CHAPTER XII: THE WORKING COMMITTEE FORMULATES

QUIT INDIA DEMAND

1

Early in July members of the Congress Working Committee and other leaders of the Congress started arriving at Sevagram for consultations with Gandhiji and for the meeting of the Working Committee scheduled for the second week of the month.

They were full of doubts and misgivings as regards the proposed course and did not at all see their way clear. All were agreed that the crisis through which the country was passing demanded a bold line of action, a bold lead from the Congress, but they were at the same time not without a feeling of foreboding that launching a mass movement with the single aim of making the British withdraw from India might be politically risky.

On 7 July some of them informally gathered round Gandhiji to hear what he had to say. Gandhiji told them:

The time has come when the serfdom of the country, which has gone on for 150 years, must end. Earlier we called off the movement because of incidents such as at Chauri Chaura. I do not regret it. But it gives me the courage to say that we shall not now be deterred by any obstacles coming in our path.

I do not visualize hundreds of thousands going to jail this time. Certainly people will be jailed and subjected to lathi-charges. But that will not be all. People will have to face bullets. The condition of wearing of khadi will not apply. The only condition will be that of adherence to non-violence. This condition too will be political, restricted to action only. There must be no violence.

The areas of mass action will not be restricted. People will be allowed to go as far as they can. There can be non-payment of taxes and labour strikes. They will not be able to keep me out of jail and they will not



be able to digest me even in jail. The stake is high and success uncertain.

I do not want a compromise. I do not visualize their giving power to this or that political party. I seek their withdrawal from India. It might result in anarchy. Terrorism might come to the fore. But the danger has to be faced. We must not cringe in the face of danger.

The Congress organization today is not as it should be, and if we do nothing today it will be destroyed. Already here in Wardha there is no wheat, no sugar, even *jawar* and *bajri* are in short supply. Now there is talk of military being billeted in the homes of civilians. Had this been our war people would have gladly welcomed soldiers in their homes. But that is not so.

The new Executive Council of the Viceroy is being advertized as a National Government. As a matter of fact the Council is neither national nor Indian. It is something nominated by the Viceroy. It is a challenge both to the Congress and to the Muslim League. I would far rather have autocracy.

You must make up your minds and decide. The situation demands urgent action.

Answering a question Gandhiji said people must refuse to put up soldiers in their homes. Strikes by railwaymen, dock workers and by posts and telegraph employees would be on the cards. As for strikes in the munitions factories, it was a ticklish matter, Gandhiji said, since he had declared that foreign troops could operate from the soil of free India, and if the troops remained, munitions factories would have to keep on functioning. There was risk of the Government provoking communal riots but that risk would have to be faced.

Jawaharlal Nehru agreed that it was the right position to take to ask the British to quit. The situation created by the war had, if anything, lent urgency to India's demand for independence. The risk of the movement resulting in helping the Japanese was certainly there, but the situation had been worsening day by day and action had become imperative. Besides, Gandhiji having agreed that the



Allied forces could remain in India for the prosecution of the war there was not much left to be said on the point.

Not doing anything under the existing circumstances, Nehru said, could be dangerous. It might result in the Congress fading away. The action to be taken, moreover, must not be merely symbolic. It should have force behind it. Even if it should mean Japan taking advantage of it, in the balance, it appeared to be the only right course to pursue.

Pattabhi Sitaramayya pointed out that payment of land revenue was not due until January. As for strikes it was only the Communists who could successfully organize them.

Jawaharlal Nehru said what was required was a hundred per cent revolt – rebellion – against British rule – an unarmed, peaceful revolt. Merely going to jail would not do.

Shankarrao Dev argued for the need of setting up parallel administration.

Jawaharlal Nehru disagreed. To talk of setting up a parallel government was dangerous, he said, for the Muslim League could then say that the Congress was using its strength to monopolize power.

Vallabhbhai Patel said the effort should be to paralyze the Government.

Acharya Narendra Dev, representing the Congress Socialist view, strongly expressed the opinion that not doing anything would be suicidal. It was irrelevant to consider whether the movement would help the Fascist powers. While he wanted the Fascist powers to be defeated, he equally wanted Imperialism to be defeated. There was no difference between Fascism and Imperialism. [The Diary of Mahadev Desai (unpublished), Book No. 44, pp. 47-54]

At the meeting of the Working Committee on 8 July, Dr. Syed Mahmood gave vent to his own doubts and fears. As he saw it, there was an element of cowardice in the anger and hatred that the country entertained against the British. There was no willingness for sacrifice among the people. Besides, the contemplated struggle had no moral ground, it only had political ground. Syed



Mahmood suggested that the attempt should be to check the growing power and importance of Jinnah. This could be done by unconditionally helping the British.

Maulana Azad was troubled in mind. Conscious of "the responsibility to the coming generation" he could not see how a mass struggle would fit with the scheme of things. That was why, Azad said, when at Bardoli it was decided to discontinue the individual civil disobedience, it had not caused him any shock. A struggle did not have to be started merely because something had to be done. What was meant by compelling the British? – Azad asked. It meant striking at their sinews of war. Hundreds of thousands of people going to jail was not going to hurt them. The only way to hurt them was to immobilize their war machine, to paralyze their munitions factories.

Referring to the action being taken by the military authorities under the denial policy in Bengal, Orissa and elsewhere, involving evacuation of villages and commandeering of boats, bicycles and other means of transport, Azad said that though the hardships being inflicted on the people in the process should be removed it had to be seen how it was to be done. It must also be considered what effect the contemplated closure of posts and telegraphs was likely to have. The complaints of the people in the coastal areas must be taken up but they could not be made the main issue.

Gandhiji pointed out to Azad that the things he had just said were things that he had already said earlier. He said the struggle that he visualized could not be interpreted as an invitation to Japan. Doing nothing would be an invitation to Japan. India must secure independence through its own strength. People must cast out any idea from their minds that Japan's victory in the war would bring about the freedom of India. India could not help China unless she herself was free. It was not out of merely selfish motives that he was asking the British to withdraw from India. There was in the demand a consideration for the interests of the world at large. The British were not fighting the war in order to protect human rights. They were fighting in order to keep the field of colonial plunder open. America and Britain, if victorious, would divide up Asia and Africa. There was no reason to suppose that the British wanted to help China. It would be a calamity for India if China collapsed, but it could not be said that the collapse of China would mean India losing her freedom for ever.



As for what Dr. Mahmood had said, the struggle must be launched irrespective of whether it was likely to succeed or not. Non-violence did not know defeat. Gandhiji said he did not know what strength the struggle would command. The strength of the army would be known after it had been flung into battle. But to him, at any rate, it was shameful to sit quiet and do nothing. It would be losing a great opportunity in the history of India. He did not fear communal riots. Dacoities and loot might increase, but lawlessness would not sap India's strength. Terrorism might raise its head, but he would keep a watch on it and if necessary sacrifice himself in the process of putting it down. If people were prepared to face bullets, it would give them enough power to make the British quit.

As regards Jinnah, Gandhiji said he could not bring him down by selling himself.

Jawaharlal strongly argued for action. The question, he said, was one of "mentality". Did they want to resist or did they want to surrender? It could not be that while they would resist Japan they would surrender to the British. While the position of Gandhiji did not appear to him foolproof, he was clear in his mind that if independence came as a result of bargaining it would not endure. There was no salvation for India unless millions went through fire.

Maulana Azad: "I make a distinction between the Allied powers and the Axis powers. I consider the victory of the Axis powers harmful and I would not want to do anything to facilitate their victory. It is not relevant to say that the British are not fighting to defend human rights. All nations fight for their own national rights. They are helping China because China is fighting against the same enemy. We have never yet had to go through the horrors of war such as the countries of Europe have had to go through. Roosevelt, in my view, represents the things that we ourselves stand for. When he talks of human rights he does so honestly. That he may not have the power to enforce what he says is another matter. On the other hand there is hardly any distinction between Churchill and Hitler. People always have mixed motives. I cannot subscribe to the view that we are moved by no self-interest." [Ibid, pp. 55-61]



Gandhiji produced a draft resolution and the debate on it continued over the next many days. In the meanwhile, on 10 July, the Working Committee approved a resolution on the working of the denial policy of the Government in the militarily sensitive areas. The resolution contained instructions to the people on how they should respond to the measures the Government might adopt.

The resolution took note of the various complaints received regarding Government orders for evacuation of villages, lands and buildings without due notice and proper compensation, seizure and destruction of country boats and requisitioning of vehicles, and expressed the hope that the Government would take immediate steps to remove the grievances of the people. In case the grievances were not removed the resolution issued instructions to the people along the following lines:

With regard to evacuation and other orders ...full compensation should be demanded.... If no agreement is reached between the authorities and the evacuees regarding the amount of compensation and the matter has to be referred to a tribunal the amount proposed by the authorities should be paid forthwith and not withheld pending adjudication.... In case of requisition of boats ...no boats should be surrendered till the question of compensation is settled. In areas surrounded by water ...they should not be surrendered at all.... In case of requisition of vehicles ...until the question of compensation is settled they should not be parted with.

...People may manufacture salt for their own and their cattle's consumption.

The Committee considers it the inherent right of all to protect their own and their neighbour's life and property, so all restrictions on organization for self-protection should be disregarded.

The resolution also asked for dispossessed agriculturists to be provided with other land or money compensation in lieu of it and full compensation for houses taken over. [The Transfer of Power, Vol. II, pp. 362-64]



The resolution, the text of which was immediately transmitted by the Viceroy to London, roused the wrath of Amery. He saw in it the "defiance of established Government" by parallel authority, an "essential preparatory action for campaign". On 13 July he telegraphed to the Viceroy "to take drastic action with Gandhi and the Working Committee (such as immediate arrest pending prosecution) and with Press".

In a note to Churchill the same day Amery said the resolution was an attempt to "provoke cases of open conflict with authorities so as to poison the atmosphere" and added that he was putting the matter up to the Cabinet and hoped they would authorize the Viceroy to "arrest Gandhi and the Working Committee at once". They were, he wrote, "definitely our enemies, inclined to believe in the victory of Japan" and "determined to make the most mischief they can".

The Cabinet considered the matter the same evening but thought better of authorizing the arrest of Gandhiji and the Working Committee at once, as desired by Amery. The Congress Working Committee, in the view of the Cabinet, did not possess the power which it claimed, and there was no reason to believe that "their so-called instructions would be at all generally acted upon".

Amery still wanted the Viceroy to consider arresting the leaders. The Cabinet, he said, would not be "able to stand up to the two of us together". It was a time when the fire brigade could not wait to ring up the headquarters, but must turn the hose on the flames at once.

But Linlithgow was "not unduly fussed" by the resolution. He would rather wait for the main resolution. To blunt the impact of the Working Committee's resolution, he wrote to the Governors to make sure that "the burden on individuals caused by requisitioning is eased as much as possible by adequate and prompt compensation". Hardships caused by the shortage of salt could also be eased by relaxing normal restrictions locally where the situation demanded it. [Ibid, pp. 374-83]

Unaware of these exchanges the members of the Working Committee continued the debate on the draft resolution of Gandhiji. Azad doggedly stuck to



his position that, while the raising of the demand that the British should withdraw from India was legitimate, launching a mass movement to enforce that demand would amount to an invitation to Japan to invade the country.

Gandhiji said if the view held by Azad was the view of the Working Committee then he had nothing to say and the movement must be deferred. He himself could not subscribe to the view. Since he had agreed that foreign troops might remain in India to carry on the war against Japan, it could not be said that the effect of the movement would be to invite Japan.

Vallabhbhai Patel pointed out that pro-Japanese feeling in the country had been on the rise and by launching a struggle it might be possible to check it. Sarojini Naidu, Shankarrao Dev and Rajendra Prasad expressed similar views.

Pattabhi Sitaramayya said that while it was possible that Japan might take advantage of the movement to launch an invasion, she certainly was not waiting for an internal rebellion before launching the invasion. Kripalani felt that launching a movement was not likely to affect whatever plans Japan might have in regard to the invasion of India.

Syed Mahmood was certain that Japan was waiting for an internal rebellion in India to invade the country. Asaf Ali expressed the same view.

Jawaharlal put up a revised version of Gandhiji's draft resolution. Jawaharlal had incorporated in the draft a sentence to the effect that withdrawal meant "handing over full political control to representatives of the people". Gandhiji objected to it. He said by British withdrawal he did not mean that power should be handed over to any "representatives" of the people. He wanted the British just to withdraw. But surely, Jawaharlal argued, the person guarding the treasury could not be expected to throw away the key and just walk away. He would have to hand it over to someone. The British might say: 'All right, we are going. To whom shall we give the key?'

But there was no one to take charge of the key, Gandhiji said, and it should be of no concern to the British who took possession of it. As he visualized things, immediately after the British withdrew the various political parties would meet and evolve some political arrangement. A treaty with the British would be a natural consequence.



Gandhiji in his draft had said: "The Congress would feel reconciled to the British retaining their troops at their own expense." This was objected to by members. Jawaharlal pointed out that money had been pouring into India. If ten million had been spent on the American troops, one hundred million had come into India. Sarojini Naidu also thought the words "at their own expense" were ungracious.

Maulana Azad expressed the view that the resolution as phrased showed a negative attitude, as the emphasis was on British withdrawal rather than on independence. The promise it held out was anarchy in the event of success and ruin in the event of the failure of the movement. No one would be willing to sacrifice his life in order to bring about anarchy.

Asaf Ali objected to the phrase "intolerable state of affairs" occurring in the draft. What had happened lately to make the state of affairs intolerable? –he asked.

Jawaharlal said if anarchy should follow, as was envisaged, it would be difficult for foreign troops to be retained. They would need secured supplies of food, they would need munitions. Only a stable and strong Government could provide that. Turning to Gandhiji he said : "When you said foreign troops could remain in India, you did not do so at my prodding. But it removed the wall that had stood between you and me. But I expect from you something which is foolproof. You want to convince world opinion of the correctness of your position. I know something about world opinion and I tell you that you will not be able to convince it. Your approach is negative."

Pant and Shankarrao Dev also expressed the view that if foreign troops had to be kept a stable Government would be a necessity.

Gandhiji reiterated his view that the British could not be asked to form a National Government to whom they could entrust power before withdrawing from India. Even if no Government should be formed the foreign troops would continue to remain in India, since they were already there. Gandhiji said if he should be alive at the end of it all, he would not insist on a National Government being formed. He would work for the formation of a Provisional Government. [The Diary of Mahadev Desai (unpublished), Book No. 44, pp. 63-73]



The resolution, as passed by the Working Committee on 14 July, after repeated revisions and changes by Gandhiji and Jawaharlal Nehru, read:

The events happening from day to day ...confirm the opinion of Congressmen that British rule in India must end immediately.... Ever since the outbreak of the World War, the Congress has studiously pursued a policy of non-embarrassment ...in the hope that this policy of non-embarrassment would be duly appreciated and that real power would be transferred to popular representatives.... It had also hoped that negatively nothing would be done which was calculated to tighten Britain's hold on India.

These hopes have, however, been dashed to pieces. The abortive Cripps proposals showed in the clearest possible manner that there was no change in the British Government's attitude towards India and that British hold on India was in no way to be relaxed.... This frustration has resulted in a rapid and widespread increase of ill-will against Britain and a growing satisfaction at the success of Japanese arms.

...The Congress is anxious to avoid the experience of Malaya, Singapore and Burma and desires to build up resistance to any aggression or invasion of India by the Japanese or any foreign power. The Congress would change the present ill-will against Britain into goodwill and make India a willing partner in a joint enterprise of securing freedom for the nations and peoples of the world.... This is only possible if India feels the glow of freedom.

...On the withdrawal of British rule in India responsible men and women of the country will come together to form a Provisional Government, representative of all important sections of the people of India which will later evolve a scheme by which a Constituent Assembly can be convened.... Representatives of free India and representatives of Great Britain will confer together for the adjustment of future relations. . . .

...In making the proposal for the withdrawal of the British rule from India, the Congress has no desire whatever to embarrass Great Britain or the Allied powers in their prosecution of the war....



The Congress is therefore agreeable to the stationing of the armed forces of the Allies in India, should they so desire, in order to ward off and resist Japanese or other aggression and to protect and help China....

...The Congress would be pleased with the British power if it accepts the very reasonable and just proposal herein made.... Should, however, this proposal fail, the Congress cannot view without the gravest apprehension the continuation of the present state of affairs involving a progressive deterioration in the situation and the weakening of India's will power to resist aggression. The Congress will then be reluctantly compelled to utilize all the non-violent strength it might have gathered since 1920 when it adopted non-violence as part of its policy for the vindication of the political rights and liberty. Such a widespread struggle would inevitably be under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi.

The resolution, however, left the final decision in this regard to the A.I.C.C., which it announced would meet in Bombay on 7 August 1942. [C.W.M.G., LXXVI, pp. 451-53]

5

Gandhiji had not been keeping too well for some time. His high blood-pressure had been giving him trouble. The great pressure of work that the shaping of the policy framework of the coming movement brought and the continuous debates with his colleagues of the Working Committee, not to mention the interviews to Press correspondents and regular writing that he had to do for Harijan, did not ease matters. Co-workers and friends showed concern. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur was writing continuously anxiously enquiring after his health. Gandhiji pooh-poohed her concern, assuring her that there was nothing the matter with him, that it was only fatigue brought on by work. [Ibid, pp. 268, 272, 279, 281]

But the story got around that Gandhiji's condition was more serious than he himself imagined. The B.B.C. asked how he hoped to lead the movement if he was ill and bedridden. Gandhiji wrote that he was not really, ill, but even if he should be,



so long as the reason is unimpaired, physical illness is no bar to the conduct of a non-violent struggle. The peremptory belief in non-violent conduct is that all urge comes from God – the Unseen, even Unfelt save through unconquerable faith. [Ibid, p. 289]

But even the British rulers tended to believe, or were hoping, that Gandhiji's physical condition was worse than he realized. On the day (12 July) that Gandhiji was assuring the readers of *Harijan* that there was nothing the matter with him, Twynam, the Governor of the Central Provinces, was writing to the Viceroy:

Your Excellency will have seen reports about Gandhi's health.... There have been several references to his inability to function owing to rise in blood-pressure, etc. He is now about to complete his 72nd year and I feel that, in the circumstances of his malady, I may at any moment be confronted with the problem regarding the flag and closure of the offices.... I should welcome instructions on the subject as soon as may be convenient. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. II, p. 372]

It was obviously the case of the wish being father to the thought. The rulers were spared the painful necessity of having to decide whether to half-mast the Union Jack in the happy event of the death of their arch-enemy. Gandhiji's faith in God, his indomitable will and his total commitment to the supreme cause of the country's freedom prevailed over the frailty of the body.

Though the resolution as proposed by Gandhiji had in the main been passed by the Working Committee, the doubts on many points contained in it, doubts that many members, but chiefly Azad and Nehru, had voiced in the debate throughout, persisted. Azad remained doubtful of the wisdom of the movement. Nehru, while all for action, could not see how the British could leave India without handing over charge to some representative body. On 13 July, even before the resolution had been put to the vote, Gandhiji wrote to Nehru:

...I have thought over the matter a great deal and still feel that your capacity for service will increase if you withdraw [from the Working Committee].... You may attend the Committee occasionally as I do or as



Narendra Dev does. This will ensure your help being available and at the same time you're fully retaining your freedom.

This is my plea about Maulana Saheb. I find that the two of us have drifted apart. I do not understand him nor does he understand me.... I have also a suspicion that Maulana Saheb does not entirely approve of the proposed action. No one is at fault. We have to face the facts. Therefore I suggest that the Maulana should relinquish Presidentship but remain in the Committee, the Committee should elect an interim President and all should proceed unitedly. [C.W.M.G., LXXVI, pp. 293-94]

The two leaders did not find it necessary to follow Gandhiji's advice to resign. Instead they were able to overcome their doubts and fall in line.

6

On 14 July, immediately after the Working Committee passed the resolution, Gandhiji met representatives of the Indian Press and answered their questions.

Asked what he proposed to do assuming that the A.I.C.C. adopted the resolution passed by the Working Committee, Gandhiji said if a mass movement became necessary, it would be strictly of a non-violent character and include all that a mass movement could include.

Depending on circumstances, it might also include closing of liquor shops and foreign cloth shops. Precautions would be taken to avoid rioting but if nevertheless rioting followed it could not be helped.

Gandhiji said the struggle would not involve courting imprisonment, which was too soft a thing. His intention was to make the thing as short and swift as possible.

Did he hope that the British might open negotiations? - a correspondent asked.

They might, Gandhiji answered. But it was not a question of placating this or that political party. The demand was for the unconditional withdrawal of British power without reference to the wishes of any party. The proposal for withdrawal was not open to negotiation. They must unequivocally declare that



they recognized the independence of India. Then from the very next moment free India would begin to function. There might be anarchy. But if the change was effected with goodwill there might be no disturbances. Wise people from among the responsible sections would come together and evolve a Provisional Government.

As regards the composition of the Provisional Government, Gandhiji said it would not be a party Government. All parties, including the Congress, would automatically dissolve, though other parties might come into being afterwards.

The movement, Gandhiji assured the correspondents, would not hamper the war effort of the Allies. However, if the British did not withdraw, the ill will against the British that was already there would grow apace. But the movement might change the ill will into goodwill.

Asked if the free India he envisaged after the withdrawal of the British would carry out total mobilization to help the Allies in the war, Gandhiji said it was beyond him to answer the question. He could only say that India would make common cause with the Allies. He would certainly try to turn India to non-violence, but if India chose militarism he would not oppose the will of free India. [Ibid, pp. 294-97]

On 15 July Gandhiji gave an interview to correspondents of the foreign Press, including Steele of the *Chicago Daily News*, Emeny of the *News Chronicle* and Richard Jen of the Central News Agency of China.

The correspondents asked Gandhiji if the mass movement he contemplated would include such things as breach of the Salt Laws, calling out of Government servants and labour, etc. Gandhiji said the programme would cover every activity of a strictly non-violent character included in a mass movement. He would however keep a watch against a sudden outbreak of anarchy or a state of things calculated to invite Japanese aggression. But he would not hesitate to go to the extreme limit and the Allied Powers would then be responsible for whatever might happen in India, for it was for them to prevent the happening of anything in India which might hamper the war effort. The struggle had been conceived, Gandhiji said, to avert a catastrophe. At the critical moment an unfree India was likely to become a hindrance rather than help. A large number of



Indians might go over to the Japanese side, as had happened in Burma. Had Burma been made independent before the Japanese invaded the country, the picture might have been different. If India secured her independence no Indian worth his salt would think of going over to the Japanese side.

Steele of the *Chicago Daily News*, speaking as an American, expressed the view that a mass movement at that juncture might lead to complications and might be prejudicial to the efficient prosecution of the war.

Gandhiji said the belief was born of ignorance. What possible internal complications could take place if the British Government declared that India was an independent country? Nobody, Gandhiji said, had been able to convince him that in the midst of the war the British Government could not declare India free without jeopardizing the war effort.

Asked what help free India could give to China, Gandhiji said if India were to listen to him, she would give non-violent help to China. But he knew that it would not be so. Free India would want to be militarist. Then she would give all the material and men that China needed, though China did not need men. An unfree India could give no help to China. [Ibid, pp. 298-303]

On 18 July Gandhiji addressed an open letter to the Japanese. He assured the Japanese that he had no ill-will against them but he denounced, without mincing words, their acts of aggression in pursuit of their imperial ambition, which they would not be able to realize. He expressed grief at their unprovoked attack against China and the merciless devastation wrought by them in that great and ancient land.

Gandhiji wanted the Japanese not to misunderstand the motives of the movement that he planned to launch. It was not conceived to embarrass the Allies just when the Japanese attack against India was imminent. The demand for British withdrawal should not lead them to think that they would be welcome in India. If the Japanese cherished any such idea, Gandhiji wrote, India would not fail in resisting them with all her might.

Gandhiji's appeal to the Japanese concluded:

The hope of your response to my appeal is much fainter than that of response from Britain.... All I have read tells me that you listen to no



appeal but to the sword.... Anyway I have an undying faith in the responsiveness of human nature. On the strength of that faith I have conceived the impending movement in India, and it is that faith which has prompted this appeal to you. [Ibid, pp. 309-11]

Throughout the three weeks from 14 July, when the Working Committee passed the resolution, to 7 August, when the A.I.C.C. met in Bombay, Gandhiji and the members of the Congress Working Committee earnestly tried, through writings, statements, speeches and talks, to explain the meaning and implications of the resolution to the country.

The points emphasized were:

That the demand for immediate British withdrawal from India was the expression of the long-standing desire of the country for freedom and was based on justice and morality.

That the Congress did not seek to grab power for itself as soon as the British left, but would be only one of the constituents making up the future political set-up which must come into being through consultations between leaders of political opinion representing all the important sections and interests in the country.

That the demand for withdrawal was not made to embarrass the war effort of the Allies, but to make it more effective, since an unfree India would not be in a position to withstand Japanese invasion. To lend strength to the anti-Japanese impulse behind the resolution it was pointed out that it envisaged the retention in India of the troops of the Allied nations for operations against Japan under a treaty with the Provisional Government of free India. [Ibid, pp. 312-14, 328-30, 330-32, 339-40, 350-51, 354-55, 357-59, 361-63]

7

The resolution was nevertheless greeted with a howl of outrage from the entire spectrum of non-Congress political conglomerations, from the Princes to the Depressed Classes, from the Liberals to the Muslim Leaguers. They expressed themselves as totally opposed both to the demand for British withdrawal and the movement planned to enforce the demand.



Rajagopalachari and some of his followers were among the first to voice their consternation. In a letter addressed to Gandhiji on 18 July jointly by Rajagopalachari, K. Santhanam, S. Ramanathan and Dr. T. S. S. Rajan, the point was made that the demand for British withdrawal, as formulated, must lead either to anarchy, if conceded, or to "widespread self-inflicted sufferings" if the demand was rejected. It was argued that the British could not withdraw without transferring power to a successor, for the State was "not a mere superstructure" but was "intimately bound up with the functioning of every activity of the people". Rajagopalachari and the other signatories to the letter suggested that before the demand for withdrawal could be made "the major political organizations of this country, namely the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League, should evolve a joint plan with regard to the Provisional Government which can take over power".

The letter warned that the authorities were not likely to let the movement proceed under central direction and when responsible leaders were removed there was a serious danger of the enemy taking advantage of the situation and converting it into fifth-column activity. [Ibid, pp. 454-55]

On 16 July Rajaji, Dr. Rajan, S. Ramanathan, P. Ratnaveluthever, Subramaniam, R. S. V. Aiyar, V. T. Venkatachari and Abdul Kadir communicated to the Governor their resignations of membership of the Madras Legislative Assembly. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1942, Vol. II, p. 7]

Jinnah, whom Rajaji continuously kept persuading Gandhiji and Nehru to meet, saw in the Working Committee's resolution a serious development threatening Muslim interests. He showed no concern as regards the implications of the resolution for the war effort. Speaking to the foreign Press on 31 July he said:

The latest decision of the Congress Working Committee on July 14, 1942, resolving to launch a mass movement if the British do not withdraw immediately from India is the culminating point in the policy and programme of Mr. Gandhi and his Hindu Congress of blackmailing the British and coercing them to concede a system of Government and transfer power to that Government which would establish a Hindu raj immediately under the aegis of the British bayonet thereby throwing the



Muslims and other minorities and interests at the mercy of the Congress raj. [Ibid, pp. 12-13]

The Muslim Press as a whole, whether League or non-League, was united in denouncing the demand for British withdrawal as "blackmail", "hypocrisy" and as "ludicrous". [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. II, p. 463]

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, the leader of the Depressed Classes, was equally vehement in denouncing the Working Committee's resolution. Having assumed charge of the Labour portfolio in the Viceroy's Executive Council on 20 July, his very first public pronouncement was a scathing attack on the Congress. Speaking at a meeting in Bombay on 22 July he described the talk of civil disobedience as "treachery to India" and "playing the enemy's game" and urged all Indians "to resist with all the power and resources at their command any attempt on the part of the Congress to launch civil disobedience". [Ibid, p. 436]

The Liberals were not behindhand in roundly condemning the Wardha resolution. Tej Bahadur Sapru in a letter to *The Times of India* of 28 July wrote:

I feel very strongly that nothing can be more dangerous in its implications or consequences than the Wardha proposals, particularly at a juncture like this. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1942, Vol II, pp. 11-12]

On 1 August he wrote to Gandhiji expressing the fear that if civil disobedience was started at that juncture it might lead to very serious consequences, and suggesting, instead, that Gandhiji should convene a round table conference to sort out issues. Gandhiji pointed out to Sapru that on the question of civil disobedience he had differed from him "from the very commencement". So far as the summoning of a round table conference was concerned, he had no faith in the usefulness of such a conference so long as the British remained in the country, and in any case he did not have faith in his own capacity to shoulder the burden. [*C.W.M. G.*, LXXVI, pp. 343, 369-70]

H. N. Kunzru, Chimanlal Setalvad and Cowasji Jehangir similarly came out with statements strongly denouncing and debunking the launching of civil disobedience. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1942, Vol. II, pp. 7, 12; *The Transfer of Power*, Vol. II, p. 405]



In England there was a chorus of indignation from the politicians and the Press at the Working Committee's resolution. Even the Labour Party which claimed to sympathize with India's aspiration for freedom was shocked.

On 21 July the Labour newspaper *Daily Herald*, addressing the Congress in a leading article wrote:

If you persist in demands which are at this moment impossible to grant, you will cripple your cause and humble the influence of us who are your proud and faithful advocates. You will do worse, you will convey to the world the impression that India's leaders are incapable of distinguishing between the ideal of the United Nations and the petty standards of nationalism. [*The Indian Annual Register*, Vol. II, p. 9]

Gandhiji was pained at this "unkindest cut" on the part of *Daily Herald* and expressed the suspicion that it might be inspired. *Daily Herald* denied the charge, saying it was merely interpreting the outlook of Labour men and women. [C.W.M.G., LXXVI, p. 332]

Amery, however, in a private telegram to Linlithgow of 24 July, admitted that he might have "helped by some very frank talk to the Lobby correspondents and the American Press. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. II, pp. 454-55]

The Labour Party's view was expressed in a resolution passed by the National Executive Committee of the party on 23 July. The resolution ran:

The British Labour Party, anxious to promote the well-being of the Indian peoples and their aspirations for self-government, reaffirms its call to them, made at its recent annual conference, to make a further effort to reach a rapid and satisfactory settlement in conjunction with the British Government. It therefore regards with grave apprehension the possibility of a civil disobedience movement in India and its effect on the efforts of the United Nations now engaged in a desperate struggle to preserve and extend world freedom. Such a movement, the very contemplation of which is a proof of political immaturity, might imperil the fate of all freedom-loving peoples and thereby destroy all hopes of Indian freedom. [Ibid, p. 455]



In the U.S.A. though the Press had generally been critical of the Congress resolution, the impression among Americans, as reported to the Government of India by its Agent-General G. S. Bajpai, was strong that the Congress counted for a great deal in Indian politics and its demands should not be dismissed out of hand. The Viceroy on 21 July telegraphed to Bajpai that in his conversations with American personalities he should proceed along the following lines:

To those who may be tempted to regard the establishment of the Congress Hindu raj as lesser risk than infuriating the Muslims, the answer is that it is not only a question of irritating 90 millions of Muslims. Communal outbreak of a serious kind would certainly damage very dangerously the Indian Army, and if protracted might well lead to the disintegration of a large and important part of our forces in Egypt and the Middle East, as well as in India. No one doubts that a climb-down to Congress at this stage would immediately give rise to a country-wide communal struggle, in which the Sikhs would be involved equally with the Hindus and Mohammedans. [Ibid, p. 423]

Anxious as the British were that the Americans should believe what they told them about the situation in India and should not be "misled" by the Congress propaganda, they were not particularly keen that any American personalities should come to India to see things for themselves. When towards the end of July Reuters put out a story that Wendell Wilkie, defeated American Presidential candidate and President Roosevelt's emissary to the Far East, proposed to visit India, Linlithgow was outraged. In a telegram to Amery on 30 July he asked that it be tactfully conveyed to Wilkie that he would not be welcome in India at that juncture. The Government in London pulled the necessary diplomatic wires and managed to stave off Wilkie's visit. [Ibid, pp.500, 540, 93,652,815]

The British ruling coterie, which had been keeping a sharp watch on the deliberations of the Working Committee at Wardha, found the main political resolution on the expected lines. The Home Department of the Government of India concluded that the resolution, as worded, did not afford ground for action against the Congress and that its publication pending ratification need not be suppressed. In any case, even after the ratification of the resolution by the



A.I.C.C. it would not be possible for the Congress to start the contemplated movement before September. In a telegram dated 16 July to the Secretary of State it suggested that the best time to strike against the Congress would be immediately after the A.I.C.C. had ratified the resolution. Provincial Governors, the Home Department said, were being asked to have their plans in complete readiness by 7 August. [Ibid, pp. 394-95]

On 22 July the Viceroy telegraphically requested all Provincial Governors to let him have before the end of the month an appreciation of the state and morale of their police forces with particular regard to possible action against the Congress.

Most Governors reported that their police forces, considerably increased in strength since the start of the war, would be adequate to deal with the Congress. The Assam and C.P. Governors said they could not entirely rule out the possibility of policemen here and there resigning from the force from fear of future victimization in the event of the Congress coming to power. Even so the resignations were not expected to be on as large a scale as in the civil disobedience movement of 1920-22. The possibility of resignations could be minimized if policemen could be given an assurance that there would be no victimization. The Assam Governor admitted the difficulty about giving such an assurance. The C.P. Governor expressed the view that perhaps such an assurance could be given, seeing that the chances of the Congress coming to power had receded by a few years.

The Bengal and Madras Governors mentioned some discontent in the police owing to hardships caused by rising prices but thought this could be dealt with by increasing the dearness allowance.

The Sind Governor admitted that there was demoralization in the police force of that Province, for which he blamed the Congress. But with Martial Law covering, or soon to cover, most of Sind, the Governor thought the style of Congressmen would be considerably "cramped". [Ibid, pp. 428, 458-60, 467, 477, 502, 512-13]

Amery continued to press that action against the Congress be taken immediately on the basis of the resolution passed by the Working Committee on



10 July. The Government of India however continued to resist. In a telegram to the Secretary of State, dated 24 July, the Home Department expressed the view that it would be "unwise" to take action against the Congress before the Bombay meeting of the A.I.C.C.

Action planned against the Congress, it said, fell into three stages, the aim being (a) to avert, (b) to abort and (c) to suppress mass movement.

The first stage would last till the Bombay meeting and would be confined in the main to propaganda. Press reactions in India and abroad had been supportive of the British position and the Home Department hoped that the mass movement might somehow be averted.

The second stage would commence with the ratification of the Wardha resolution and would include the following: (a) proclamation of all P.C.C.s but not the Congress as a whole under the Criminal Procedure Act, (b) simultaneous arrest in Bombay of Gandhiji and all the members of the Working Committee, (c) issue of political statement denouncing the leadership of the Congress but not the Congress and (d) seizure by Provincial Governments of Congress Committee offices and funds and arrest of all important Provincial leaders.

The Home Department said it expected "widespread protest meetings and possibly some disorder" following the arrest of the leaders, but felt that it was best to face the worst at once. As regards the place of detention the idea was to intern Gandhiji either at Poona or at Sevagram as a State prisoner and effectively segregate him. Of the members of the Working Committee some might be deported to Uganda.

Stage three, the suppression of the movement, would come if attempts to avert or abort the movement failed. It would include proclaiming the whole of the Congress as an unlawful organization and promulgation of the Emergency Powers Ordinance. [Ibid, pp. 447-50]

Some of the Governors were pressing for swift and drastic pre-emptive action. Hallett of the U.P. telegraphed to the Viceroy on 24 July that active preparations were already going on in the U.P. for starting a mass movement, meetings were being held and instructions regarding the movement were being



verbally given, and there were reports that the movement would include all known forms of civil disobedience including even the cutting of telegraph wires. Hallett expressed the view that it would be disastrous to delay action. [Ibid, pp. 450-51]

Arthur Hope of Madras went further. Everyone, he wrote to Linlithgow on 23 July, was agreed that the movement must be squashed at the beginning. He was against giving a long rope to the Congress which might "entangle our legs more than it will the Congress neck". He suggested that Congress leaders when convicted should be treated not as political prisoners but as common criminals and any mention in the Press of the conditions in jail should be prohibited.

As for Gandhiji, "the villain of the piece", Hope suggested arresting him at once and deporting him to Mauritius or Kenya and prohibiting any reference to him in the Press. He added: "If hefasts let it not be known; and if he dies announce it six months later." [Ibid, pp. 242-43]

The desirability and practicability of the deportation of Gandhiji and the members of the Working Committee after they were arrested was the subject of a great deal of exchanges between the Viceroy, the Secretary of State and the Provincial Governors. While there was a general concensus on the desirability of the course there were differences of views on the practicability of it.

On 19 July the Viceroy informed the Secretary of State that he had been considering keeping Gandhiji in the Aga Khan's house in Poona, imprisoning members of the Working Committee whose health would make long journeys difficult for them elsewhere in India and deporting the rest to Uganda. The deportees would be about 15 in number and would be flown by air to Uganda via Muscat, Aden and Khartoum. [Ibid, pp. 409-10, 424]

Amery said he was in principle in favour of the Viceroy's suggestion and was having confidential enquiries made if the East African authorities would undertake the custody of the leaders. But why not send Gandhiji by sea to Aden? — he asked. [Ibid, pp. 452-53]

The Colonial Office, which Amery consulted in the matter, thought that Uganda would not be the most suitable place for the purpose, since it had a very large Indian community, and instead approached the Acting Governor of



Nyasaland, which had the smallest Indian community in East Africa. The Nyasaland Governor said he could not guarantee very comfortable accommodation. He could have some military quarters vacated for the purpose and the Government of India would have to stand the expense of building alternative accommodation for the military. [Ibid, pp. 513-14]

Meanwhile the Viceroy had been consulting the Governors in the matter. On 27 July he sent round an immediate, most secret, private and personal circular telegram to all Governors requesting them to give their views on (a) deportation of all or some of the Working Committee, or (b) their imprisonment in India — the party being divided between Yeravda Jail and Attock Fort (in the Punjab). The Viceroy expressed the view that whatever might be done with the rest, it was most important to dispose of Patel. Also Nehru and Purushottamdas Tandon. [Ibid, pp.466-67]

Lumley expressed himself against the course. It would shock moderate opinion in India and alienate support for the British, he argued. He was also against singling out Patel for deportation. [Ibid, pp. 475-76]

Stewart of Bihar also opposed deportation. It would be regarded as unduly harsh, he said, and if a mishap should occur to Rajendra Prasad or Syed Mahmood in exile, there would be serious revulsion of even moderate feeling in Bihar. [Ibid, p. 478]

Hope of Madras and Twynam of the C.P. favoured deportation. The Viceroy accordingly informed the Secretary of State on 1 August that on balance it might be wise not to proceed with the idea. Forts of Dargai, Attock and Ahmadnagar could be considered as places of detention. He was inclined to think that Ahmadnagar might be the best. He wanted to ensure that the detenus were completely cut off from the outside world, but of course treated with the utmost consideration and with all possible comfort. [Ibid, p. 517]

On 5 August the Viceroy informed the India Office that the Government of India were now clear about the Ahmadnagar Fort for the members of the Working Committee and the Aga Khan's Palace for Gandhiji and possibly Mrs. Naidu. [Ibid, p. 570]



On 6 August the Cabinet in London considered the matter. Amery said the issue was one in which His Majesty's Government (rather than the Viceroy) must be responsible for the decision taken.

The War Cabinet concluded that as soon as he was arrested Gandhiji should be removed by sea to some place outside India. Aden could be the first destination. Afterwards he could be transferred to Sudan. He would be accompanied by medical attendants. Other leaders could be flown to East Africa, to avoid the impression being given that Gandhiji was being selected for special treatment. [Ibid, pp. 486-88]

The Viceroy did not agree. He telegraphed to Amery on 7 August that he had consulted his Executive Council, who were strongly opposed to deportation of the leaders. Reaction in India would be very bad. Also, if Gandhiji fasted it would be easier to deal with him if he was in India rather than abroad or on the high seas. [Ibid, pp. 596-97]

The Cabinet was not convinced, but said in view of the Viceroy's telegram, it did not desire to press its view. [Ibid, p. 606]

11

It was not only the Government that was proceeding on the assumption that the A.I.C.C. at Bombay would ratify the Working Committee's resolution and put its seal on a mass movement of Gandhiji's devising to force the British to quit India. Local Congress Committees everywhere, middle-rung leaders at the Provincial and district level, as also rank and file Congressmen were equally certain that the coming meeting of the A.I.C.C. would sound the bugle for the movement. The excitement all over the country was therefore at a high pitch and enthusiasm filled the hearts of workers. It was being taken for granted that the Government would come down heavily on the movement as soon as it was started and Congress organizations at various levels were getting themselves ready to face the worst, while actively carrying on the movement.

In the U.P. on 24 July a C.I.D. communication to all S.P.s reported that Congress leaders expected immediate arrest on the start of the movement and were intent on arranging for suitable successors. The movement would aim at paralyzing the existing administration. No-rent campaign, interference with



essential services, acts of sabotage, pressure on Government servants to relinquish their posts, etc., were contemplated. The Congress, the circular said, was prepared to encourage all subversive groups to assist the movement in whatever way they chose and with whatever weapons they chose. 15 September was mentioned as the contemplated date of the start of the movement. [P. N. Chopra, ed., *Quit India Movement: British Secret Documents*, Interprint, New Delhi, 1986, pp. 3-5]

Another C.I.D. circular of 4 August addressed to all S.P.s reported that meetings had been held at various centres, including Lucknow, Kanpur, Benares, Allahabad, Agra and Bareilly, to inform selected leaders of the steps to be taken to ensure success of the movement. It was emphasized, the circular said, that Congressmen must be non-violent but that even if violence occurred the movement would not be called off. Steps recommended for paralyzing the Government, the C.I.D. report said, were the following:

1. Boycott: Quit India slogan to be pasted on road crossings, public places, residences of Englishmen; social boycott of those assisting in the war; approach to Government servants to join the movement.
2. Non-payment of rent to zemindars siding with the Government; travelling by train without ticket.
3. Strikes in schools, colleges, Government offices, mills, workshops, aerodromes and markets.
4. Sabotage: cutting of telephone and telegraph wires, removal of fish-plates from rail tracks, occupation of police stations, lying down in front of military trains.
5. Army: people to be persuaded not to enlist; recruits to tamper with the loyalty of troops; contractors to be asked to terminate contracts with the Army.
6. Dictators to be appointed for each district. Province to be divided into six areas. Communication through couriers, preferably women. Jail rules to be disobeyed. [Ibid, pp. 7-10]



On 29 July the Andhra Provincial Congress Committee issued a confidential circular addressed to all District Congress Committees to take up organizational work preparatory to the coming movement. Since the success of the movement would depend on the tempo that could be imparted to it, the organization had to be effective and in capable hands.

The circular proceeded:

(1) The whole movement is based on non-violence. No act which contravenes this instruction should ever be undertaken.

All acts of disobedience committed should be overt and never covert.

(2) *Organization*: The district may be divided into convenient groups based on Revenue divisions or Taluks and should be placed under an organizer. The organizer should be given the assistance of select Congress workers who will actively arrange the details — place, date and persons....

The following suggestions can be followed immediately:

1. Collect information as regards items of the programme — toddy--yielding trees and natural salt depots, liquor shops, railway stations, telegraph and telephone lines, troop locations, recruiting centres, etc.
2. Names of persons put in charge of various items of organization work should be listed.
3. Organize public meetings and intensive propaganda in villages at once.
4. Congress resolutions and replies to counter-propaganda must be widely circulated. Printing work may not be possible. Duplicators may be used....

The form of disobedience may be individual, generalized individual or mass.

Items of the programme:

Group I - First stage

(a) Breaking of prohibitory orders, (b) picking salt, (c) continuing openly to be members of an unlawful association.



Group II - Second stage

(a) Items of non-cooperation: lawyers to leave practice, students to leave colleges, jurors and assessors not to respond to summons.

(b) Government officers including village officers to resign their jobs.

Group III- Third stage

Arranging labour strikes.

Group IV - Fourth stage

(a) Picketing of foreign cloth shops, (b) liquor shops, (c) foreign concerns in trade and industry.

Group V - Fifth stage

The following items are not prohibited but not encouraged and to be considered at this stage only:

(1) Stopping trains by pulling chains only.

(2) Travel without tickets.

(3) Cutting toddy-yielding trees.

(4) Cutting telegraph and telephone wires.

N.B. Rails should not be removed or in a permanent way obstructed. No danger to life should be great caution [sic].

Group VI - Practically the last stage

(a) Non-payment of taxes including Municipal taxes. Especially zemindari rent should not be paid if the zemindar will not join the movement.

Convictions: When people are sent to jail they need not keep quiet as usual. But they should continue disobedience there also.... Hunger-strikes should also be undertaken, but voluntarily, at personal risk of the individual as it may lead to the glory of self-immolation.

Warning: 99 out of 100 chances are for the inauguration of this movement by Mahatmaji at an early date, possibly a few hours after the next All-India Congress Committee meeting at Bombay. The D.C.C.s should



be alert and begin to act immediately. But please also take note that no movement should be launched or any overt act done till Mahatmaji decides. After all he may decide otherwise and you will be responsible for a great unwarranted mistake. Be ready, organize at once, be alert, but by no means act. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1942, Vol. II, pp. 211-12]

The circular has been quoted here in full because of the importance attached to it by the British as part of the evidence showing that Gandhiji and the Congress were responsible for the disorders and the violence that followed in the course of the Quit India movement. The text of the circular, conveyed to the Viceroy by the Governor of Madras, was telegraphed by him to London on 4 August and the War Cabinet considered it at its meeting on 6 August. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. II, pp. 557-58, 586] The Government in their pamphlet *Congress Responsibility for the Disturbances*, brought out later in February 1943, also mentioned the circular.

As may be seen, the emphasis in the circular was on strict non-violence and the need for all acts of civil disobedience to be overt and "never covert". In his answer to the Government pamphlet Gandhiji, while pointing out that he had known nothing about the circular before his arrest and could not be held responsible for some of the items, insisted that the governing clause in the circular was the one on the non-violent character of the movement. [*C.W.M.G.*, LXXVII, pp. 151-52]

On 4 August Gandhiji drafted instructions for the guidance of civil resisters in the event of his starting the movement. These were tentative, to be considered in the first instance by members of the Working Committee.

The instructions said:

On the day of the hartal no processions should be taken out nor meetings held in the cities. All the people should observe a twenty-four hours' fast and offer prayers ...no one should be made to close his shop under coercion. In the villages ...meetings may be held and processions taken out and responsible Congressmen who believe in mass civil disobedience should explain the meaning of the contemplated satyagraha struggle to the people.... Local Congress workers should send all reports



about the hartal and other activities to their Provincial Congress Committee and the latter to the Central Congress office.... In the last resort, every Congressman is his own leader and a servant of the whole nation. A final word: no one should think that those whose names are on the Congress register are the only Congressmen. Let every Indian, who desires the freedom of the whole of India and fully believes in the weapon of truth and non-violence for the purpose of this struggle, regard himself as a Congressman and act as such....

...Those employed in Government offices, Government factories, railways, post offices, etc., may not participate in the hartal, because our object is to make it clear that we will never tolerate Japanese, Nazi or Fascist invasion, nor British rule.

...But an occasion may certainly arise when we shall ask all those people ...to give up their positions and join the satyagraha struggle....

If any Government servant is called upon to perpetrate excesses or injustice it will be his clear duty to resign at once, giving the real reasons. Free Indian Government will be under no obligation to continue in its service all those Government functionaries who are at present serving the Empire on huge salaries....

All students reading in institutions conducted or controlled by the Government should come out of those institutions. Those who are above sixteen years of age should join the Satyagraha.... If excesses are committed in any place by the Government, people should offer resistance and endure the penalty. For instance if villagers, labourers or householders are ordered to vacate their farms or homes, they should flatly refuse to obey such orders [unless] adequate compensation is offered.... We do not want to hinder military activities, but neither shall we submit to arbitrary high-handedness.

The salt tax causes great hardship to the poor. Therefore, wherever salt can be made, poor people may certainly manufacture it for themselves and risk the penalty.

Land tax is due only to a Government which we recognize as our own. It is long since we have mentally ceased to recognize the existing



Government as such ...the time has now come when those who have the courage and are prepared to risk their all, should refuse to pay it. [In areas where the zemindari system prevails] if the zemindar makes common cause with the ryots, his portion of the revenue ...should be given to him. But if a zemindar wants to side with the Government, no tax should be paid to him. This will ...spell ruin to the ryot. Therefore only those who are prepared to face utter ruin should refuse payment of land revenue.

The Working Committee discussed the instructions on 8 August and was again to consider the matter on 9 August. But that was not to be, and the instructions were not issued. Nevertheless, they serve to show the completely non-violent nature of the movement that Gandhiji had contemplated launching. [C.W.M.G., LXXVI, pp. 364-67]

12

There were some last-minute attempts at intervention to avert the catastrophe that the British rulers' stiff-necked attitude threatened to bring to the country.

One of them, the most notable, came from Chiang Kai-shek. On 30 July the Generalissimo despatched a long telegram to Roosevelt — after T. V. Soong, his ambassador, had already had a discussion on the Indian situation with the President the previous day. In the telegram the Chinese leader expressed the view that the Indian situation had reached "an extremely tense and critical stage", from which the Axis powers were sure to benefit and which was bound to affect adversely "the whole course of the war". To an Indian freedom of his country was of paramount importance. If the United Nations should show India no sympathy, Chiang feared, there was danger of the situation getting out of control and if the August meeting of the Congress should decide to start an anti-British movement, the war in the East was sure to be affected. The telegram proceeded:

The only way to make them reconsider their course of action is for the United Nations, and especially the United States which they have always admired, to come forth as third parties and to offer them sympathy and consolation.... Once the situation is eased it can be stabilized and the Indian people, grateful to the United Nations for what they have done, will willingly participate in the war.... Should, however, the situation



be allowed to drift until an anti-British movement breaks out in India, any attempt on the part of the British to cope with the crisis by enforcing existing Colonial laws or by resorting to military and police force, will only serve to spread disturbances and turmoil. The greater the oppression the greater the reaction.

The telegram concluded that the wisest and most enlightened policy for Britain to pursue would be to restore to India "her complete freedom" and thus to prevent Axis troops from setting foot on Indian soil. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. II, pp. 529-32]

Roosevelt simply forwarded the communication to Churchill for his comments. Churchill's answer was swift and terse and repetitive. He said the Congress in no way represented India and was opposed by 90 million Muslims, 40 million Untouchables and Indian States comprising 90 millions. It represented only non-fighting Hindu elements who could neither defend India nor raise a revolt. Transferring power to the Congress would imperil the loyalty of the military classes on whom everything depended. The Government of India, he told Roosevelt, had no doubt of their ability to maintain order and carry on Government with efficiency "whatever the Congress may say or even do". He requested the President to dissuade Chiang "from his completely misinformed activities and lend no countenance to putting pressure upon His Majesty's Government". [Ibid, p. 533]

The British War Cabinet at its meeting on 6 August, while approving action proposed to be taken by the Government of India against the Congress in the event of the A.I.C.C. endorsing the 14 July resolution of the Working Committee, decided that advance information of the action to be taken should be given to the U.S. President and to the Dominion Prime Ministers but not to Chiang Kai-shek until after the arrest of Gandhiji and the Congress leaders. [Ibid, p. 588]

Tej Bahadur Sapru also did his best to avert a show-down between the British Government and the Congress. Gandhiji having turned down his appeal for the summoning of a round table conference, he made a similar appeal to the British on 4 August, suggesting that the Viceroy should summon such a conference. Cripps thought it might be a good idea for the Viceroy to issue a last-moment declaration welcoming the idea of a meeting between the Congress and



other parties, as suggested by Sapru, and offering to give serious consideration "to any conclusions that emerged from such a meeting". He put it up to the Cabinet. But the Cabinet, at its meeting on 7 August, under Amery's persuasion rejected the idea, saying that the issue of such a statement by the Viceroy at that stage was likely to be interpreted in India as a sign of weakness on the part of the Government. [Ibid, pp. 604-5, 629]

Dr. Radhakrishnan, eminent philosopher and Vice-Chancellor of the Benares Hindu University, also made a last-minute bid to make the British see reason. In a letter to the Viceroy, written on 8 August, just when the A.I.C.C. was debating the Quit India resolution, he drew the Viceroy's attention to the high prices, scarcities and acute hardships brought on by the war, and reminded him that hunger was a "great revolutionary force". Should the A.I.C.C. accept the Working Committee's resolution, as was likely, and start a mass movement, it would spread like wildfire, giving rise to riots, looting and bloodshed, and should anything happen to Gandhiji, the movement would acquire greater momentum.

Since the British Government were pledged to the grant of complete self-government to India after the war, Radhakrishnan argued, why not do it right away? The British policy in Burma, Malaya and Ireland had failed. The Congress, he pointed out, was pledged to resist the Axis powers if India was made a self-governing country.

The transfer of power need not disturb the existing order. The Viceroy's Council could be replaced by a coalition cabinet of representatives of the Congress and the Muslim League. The Commander-in-Chief would continue to have the sole command of the military movements, and in matters affecting Indian States the Viceroy would continue to have his say. The communal cleavages, Radhakrishnan counselled, must not be exaggerated. After all coalition governments were functioning in three Provinces and the N.W.F.P., essentially a Muslim Province, was under Congress control. It was no time to discuss the rights and the wrongs. The need was for work for a resolution of the problem.

The Viceroy's response was only a note in the margin: "Out dated! - L. 10-8."



PART IV
THE QUIT INDIA MOVEMENT



CHAPTER XIII: THE A.I.C.C. RESOLUTION AND THE BRITISH RESPONSE

1

The Congress Working Committee met in Bombay on 5 August 1942, to finalize the draft of the resolution to be placed before the A.I.C.C. two days later. The resolution as passed by the Working Committee approved the Wardha resolution of the Committee passed on 14 July 1942 and repeated that "the immediate ending of British rule in India is an urgent necessity both for the sake of India and for the success of the cause of the United Nations." For India, the resolution declared, was the crux of the question. The ending of British rule in the country was a vital and immediate issue on which the future of the war depended. The freedom of India would not only ensure India's great resources being thrown into the struggle against Nazism and Fascism but also bring all the subject and oppressed humanity on the side of the United Nations. The resolution proceeded:

On the declaration of India's independence a Provisional Government will be formed and free India will become an ally of the United Nations. The Provisional Government can only be ...a composite government, representative of all important sections of the people of India. Its primary function must be to defend India ...with all the armed as well as the non-violent forces at its command, together with the Allied powers.... The Provisional Government will evolve a scheme for a Constituent Assembly which will prepare a constitution for the Government of India acceptable to all sections of the people.

This constitution, according to the Congress view, should be a federal one, with the largest measure of autonomy for the federating units, and with the residuary powers vesting in these units.

The resolution declared that while the independence of India was the primary concern of the Congress, in its view the future peace and security of the



world demanded a federation of free nations, which would ensure the freedom of constituent nations, prevent aggression and make disarmament practicable.

But the peril grew and submission to foreign administration was degrading India and reducing her capacity to defend herself. The A.I.C.C. therefore would no longer be justified "in holding the nation back from endeavouring to assert its will against an Imperialist and authoritarian Government". Then came the action line:

The Committee resolves, therefore, to sanction, for the vindication of India's inalienable right to freedom and independence, the starting of a mass struggle on non-violent lines on the widest possible scale, so that the country might utilize all the non-violent strength it has gathered during the last twenty-two years of peaceful struggle. Such a struggle must inevitably be under the leadership of Gandhiji and the Committee request him to take the lead and guide the nation in the steps to be taken.

The resolution called upon the people of India to face with courage and endurance the hardships that might fall to their lot and carry out Gandhiji's instructions as disciplined soldiers. A time might come when it would not be possible for instructions to be issued and when the Congress Committee would not be able to function. When that happened every man and woman participating in the movement must function for himself or herself within the four corners of the general instructions issued. They must be their own guides.

The resolution again made it clear that in embarking on a mass struggle the Congress had no intention to gain power for itself. The power when it came would belong to the whole nation. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1942, Vol. II, pp. 209-11; *The Transfer of Power*, Vol. II. pp. 621-24]

On 6 August Gandhiji gave an interview to the Press. He was asked if the resolution meant peace or war. Foreign journalists, Gandhiji was told, were interpreting the resolution, especially the last three paragraphs, which were the operative part, as a declaration of war. Gandhiji said in any non-violent struggle, whether projected or in operation, the emphasis was always on peace. War only when it became an absolute necessity. Gandhiji was asked if he visualized an interregnum between the departure of the British and the setting up of a



Provisional Government. Gandhiji said a Provisional Government could be set up almost simultaneously with British withdrawal. Being of necessity based on non-violence such a Provisional Government would represent the free and voluntary association of all parties.

Answering a further question Gandhiji said he contemplated an interval between the passing of the resolution by the A.I.C.C. and the starting of the struggle. A letter would go to the Viceroy, and if he responded favourably there could be negotiations on the basis of the letter. [C.W.M.G., LXXVI, pp. 375-76]

2

The response of the British Government, on the levels of propaganda and of repressive action, had of course already been elaborately worked out in anticipation of the A.I.C.C. decision on the Working Committee's resolution. On 6 August Linlithgow forwarded to Amery the draft of a communique, to be rubber-stamped by his Executive Council and issued as soon as the A.I.C.C. passed the resolution. The draft referred to the Congress demand for the immediate withdrawal of British power from India and, failing acceptance of the demand, starting of a mass struggle on non-violent lines under Gandhiji's leadership, and mentioned "dangerous preparations being pushed forward by the Congress" for the "cutting of telegraph wires, interference with railway services, the organizing of strikes, the picketing of troops and a wide variety of similar unlawful and nefarious activities".

The Congress demand if accepted, the draft proceeded, "would plunge India into confusion and anarchy" and "would be a betrayal of the United Nations, betrayal of Russia and China and betrayal of India's fighting men.

The Congress, the draft said, had no sanction for its demand. It did not represent the Muslims, nor the Scheduled Castes, nor the Indian States, nor the lesser minorities, nor even the "solid opinion in Hinduism". The British would not yield to "chicanery and treachery" and abandon India to external aggression and internal chaos. The Governor-General in Council, with full support of His Majesty's Government, would meet the Congress challenge, "with determination, but with anxiety that action shall be preventive rather than punitive". [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. II, pp. 580-82]



The Viceroy's Executive Council discussed the draft and made many changes in it. The changes being only verbal the Viceroy let the Council have their way. Linlithgow was anxious for the world to believe that the Government of India was being run by the Council, made up of five Englishmen, including himself, and eleven Indians, and that the action planned against the Congress was at their discretion. When the B.B.C. in a broadcast on 5 August spoke of "the British Government's attitude to the forthcoming meeting of the A.I.C.C.", the Viceroy was embarrassed. He telegraphed to Amery saying he had received a very strong protest from his Council, for the B.B.C. broadcast would have given the impression that the Executive Councillors were not "free agents". They were, he admitted, unduly touchy, but hoped Amery would give him something consoling to say to them. [Ibid, p. 579]

The British War Cabinet, on the other hand, thought that Linlithgow was making too much of a fuss about not hurting the sentiments of his Executive Councillors. At a meeting of the Cabinet on 7 August it was pointed out that the vital need was for the Government of India to show firmness in dealing with the Congress, which must not be prejudiced by the desire to obtain the full support of the Council. In the last resort the responsibility lay with the Viceroy, not the Council. Amery was asked to inform the Viceroy accordingly. [Ibid, pp. 606-7]

Again and again it was emphasized that while the Viceroy must, for propaganda purposes, emphasize that the action to be taken against the Congress had the "full support" of his Executive Council, the paramount need was for promptitude and decisiveness in dealing with the Congress and even if the support of the Council had to be forgone to secure this, the Viceroy should not hesitate. [Ibid, pp. 588, 597, 607, 618]

On the eve of the meeting of the A.I.C.C. the plans of the British Government for striking at the organization and thus "abort" the mass movement were complete in all respects. As communicated by the Home Department to Provincial Governments the procedure to be followed would be:

As soon as the A.I.C.C. passed the resolution, Bombay Government would inform the Government of India, Provincial Governments, Chief Commissioners and Political Residents by telegram containing a pre-arranged code word. Action,



however, would be taken only when the Government of India authorized it by telegram containing another code word to all the authorities mentioned above.

On receiving such telegram the Bombay Government would arrest Gandhiji and all the members of the Working Committee present in Bombay under Defence of India Rule 26. (Earlier there had been consultations between Delhi, London and the Provincial Governors whether Gandhiji should not be held under Regulation III of 1818. In the end it was decided that holding him under an obsolete law might look bad and might also give the appearance that he was being treated differently from the other leaders of the Congress.)

Provincial Governments would simultaneously proclaim unlawful, under Criminal Law Amendment Act, the Congress Working Committee, the All-India Congress Committee and Provincial Congress Committees but not the Congress as a whole. Relevant offices and funds of the Congress would be seized and individuals considered likely to launch mass civil disobedience would be arrested.

Mahadev Desai, Mirabehn and the present author in her capacity as a doctor, would be permitted to accompany Gandhiji if they voluntarily accepted restrictions imposed on Gandhiji. If the first two refused to accept conditions they would also be arrested.

Gandhiji and all the arrested leaders would be precluded absolutely from any communication with the outside world.

It was realized that there would be widespread protest demonstrations, and Provincial Governments were instructed to take all precautionary steps in consultation with military authorities, who had already been warned by General Headquarters.

If these steps should not succeed in aborting the movement the whole Congress organization would be proclaimed unlawful and an Emergency Powers Ordinance promulgated. (The draft of this Ordinance had already been prepared in August 1940, when it had been proposed to call it the Revolutionary Movement Ordinance.) [Ibid, pp. 366-67, 534-37]

The meeting of the All-India Congress Committee began as scheduled on 7 August in the afternoon. The venue was the Gowalia Tank Maidan, where a



tastefully decorated *pandal* had been erected for the event. Some 250 members of the A.I.C.C. were present, while the visitors numbered nearly ten thousand.

The President, Maulana Azad, opened the proceedings. In his speech he emphasized that the demand for British withdrawal from India had been above all to ensure participation of the people in the defence against the impending Japanese aggression. The decision taken by the A.I.C.C. at Allahabad had been impelled by necessity. For the defence of the country against foreign aggression the only course was to have the reins of Government in Indian hands.

"Let us have," he said, "a declaration of Indian independence forthwith and we, on our part, shall immediately enter into a treaty of alliance with the United Nations for the sole purpose of fighting and winning this war."

Azad reiterated that what the Congress demanded was only transfer of Governmental power to Indian hands. It was not demanded that the Allied forces should also withdraw from India. Neither was it desired that all the Britishers should be physically removed from India.

The Congress, he said, did not want promises, nor did it want to make promises. The need of the hour was action, immediate action both on the part of the Congress and on the part of the British Government. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1942, Vol. II, pp. 237-39]

Speaking after the President Gandhiji emphasized the non-violent character of the movement contemplated. He also rebutted the charge that the Congress wanted power for itself. He said:

Our object is to achieve independence and whoever can take up the reins may do so.... May be that power may be given to those whose names had never been heard of in the Congress. It will be for the people to decide. You should not feel that the majority of those who fought for it were Hindus and the number of Muslims and Parsis in the fight was small.... If there is the slightest communal taint in your minds, keep off the struggle.

Referring to the popular resentment against the British Gandhiji said:

There are people who have hatred in their hearts for the British. I have heard people saying that they were disgusted with them. Common people's mind does not differentiate between the British Government and



British people.... They are the people who do not mind the advent of the Japanese.... But it is a dangerous thing. You must remove it from your mind. This is a crucial hour. If we keep quiet and do not play our part it would not be right on our part. If it is only Britain and the United States who fight this war and if our part is only to give monetary help ...it is not a very happy proposition. But we can show our real grit and valour only when it becomes our own fight.... We must remove any hatred for the British from our hearts. At least in my heart there is no such hatred.... I know they are on the brink of a ditch and about to fall into it. Therefore even if they want to cut off my hands, my friendship demands that I should try to pull them out of that ditch.

...At a time when I am about to launch the biggest fight in my life there can be no hatred for the British in my heart. The thought that because they are in difficulties I should give them a push is totally absent from my mind. Maybe that in a moment of anger they might do things which might provoke you. Nevertheless you should not resort to violence and put non-violence to shame. When such a thing happens you may take it that you will not find me alive, wherever I may be.

Gandhiji told the members not to entertain the thought that the British were going to fail. They were not a nation of cowards. But it was possible that as a matter of military strategy they might leave India as they had left Burma, Malaya and other places. In that event the Japanese would come. That would be the end of China and possibly even of Russia. Gandhiji said he did not want to be the instrument for the defeat of Russia and China. Hence the demand for British withdrawal.

Gandhiji referred to the reported statement of Sardar Patel that the campaign would be over in a week. If that should be so, Gandhiji said, it would mean the melting of the British heart, the dawning of the wisdom to realize that they must not put in jail the very people who wanted to fight for them.

Concluding Gandhiji said:

The resolution that is placed before you says we do not want to remain frogs in a well. We are aiming at a world federation in which India



would be a leading unit. It can come only through non-violence.... I want you to adopt non-violence as a matter of policy. With me it is a creed, but so far as you are concerned, I want you to accept it as a policy. As disciplined soldiers you must accept it *in toto* and stick to it when you join the struggle. [C.W.M.G., LXXVI, pp. 377-81]

After Gandhiji had spoken Jawaharlal Nehru moved the resolution (text of which has been summarized in the earlier pages) as finalized by the Working Committee on 5 August. In his speech on the motion, Nehru emphasized that the movement contemplated was not merely for the freedom of India, but for achieving world freedom. The Congress was plunging into a stormy ocean and would either emerge with India free or would go down. It would be a fight to the finish. He made it clear that Gandhiji and the Congress would not indulge in any bargaining or haggling.

The system under which India was being governed, Nehru continued, was inefficient, incompetent and rotten. He would not want to associate himself with the creaking, shaky machinery that the Government of India was. The British had made Indians miserable poverty-stricken wrecks.

Nehru rebutted the charge that the movement would hamper the war effort. The resolution that had been moved, he said, was the only effective way in which China and Russia could be helped. Britain and America treated Asia as a side-show. Asia was the seat of the war and it was Asia which was going to determine the result of the war. If there should be internal trouble in India or Japanese invasion it was Indians who would suffer. England might be affected in a distant way, but Indians would have to die immediately. How could the British be trusted to defend India? Their whole attitude was one of retirement.

The resolution, Nehru concluded, was not an expression of narrow nationalism. He was proud of Indian nationalism, because it was broad-based and had an international background.

Sardar Patel seconded the resolution. He referred to the advice from friends abroad and also threats that had been coming since the passing of the Wardha resolution of the Working Committee. He would not reply to the threats or advice, if only because whatever reply he gave was not likely to find its way



out of the country. The normal channels of publicity were no longer open to the Congress. Only things that were palatable to the Government were allowed to go out of India.

Sadar Patel said it was foolish of the British and Americans to imagine that they could fight the war from India without the cooperation of India's four hundred million people. People must be made to believe that it was their war, the people's war, and they should fight to defend their country and to secure its freedom. Sardar Patel also warned the people against placing their faith in the professions of Japan. Her acts in Manchuria, China and elsewhere showed that the Japanese had the same imperialist ambitions that the British had.

Let the British, Sardar concluded, transfer power to the Muslim League, or to the Hindu Mahasabha or to anyone else, so long as they gave up their control over India. But they did not want to do that, and the people would have to fight for their freedom. The fight, as Gandhiji has emphasized, should be short and swift. The movement would not be confined only to Congressmen; it would take in all who were willing to fight for their country. The movement would include all the items of non-violent resistance already sanctioned by the Congress and probably some more. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1942, Vol. II, pp. 239-42]

On 8 August, when the A.I.C.C. assembled again many members moved amendments. Balkrishna Sharma of Kanpur thought it was an inopportune moment for launching a mass struggle, because the country was faced with the threat of invasion and because Mahatma Gandhi's message of non-violence had not been fully understood by the masses.

Dr. P. Subbarayan of Madras in his amendment took Rajaji's line. He emphasized the need for initiative to bring about communal unity through an understanding between the Congress and the League for the formation of a Provisional National Government so that the menace of Axis aggression could be faced.

Communist members, Dr. K. M. Ashraf, Sajjad Zaheer and S.G. Sardesai also moved amendments to stall the contemplated mass movement. Dr. Ashraf wanted the Congress in effect to recognize the right of self-determination for Muslims. Sajjad Zaheer's amendment asked for efforts to bring about national



unity for the formation of a Provisional National Government which would undertake the organization of armed as well as non-violent defence against Fascist aggressors in cooperation with the United Nations. Sardesai's amendment was on similar lines.

The most determined advocacy of the mass struggle came from the Congress Socialist group, of which Dr. Lohia, Achyut Patwardhan and Acharya Narendra Dev were the spokesmen. Ram Manohar Lohia wondered how the Communists, who had earlier been demanding the immediate launching of a revolutionary struggle, could now oppose the movement. Achyut Patwardhan found the argument strange that in order to bring about unity in the country, the Congress should agree to break up the country. Acharya Narendra Dev, criticizing the amendments moved by Communist members, regretted that at the time of the final struggle there still should be people who were not willing to make the required sacrifice.

Replying to the debate Jawaharlal Nehru said the resolution was not a threat; it was an invitation, an offer of cooperation. But behind it was the indication that certain consequences would follow if certain events did not happen.

The resolution was not merely the resolution of the A.I.C.C. It represented the voice of the whole of India, nay, the voice of the entire oppressed humanity. If the demand contained in the resolution had been accepted by Britain the whole character of the war would have changed, giving it a revolutionary character. He appealed to the people to realize that they were not only fighting in the interests of India, but were fighting in the interest of all countries in the world, including China and Russia. Nehru denounced the one-sided propaganda that the Congress should come to terms with the Muslim League. He said: "I can talk and negotiate with anybody who recognizes democratic freedom for India, but I cannot negotiate with anyone who refuses to recognize the fundamental issue, the freedom of India."

After the amendments had been withdrawn, or (those moved by Communist members) defeated by an overwhelming majority, the resolution was put to vote and passed by the A.I.C.C., with only thirteen members voting against. [Ibid, pp. 244-58, 252-54]



Gandhiji then addressed the delegates and visitors. Speaking first in Hindustani and then in English, he dwelt at length on the question of Hindu-Muslim unity that had figured so largely in the debate on the resolution. The problem, he said, was not a new one. Millions of Hindus and Musalmans had been seeking Hindu-Muslim unity and he himself had left no stone unturned to achieve that unity. He referred to the unconditional support he had extended to the Muslims on the Khilafat question earlier and the spirit of brotherhood and tolerance that then had prevailed between the two communities.

It cut him to the quick, Gandhiji said, that his stock among the Muslims had since fallen. He was being subjected to a campaign of vilification, which went on growing notwithstanding the importunities and pleas of Maulana Azad and himself. Maulana Saheb was the target of the filthiest abuse.

He would say to Jinnah: 'Whatever is true and valid in the claim for Pakistan is already in your hands. What is wrong and untenable is in nobody's gift? Friends had advised him that he should agree to the Pakistan demand to placate Jinnah. But he would not be a party to a course of action with a false promise. That was not his method. To the extent that the demand for Pakistan accorded with equity and justice it was already in Jinnah's pocket. To the extent it was contrary to justice and equity he could take it only by the sword and in no other manner. If Pakistan was to be a portion of free India what objection could Musalmans have to joining the struggle for freedom? Contrary to expectations the war must end quickly. If it went on for six months more China would be destroyed.

He therefore wanted freedom immediately, that very night, before dawn, if it could be had. Freedom could not wait for the realization of communal unity. The Congress must win freedom or be wiped out in the effort. Sacrifices required would be much greater because of the opposition of the British and the Muslim League.

Fraud and untruth were stalking the world. He could not be a helpless witness to such a situation. However gigantic the preparations that the Empire had made India must get out of its clutches. Had the conditions been different



he would have asked the people to wait awhile. But the situation had become intolerable, and the Congress had no other course left.

Unfolding the plan of action he proposed, Gandhiji said:

Nevertheless, the actual struggle does not commence this moment. You have only placed your powers in my hands. I will now wait upon the Viceroy and plead with him for the acceptance of the Congress demand. The process is likely to take two or three weeks.

In the meanwhile, there was for them the spinning-wheel and the fourteen-point constructive programme. They should all, from that very moment consider themselves free men and women. Gandhiji assured the audience that he did not intend to enter into a bargain with the Viceroy for Ministries and the like. He would not be satisfied with anything short of complete freedom. He said:

Here is a *mantra*, a short one that I give you. You may imprint it on your hearts and let every breath of yours give expression to it. The *mantra* is: "Do or Die". We shall free India or die in the attempt; we shall not live to see the perpetuation of our slavery.... He who loses his life will gain it; he who will seek to save it shall lose it.

Gandhiji asked the journalists, even if they did not wish to defy Government restrictions for fear of losing their printing-presses and other property, that they should wind up their Standing Committee and declare that they would give up writing under the existing restrictions and take up the pen only when India had gained her freedom. They must tell the Government that they would not publish its Press notes, which were full of untruth. They must openly declare that they were whole-heartedly with the Congress.

Addressing the Princes, Gandhiji said that though in Jawaharlal's scheme of things there was no room for Princes and zemindars or any other privileged classes, as far as he was concerned the Princes as well as zemindars would have a place in India. The only thing required of the Princes was that they should become servants of their people. They should derive their power from their people and not from the British. They should tell the British: 'The people are now awake. We shall sink or swim with them.' There were no treaties to prevent the Princes from adopting such a course. The people of the States should also realize



that though they were Princes' subjects they were part of the Indian nation and they must cast their lot with the people of India. Should this enrage the Princes and provoke them to kill their people, the people must meet death bravely and unflinchingly.

The Government servants need not resign their jobs. But they must openly declare their allegiance to the Congress.

The soldiers too should declare that they were with the Congress and should refuse to obey orders to fire on the people.

The students would have to give up their studies to participate in the struggle. In the meanwhile they could continue with their studies but only after telling their teachers that they belonged to the Congress. Nothing, Gandhiji emphasized, should be done secretly. In the struggle that was coming secrecy would be a sin. A free man would not engage in a secret movement. They must work openly and receive bullets on their chests.

Speaking afterwards in English, Gandhiji reiterated that the actual struggle was not commencing from that very day. He had to go through the usual ceremonial. He had to continue to reason with circles with whom he had for the time being lost credit. Gandhiji claimed the privilege of friendship with Lord Linlithgow, but the personal bond would not come in the way of the stubborn struggle that he must launch against Lord Linlithgow as the representative of the British Empire. He would have to resist the might of the Empire with the might of the dumb millions, with no limit but non-violence as the policy for the struggle. His conscience, the prompting of his inner voice, Gandhiji said, told him: 'You have to stand against the whole world although you may have to stand alone. You have to stare the world in the face although the world may look at you with bloodshot eyes. Do not fear. Forsake friends, wife, and all, but testify to that for which you have lived, and for which you have to die.'

The United Nations had the opportunity to prove their *bona fides*, he continued. Let India become free and the road to run for Russia's help would be opened. People had no lustre left in their eyes. If lustre was to be brought back to their eyes, freedom had to come that very day, not the next day. He had



therefore pledged the Congress, and the Congress had pledged itself, that it would do or die. [C.W.M.G., LXXVI, pp. 384-401]

On 8 August while the A.I.C.C. was discussing the resolution, the Viceroy in a most immediate telegram to Amery intimated:

Gandhi has apparently intimated in Bombay that he proposes to send me a letter.... I do not propose to delay arrest until I receive any such letter and feel that it would be a profound mistake to allow the Working Committee to disperse over India while I did so. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. II, p. 616]

5

The button was pressed and action against Gandhiji and the Congress began. The first to be pounced upon were Gandhiji, all the members of the Working Committee then in Bombay had some fifty leaders of the Bombay Congress. The Bombay police had made meticulous preparations during the night. The leaders, it appeared, were taken unawares, which surprised the authorities. They thought it was hardly likely that they would not anticipate arrest and have crowds outside their residences. The action was carried out by sixty police parties, making sixty separate visits. In the words of Governor Lumley:

Zero hour was fixed at 5 a.m. The Commissioner of Police and Rao Bahadur Desai effected Gandhi's arrest. He displayed his usual courtesy and gave no trouble at all. The only piece of trouble was occasioned by Pant, who appears to have been angry at being woken up so early and gave some trouble, with the result that he did not get to the station in time to catch the special train. Everything else went according to plan, and at 7.15 a.m. the special train, with Gandhi and the Working Committee, and about forty of our own Congress leaders, was on its way.... With the exception of a scene created by Yusuf Meherally, who is decidedly unbalanced, all went up to Chinchwad, a small station short of Poona at which Gandhi and those destined for Yeravda Jail alighted....

I think there is no doubt that the Congress leaders were taken by surprise and did not expect to be arrested so soon. This appears to have been the general trend of conversation on the train journey. [Ibid, pp. 806-7]



Of the members of the Working Committee, only Rajendra Prasad had not been able to go to Bombay for the A.I.C.C. meeting. He had been too ill. He was arrested at Patna and detained in the Hazari Bagh Jail.

Members of the A.I.C.C. on their way back to their respective Provinces, could not even complete the journeys. They were arrested at intermediate stations and spirited away to various jails. Prominent Congress workers at the provincial, district and local levels, divided by the Government into A and B categories, met the same fate.

The Indian National Congress, as such, still remained a lawful organization. However, the Working Committee, the All-India Congress Committee, the Provincial Congress Committees, Town, Tehsil, Ward and Mandal Congress Committees were declared unlawful associations, and their offices and funds seized.

By an order issued on 8 August printers, publishers and editors of newspapers were prohibited from publishing any news connected with the movement or official action against the movement, unless derived from (a) official sources, (b) A.P.I., U.P.I. or the Orient Press of India, or (c) regular correspondents registered with District Magistrates. [Pattabhi Sitaramayya, *The History of the Indian National Congress*, Vol. II, pp. 359, 372-73]

In London Secretary of State Leopold Amery expressed his profound satisfaction at the doings of the Government of India. In a statement he said:

By their prompt and resolute action the Government of India have saved India and Allied cause from a grave disaster. There may yet be a certain measure of trouble ...but I believe there will be no trouble that cannot be dealt with by the Government of India through the police and the courts.

On 10 August speaking in a broadcast to America he said:

What India is up against is nothing less than a deliberate campaign to sabotage the war effort and the war effort of all Indians, British, Americans or Chinese who are on Indian soil.... You need not fear that India is not fully capable of handling this trouble by herself. The campaign will fail – it must fail if our common cause is not to suffer irretrievable damage.



Amery gloated over the fact that the Government of India had "disconnected Mr. Gandhi and his confederates cutting the fuse leading from arch saboteurs to all the inflammable and explosive material which they hoped to set alight all over India". He derived strength, he said, from the fact that eleven of the fifteen members of the Government of India who took the decision to arrest the Congress leaders were Indians. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1942, Vol. II, pp. 17-18]

Writing to the Viceroy Amery told him that the leaders should not be released while the war was on and that they should be kept "really isolated", not allowed to communicate with the outside world or receive any information of the happenings of the outside world. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. II, pp. 631-32]

The British Labour Party, as expected, lent its full support to the policy of repression adopted by the British Government in India. A statement issued by the Labour Party and the Trades Union Congress on 10 August said:

It [the Labour Party] ...regards with grave apprehension the possibility of a Civil Disobedience Movement in India and its effects on the efforts of the United Nations now engaged in a desperate struggle to preserve and extend world freedom. Such a movement, the very contemplation of which is proof of political irresponsibility, might imperil the fate of all freedom-loving people and thereby destroy all hopes of Indian freedom.... The Labour movement therefore considers that the action of the Government of India in detaining the leaders of the Congress was a timely and unavoidable precaution. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, [*The History of the Indian National Congress* Vol. II, p. 412]

The Communist Party of Britain, the friend, philosopher and guide of the Communist Party of India, was equally forthright in condemning the course adopted by the Indian National Congress. In a letter dated 24 August addressed to Churchill its Secretary Harry Pollitt deplored the threat of Civil Disobedience contained in the Congress resolution and expressed the belief that any such policy was bound to lead to division and internal struggle in the face of Fascist aggression and would be suicidal from the standpoint of Indian freedom. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1942, Vol. II, p. 23]



The British Press by and large, as Amery informed the Viceroy on the morrow of the arrests, was "excellent as a whole", with the exception of the *Herald*, *News Chronicle*, *Manchester Guardian* and, under its new editor, *The Observer*, which even carried a "fulsome article" on Gandhiji on 9 August. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. II, pp. 631-32]

Times indeed, in its issue of 8 August, described the call for withdrawal of British power from India as a "declaration of war against Britain", and gave its full approval to the action taken against the Congress. In its issue of 10 August it wrote:

Once the decision to act had been taken, the Government had no option but to act vigorously and effectively and this it had done.

The Conservative *Sunday Express* on 10 August declared that Britain could not "abandon the Indian Empire to the non-violent Hindus or savage Japan."

The *Daily Mail* warned on 10 August: "We are paying for our past weaknesses.... From now onward we should rule."

The Spectator of 14 August carried an article on India, saying:

No terms can be made with rebellion, there can be no negotiations with Mr. Gandhi and Mr. Nehru, nor, of course, ...can there be any question of a major constitutional change such as grant of immediate independence would involve, in the middle of the war. [Arun Chandra Bhuyan, *The Quit India Movement*, Manas Publications; New Delhi, 1975, pp. 212-14]

Even a radical thinker and champion of freedom and liberty like Bertrand Russell, though deploring the violence that ensued in the wake of the arrests, expressed views "critical of the Congress demand for immediate transfer of power. In a letter to the New York weekly *Times* he said:

I do not think it would be possible, as the Congress party demanded, to hand over the Government to a professedly representative collection of Indians hastily assembled in the middle of a war, and bitterly at odds among themselves on many important questions ...a British withdrawal now would leave India in chaos and anarchy, if not actually in civil war which would result in an easy conquest by Japan. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1942, Vol. II, p. 103]



But even among the British, even in India, there were voices of dissent. There were people who could not see the legitimacy of the hammer blows that the regime had thought fit to direct at the Congress, at a time when the need was for the mobilization of nationalist forces in the war against the Axis powers. For instance, the editor of *Calcutta Statesman*, Arthur Moore, in a leader on 10 August expressed the view that the arrest of the Congress leaders should be viewed in relation to whether it was dictated by military necessity. If it was the considered view of the "supreme military direction", wrote Moore, it would of course stand, and it would be good propaganda

to emphasize, elaborate and insist, in front of an enemy which has forced us to quit Malaya and Burma, that the Congress has asked us in the literal sense to quit India. On the other hand, if what must prove one of the most critical military decision of the Allies has been taken without reference to the War Council by the Home Department of the Government of India and the bureaucracy of the India Office ...they may be subject to revision in the light of the stern necessities of war. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. II, pp. 650-51]

That such an adverse comment should come from a British establishment newspaper was too much. The Viceroy told Amery that the matter had come up in his Council, which wanted action to be taken against Moore. Amery tackled Catto, a London businessman with interests in India, who controlled *Statesman*. Catto cabled to Moore that unless he "obeyed" he would have to leave the paper. He separately cabled to Richardson, Chairman of the newspaper, to ease out Moore if he did not fall in line. It was the duty of the paper, he said, to support the Government, whose authority had been challenged.

The Board of Directors of *Statesman* met the very day Moore had written the leader and asked Moore to proceed on leave preparatory to retirement – on full emoluments. The Viceroy expressed his gratitude to Catto and Amery for their help in the business. The more effectively to shut up the mouth of Moore he requested that *Time* might also be asked to cancel Moore's appointment as special correspondent. [*Ibid*, pp. 649-5, 670-71, 698]

The Most Reverend Foss Wescott, Bishop of Calcutta and Metropolitan of India, proved another thorn in the flesh of the Government of India. In a



statement on 3 August, nearly a week before the blow was struck at the Congress, he had appealed for arbitration by Britain's allies to resolve the situation. After the events of 9 August he pointed out how few people in Britain had noticed that the Government of India had acted "not in reply to an actual order of Civil Disobedience but at the very moment when Gandhi had declared his desire to postpone Civil Disobedience and discuss matters with the Viceroy with a view to the Congress taking a full share in the military defence of India". He added:

That force has been employed must not be allowed to rule conference out of court. Within the Congress there are strong elements on the side of active participation in the war effort and in complete alignment with the Allied nations. The creation of a Council chosen by the real leaders of the political parties of India with real executive power now would unite all in the common war effort... Negotiations may be wearisome and inconclusive but however difficult they are, they are better than civil war or the sulky mood of a repressed people. The Japanese will know as they approach the frontier, whether they prefer an India in which inconclusive negotiations proceed, to one in which the hope of reasonable settlement has been abandoned. [Pattabhi Sitaramayya, *The History of the Indian National Congress*, Vol. II, p. 411]

Amery was terribly angry. In a private communication to the Viceroy he asked: "Who on earth is the Bishop of Calcutta, and what makes him say the mischievous things he does say?" Referring to an earlier statement of the Metropolitan issued on 20 April, criticizing "the calm assumption of superiority inherent in the British race", resulting from "lack of knowledge and appreciation of the culture and civilization of the East", Amery said: "It was some months ago, I remember, that ...he made some very offensive insinuation against British behaviour in India generally."

Linlithgow answered that the Bishop was perhaps "an extremely well-meaning nuisance", that with the best of intentions but without any appreciation of the situation he had been asking him to see Gandhiji, etc. The Viceroy assured Amery that he did not pay any attention to the cleric's views. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. II, pp. 551, 816]



In the U.S.A., the dominant partner of Britain in the war, the official opinion was not supportive of British action. U.S. policy-makers and spokesmen realized that they had to proceed warily and not make their disapproval of British doings in India too open. For they feared to offend the susceptibilities of the British rulers, who had time and again made it known that India was their business and any kind of intervention from either the U.S.A. or China would be most unwelcome. Yet in private conversations they did let themselves go. Thus on 5 August Campbell, an official in the British Embassy in Washington, informed the Foreign Office in London that President Roosevelt had expressed to him the view that it had been wrong on the part of Britain to have offered, in the Cripps proposals, parts of India the right to secede. It "sounded terrible", the President had remarked. [*Ibid*, p. 576]

On 10 August, the United Automobile Workers of America, "an extremely important union", at its annual convention passed a resolution affirming that "claim of Indian people to their independence is a just and democratic one, fully in accordance with liberating and democratic aim of this war", and suggesting that it was the wisest course to come to a satisfactory agreement with the Congress. The resolution requested President Roosevelt to urge the British Government to take steps to avert civil strife in India. [*Ibid*, p. 657]

Amery expressed his resentment at the idea that British policy in India should be governed by "the ignorant views of the United Automobile Workers of America", but thought the National Council of Labour in London might pass a counter-resolution. [*Ibid*, p. 680]

On 9 August, just when Linlithgow's police was rounding up the leadership of the Congress all over the country, an American official, Lauchlin Currie, arrived in India on his way through from China. The Viceroy later complained to Amery that though Currie had met him he had refused to be drawn into conversation on Indian politics and yet on 11 August he had had a long and confidential talk with Shiva Rao, a journalist, and accepted from him "Draft Memoranda" for the President. Such incidents showed, the Viceroy wrote, that the Americans were not running straight. Any American that came to India tended to flirt with the Congress. [*Ibid*, pp. 681, 785-86, 933]



Towards the end of August London informed the Viceroy that Sherwood Eddy, a retired American Missionary who had spent long years in India, would like to pay a visit in the hope of giving some help by way of mediation.

The Viceroy again protested. In a cable to Churchill, marked 'immediate', he expressed suspicion of "peripatetic Americans", whose zeal in teaching the British their business was in inverse ratio to their understanding of even the most elementary problem with which they had to deal. His fear was that they might openly express a wish to see Congress leaders in detention. That sort of pressure was bound to be deeply damaging to the Government.

On 11 September Eddy wrote to Linlithgow, informing him of his intention to pay a visit to India. His only concern, he wrote, was to find some common ground for reconciliation. He enclosed a rough draft of a fourfold plan for India.

The plan proposed:

(1) Yield to the demand of the Congress for a Provisional Government, the personnel to be chosen from a panel of names submitted by the Congress, the League and the Indian States, the Congress and League to have equal number of seats. This provisional Government would cooperate in the armed defence of India, guarantee not to make a separate peace with the Axis powers. President Roosevelt and Marshal Chiang Kai-shek might be asked to see that equitable agreement was reached and promises of post-war settlement kept.

(2) Allow a genuine Indian Defence Minister in the Viceroy's Council with power to organize and arm the Indian people. Indian masses must be made to feel that they would resist to death, whether with Nehru's violence or Gandhi's non-violence, if Japan seriously threatened India. It must be remembered that the Congress only adopted Gandhi's non-violent resistance against Japan because Britain had refused to allow India to defend herself.

(3) Keep the premises of the Cripps proposals that the post-war constitution of India should be drawn up by Indians themselves, but remove "the gratuitous invitation to secession", which would result in a divided, torn and mangled India.



(4) Parties should be made to agree that India's future constitution would be federal with maximum possible autonomy and residuary powers vested in the Provinces. Muslims might be given weightage in Hindu majority areas.

The British Foreign Office shortly afterwards instructed Lord Halifax, British Ambassador in the U.S.A. to discourage the idea of Sherwood Eddy visiting India and to tell him that he would not be welcome in India, especially in his capacity as a mediator. Halifax reported that he had seen Secretary of State Cordell Hull, that the Secretary had emphasized the extreme importance from the point of view of American public opinion of making it abundantly plain that the British Government had not abandoned constructive efforts to find a solution, and had stressed the great importance of combining some note of sympathy and hope with the obligations of preserving law and order. [Ibid, pp. 849, 854, 947-51, 968, 988-89]

The U.S. Government continued to use its own eyes and ears to arrive at its own assessment of the Indian problem and did not allow itself to be overwhelmed by the spate of the propaganda material unleashed by the British against the Congress. In the last week of August Merrell, U.S. Consul-General in New Delhi, sent a report to the State Department alleging that the Muslim League was being financed by the Indian Princes, big Muslim landlords and the British business community. They did it for the same reasons that the British Government encouraged the League, namely, to prevent the "representatives of India" from obtaining power. They wanted to play the Muslim League against the Congress to prevent a settlement and prolong the deadlock.

The perception widely shared in the U.S. Administration from the President downwards that British actions in India were not of a kind that the U.S.A. could approve, did not of course percolate to the level where it could affect policy. The public opinion in America, acutely conscious of the common Anglo-Saxon heritage of the two countries and largely influenced by the Press, a large part of which was swayed by the one-sided propaganda blitz of the British, would not permit a rift between America and Britain on a question that did not directly affect the Americans. An authoritative Administration spokesman was reported to have told a supporter of Indian freedom: "We will even suppose all you say is



true. Do you expect us to go to war with our Ally, Britain, at this moment to achieve independence for India?" [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1942, Vol. II, pp. 100-101]

7

Chiang Kai-shek reacted differently.

A full two days after the arrest of Gandhiji and the Congress leaders, British Ambassador in Chungking, Horace Seymour, called on Chiang Kai-shek to inform him of the action taken by the British in India.

Chiang Kai-shek expressed regret that the action had been taken so precipitately. At least a week or ten days time might have been allowed. He was a friend of Britain, Chiang told the Ambassador, but he was in sympathy with India's aspiration for freedom.

The Ambassador said there was a feeling that Chiang thought too much of the Congress and did not consider other aspects of the problem.

Chiang answered that in his view the pivot of the Indian problem was the Congress. If the problem of the Congress was solved, other aspects of the Indian problem could be settled without much difficulty.

The Ambassador offered the British line that Congress leaders were playing in the hands of Japan.

Chiang said he did not believe it. Was it suggested that Nehru, for instance, could be influenced by Japan?

In the interest of the Allied war effort, the Generalissimo said, the Indian problem must be solved. The United Nations should ask America to come out and serve as the mediator, though he doubted if the Congress, after what had happened, would be willing to accept America as mediator. Nevertheless efforts in that direction should be made.

Chiang informed Seymour that he had addressed telegrams to Gandhiji, Nehru and Azad, expressing his concern at their arrest. Madame Chiang, too, had written to Mrs. Naidu and Mrs. Pandit. Chiang requested the Ambassador to inform the Viceroy and seek from him permission for the Chinese Resident



Commissioner to deliver the telegrams to the detained leaders in person. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. II, pp. 675-79]

On 12 August Chiang sent a message to Roosevelt, expressing his sorrow at the arrest of the Congress leaders, including Gandhiji and Nehru, and expressing the fear that if the situation was not mended, the avowed object of the Allies in waging the war would not be taken seriously by the world. He appealed to the President, invoking the Atlantic Charter, to take measures to solve the pressing problem facing India. [Ibid, p. 672]

Chiang Kai-shek's reference to the Atlantic Charter, though he was not aware of it, was somewhat misplaced. For the Charter was not intended, in the British Government's view, to apply to the countries of Asia and Africa. Chiang might have been a wiser man had he known about a recent exchange of messages on the subject between Britain and the U.S.A.

Churchill was told of a communication from the United States Office of War Information proposing an exchange of telegrams between the President and the Prime Minister on 14 August to mark the anniversary of the Atlantic Charter. The Americans proposed that the telegram of the President would state that the Charter applied to Asia and Africa as well as Europe.

Churchill was aghast. In a message on 9 August, marked most secret, he told the President:

We considered the wording of that famous document line by line together and I should not be able, without mature consideration, to give it a wider interpretation than was agreed between us at the time. Its proposed application to Asia and Africa requires much thought. Grave embarrassment would be caused to the defence of India by such a statement.... Here in the Middle East the Arabs might claim by majority that they could expel Jews from Palestine.... I am strongly wedded to the Zionist policy, of which I was one of the authors.

He asked for the draft of the proposed Presidential telegram to be revised accordingly. [Ibid, p. 634]



Chiang's message of 12 August was dutifully transmitted by Roosevelt to Churchill. In his reply Churchill took exception to Chiang seeking to make difficulties "between us". He said:

It occurred to me you could remind Chiang that Gandhi was prepared to negotiate with Japan on the basis of a free passage for Japanese troops through India.... Personally I have no doubt that in addition there would have been an understanding that the Congress would have the use of sufficient Japanese troops to keep down the composite majority of 90 million Muslims, 40 million Untouchables and 90 million in the Princes' states. [Ibid, pp. 687-88]

In India the Viceroy received Seymour's report of the meeting with Chiang conveying Chiang's message to Gandhiji and Nehru and the request that the Chinese Commissioner might be permitted to meet Nehru. Linlithgow in a message to the Ambassador on 14 August told him that no messages of the kind could be delivered to any of the addressees and that any evidence of interference by China in the internal affairs of India would give rise to an intolerable situation which would be deeply resented. There was already soreness in non-Congress circles over the Chinese attitude. The Viceroy told the Ambassador to inform Chiang in suitable terms.

Amery telegraphed to the Viceroy on 16 August: "Whole-heartedly approve your firm handling of Chiang Kai-shek's impertinent interference." [Ibid, pp. 695, 732 and ff]

On 23 August the British Foreign Office sent a formal reply to Chiang's suggestion for mediation to solve the Indian problem. The reply said that rapid action by the Government of India had been necessitated by reports of elaborate plans being made by the Congress to sabotage the war effort. Arrest of leaders had disorganized the Congress plans. The Congress was not representative of India. The soldiers regarded the Congress as "contemptible politicians". Any parleying with the Congress would be interpreted as surrender by Government to Congress Hindus, which might lead to civil war between Hindus and Muslims in Bengal and elsewhere. Chiang Kai-shek wished to show sympathy with the United Nations and India. What he wanted to show was sympathy for the Congress. Similarly it was between the Congress and the Government that he



wanted the President to arbitrate. The Congress was in the hands of Gandhi's clique who professed that they would rather have chaos than British or Americans. There was not the slightest prospect that those men would cooperate actively in the defence of India even if their demands were set. They were only concerned to establish their political supremacy in India. Admitting any kind of intervention by a foreign country in the affairs of India would mean a loss of face for the Government. While His Majesty's Government deeply appreciated Chiang Kai-shek's friendly motives, they must decline to avail themselves of his suggestion. [Ibid, pp. 797-98]

Lin Yutang, the well-known Chinese author writing in English, nailed the British lie on the head. In a message to *Free World*, a monthly magazine, he said:

Momentous events are happening in Asia affecting not only the 390 million people of India, but also the future progress and essential character of the war the United Nations are fighting.... I therefore plead for a stern sense of realities of the Indian situation....

We have been feeding ourselves on anti-Hindu propaganda. We might accept, for our own peace of mind, the fiction that Congress is not representative of India, the lie that it does not include Muslims, that Mr. Jinnah is very important, that the British are loved in India and everything is very pretty.... By the acceptance of that fiction ...we have ourselves precipitated this inevitable conflict.

The time for delusions is past and we must not pay for it.... Intelligent citizens know that India's case has never been represented to Americans except through the eyes of British censors at Calcutta and New Delhi.... It is the law of human nature that we must abuse those whom we injure, to prove that we are injuring them for their own good.... Gandhi is an appeaser, Gandhi is a wily and crooked politician. Gandhi has no sense of reality.

India wants her freedom. Cripps denied it. They want to fight as a free nation alongside the United Nations. The Congress resolution clearly showed that they wanted Allied soldiers to remain in India and help defend their country if they were given the status of a free and equal nation. India



is united in demanding freedom immediately.... I warn that India will not give up the fight for liberty until she gets it. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1942, Vol. II, pp. 381-82]

8

In India the reactions evoked by the events of 8 and 9 August were on predictable lines.

Jinnah, in a statement issued in Bombay immediately after the Congress resolution was passed, commented:

I deeply regret that the Congress has finally declared war and has launched a most dangerous mass movement in spite of numerous warnings and advices from various individuals, parties and organizations in this country. It is impossible to believe that the Congress leaders were not fully alive to the fact that such a movement will result not only in violence but bloodshed and destruction of innocent people. It is to be deplored all the more that this movement is launched at this critical juncture and with the object of forcing their demands at the point of bayonet, which, if conceded, with a view to pacifying the Congress's arrogant attitude and averting the challenge thrown so wantonly by them, will mean complete surrender and sacrifice of all other interests. [Pattabhi Sitaramayya, *The History of the Indian National Congress*, Vol. II, p. 462]

The Muslim League Working Committee, which sat in Bombay from 16 to 20 August, in a resolution further elaborated the line laid down by Jinnah. The resolution deplored the decision of the Congress to launch an "open rebellion" by resorting to mass civil disobedience in pursuance of its objective "of establishing Congress Hindu domination in India". The movement, the resolution said, was not only intended to coerce the British Government to hand over power to a "Hindu oligarchy" but also to force the Musalmans to submit and surrender to the Congress terms and dictation. Dilating on the theme the resolution proceeded:

Ever since the beginning of the war and even prior to that the sole objective of the Congress policy has been either to cajole or coerce the



British Government into surrendering power to the Congress.... While claiming the right of self-determination for "India", which is a mere Congress euphemism for a Hindu majority, it has persistently opposed the right of self-determination for the Muslim nation to decide and determine their own destiny.

The resolution asserted that the negotiations with Cripps had broken down not on the issue of independence but because of the refusal of the British Government "to hand over the Muslims and the minorities to the tender mercies of the Congress", a course which would have been strenuously resisted by the Muslim League!

The resolution reiterated the offer of the Muslim League, "either singly or in cooperation with other parties, to shoulder the responsibility for running the administration ...if a real share in the power and authority of the Government at the Centre and in the Provinces was conceded within the framework of the present constitution". The Muslim masses, the resolution declared, could be roused to intensify the war effort if they were assured that it would lead to the realization of the goal of Pakistan.

Calling upon the Musalmans to abstain from any participation in the movement initiated by the Congress, the resolution concluded:

The Working Committee hope that no attempt shall be made from any quarter to intimidate, coerce, molest or interfere in any manner with the normal life of the Musalmans; otherwise the Muslims will be compelled to offer resistance and adopt all such measures as may be necessary for the protection of their life, honour and property.

The last bit clearly was intended as a veiled threat that if occasion should arise the Muslim League might instigate communal riots.

Answering a question Jinnah said the first condition of the Muslim League for cooperation in the war effort was a declaration on the part of the British Government conceding the demand for Pakistan, whether anybody wanted it or not. Upon such a declaration having been made, the Muslim League would be prepared to consider any proposal for the formation of a Provisional Government for mobilizing the country for the war effort. There would be no limit to the power



to be transferred to such a Government. But it would be a matter of negotiation. The League would not walk into the parlour of a Provisional Government where it neither had an equal footing, nor was there any settlement of its demand for Pakistan. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1942, Vol. II, pp. 283-85]

The resolution presented the Muslim League in so negative a light and so driven by malice and hatred against the Congress, that even some of its most ardent supporters were disappointed.

Dr. Syed Latif of Hyderabad, author of one of the many schemes of partition presented to the Muslim League in 1939, commented:

Every sincere well-wisher of the Muslim League will deeply regret the decision adopted by its Working Committee in Bombay. With the Congress off the scene, the responsibility for leading the country had devolved on the League, the next largest party in the land. The task before that body was to generate an atmosphere conducive to an honourable compromise between the Congress and the League on the one hand and between these two and the British Government on the other.

Syed Mohammed Hussain, Secretary of the Muslim League party in the Council of State and a member of the Council of All-India Muslim League, in a statement issued on 29 August said:

The decision reached by the Working Committee of the All India Muslim League after four days deliberations at Bombay has failed to give any lead to the Muslims at a juncture when it was so urgently needed.

Another Muslim leader, Nawabzada Murtuza Ali Khan, in a statement in Bombay on 25 August, said that Jinnah was ignoring his own country and looking to Britain for the consummation of Pakistan. If there was no response from Britain, he asked, what did the Muslim League and its President propose to do? [*Ibid*, pp. 22-25]

The Working Committee of the Hindu Mahasabha, which met in Delhi from 29 to 31 August, took a positive line. In a resolution it condemned the high-handed action of the Government and demanded immediate establishment of a National Government consisting of representatives of principal political parties of



the country, which would, during the war, mobilize public opinion and the resources of the country for the war effort, and after the war set up a Constituent Assembly to frame a constitution for a free India on democratic principles. The resolution condemned the anti-national attitude of the Muslim League, which, it said, could not but intensify strife and bitterness between the communities and help in the continuance of foreign domination in India.

By another resolution the Mahasabha Working Committee condemned the policy of repression launched by the Government of India and deplored the complete lack of statesmanship exhibited by the Government, particularly in view of the fact that Gandhiji had been anxious to approach the Viceroy, the British Premier and the heads of the principal Allied nations for the purpose of securing an honourable settlement. The resolution demanded immediate release of all national leaders detained. [Ibid, pp. 255-57]

10

Since well before the meeting of the A.I.C.C. in Bombay, Gandhiji had been turning over in his mind the appropriateness of undertaking a fast in his "tussle with the authority". He discussed the issue in an article for *Harijan* that he wrote on 20 July.

Fasting, Gandhiji wrote, was recognized as a religious practice. It had also been used as a part of political struggle, though in a haphazard way. However there was a natural prejudice against fasting for political purpose.

His own fasts, viz., the one of 21 days for Hindu-Muslim unity in 1924, the indeterminate fast against the Communal Award in 1932, the one for 21 days undertaken for self-purification in May 1933, another undertaken in August 1933 for right to do Harijan work in jail, which had resulted in his release after eight days when the authorities realized that the continuation of the fast might result in his death, and the last. "the ill-fated Rajkot fast" undertaken in March 1939, — had all been undertaken strictly according to the law of satyagraha. "I have been driven to the conclusion," Gandhiji wrote, "that fasting unto death is an integral part of satyagraha programme, and it is the greatest and most effective weapon in its armoury under given circumstances." Fasting was the extreme manifestation of non-violence. [C.W.M.G., LXXVI, pp. 317-19]



A week later, on 26 July, Gandhiji spoke to Vinoba Bhave and Kishorelal Mashruwala about the idea of fasting which had occupied his mind for some time, and had lately taken a firm hold of it.

In the situation that faced the country, Gandhiji said, he was not asking the people to be non-violent in thought, word and deed. It would not be right to expect 400 million people to follow such a rule. But he would insist on ahimsa in action. When a satyagrahi went to break the law he must leave his lathi behind. Nevertheless outbreak of violence could not be ruled out.

Satyagrahis had not so far shown any courage, said Gandhiji. After going to jail they had fought for small things. Some had studied. This time they could not afford to do that. The entire work had to be finished quickly. All laws would have to be broken and that would involve fasting too. If jailed, satyagrahis must be prepared to give up food and drink and immolate themselves.

With whom should the beginning be made? — asked Gandhiji, and answered that he had selected himself for the role. There was no need for anyone to feel alarmed or unhappy. It was only a question of doing one's duty.

Kishorelal objected that the general of an army should not be the first to die in the battle. Otherwise what would happen to the army?

Selecting anyone else first would not have the same effect, Gandhiji said. It would have to be he himself. To check the violence that was raging there was no other way. Fasting on his part therefore had become necessary. [Ibid, pp. 333-35]

The British viewed the possibility of Gandhiji undertaking a fast for an indefinite period with considerable alarm. The alarm was occasioned not by the prospect of Gandhiji not surviving a fast, but by the thought of repercussions that Gandhiji's death while in prison might have for the British rule. The bureaucracy, therefore, both in the India Office and the Home Department in New Delhi remained seized of the problem throughout the period.

The Home Department's note of 3 August which laid down the plan of attack against the Congress also dwelt on the problem of a possible fast by Gandhiji.



The note laid down that if "unfortunately" Gandhiji should fast, "cat and mouse" procedure, as on previous occasions, would be employed, that is to say, Gandhiji would be given every facility to take food and receive medical attention but would be released as soon as it appeared that his life was in danger. This would avoid the possibility of his dying in prison.

The War Cabinet in London opposed the proposal. At its meeting on 6 August the view was expressed that even in the event of Gandhiji undertaking a fast while under detention, he should not be released, but to save itself from the difficulties that this would create, Gandhiji should be removed by sea to some place outside India.

At a subsequent meeting the War Cabinet reiterated the view that even if Gandhiji should not be removed outside India, he must continue to be kept in detention and not released because of the fast.

On 8 August the Viceroy made a reference to the Provincial Governors inviting their views on whether Gandhiji should be released in the event of his undertaking a fast. He might of course continue the fast even after release.

Most Governors expressed the view that public opinion in India would be greatly embittered against Britain if Gandhiji died while fasting in prison. The Bombay Governor wrote:

It is quite possible that he will insist on fasting to death even if we release him ...the hysteria which would then arise would be quite formidable, but I have little doubt that it would be insignificant compared to explosion of hatred which will get right down to villages, which would follow if he died in detention.

In this Province I would expect that we would have few friends left in any community ...consequences of his death in our hands are not calculable by ordinary standards.

As Governor on the spot, Lumley requested the Viceroy, his views should be placed before his Majesty's Government.

The Governor of C.P. expressed similar views. He feared that if Gandhiji should die in prison, the British would be left with no friends in India and even some of the Indian members of superior as well as inferior services would turn



against the rulers. He suggested that as soon as Gandhiji started a fast he might be released and restricted to Sevagram.

The Governor of Sind was the only one who expressed the view that Gandhiji's death from fasting after being released might give rise to greater odium being attached to the Government than if he should die in prison, where it would be presumed he would be attended by his staff of medical advisers.

When on 10 August Amery placed the views of the Governors before the War Cabinet, the Ministers were not impressed. They argued that Gandhiji had been placed under detention to prevent him from carrying on the campaign of civil disobedience and was not subjected "to any greater degree of detention than was necessary for the purpose of securing that object". The Government of India were therefore not responsible for his life and health.

In the Executive Council of the Viceroy, all the Indian members with the exception of C.P. Ramaswami Aiyer expressed themselves in favour of releasing Gandhiji at a point at which his fast became dangerous to life.

Amery told the Viceroy that the important thing was that he should not let Gandhiji defeat him. If he was proposing to shift Gandhiji to Sevagram as soon as he went on a fast, could he be isolated effectively from the outside world? [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. II, pp. 536, 588, 606, 636-38, 644-46, 653]

For many weeks after Gandhiji's arrest on 9 August, leaders of public opinion in India devoted to the national cause but not associated with the Congress officially, remained under apprehension that Gandhiji might start a fast unto death right away, and wanted to avert it if they could. On 9 August itself Rajagopalachari wrote to the Bombay Governor requesting him to forward the copy of a telegram he had despatched to Gandhiji, wherever Gandhiji might be detained. The telegram read:

Gandhiji, c/o. Superintendent, Yeravda Prison, Poona. Love.
Earnestly plead no fast when your move is interpreted on background of war situation.

The Governor sought the Viceroy's permission for the telegram being delivered, expressing the view that it could do no harm.



The Viceroy turned down the suggestion of the Governor. The telegram might start a chain. Gandhiji would want to send a reply. Next Rajagopalachari *must* see Gandhiji personally to make the appeal effective, and so on. [Ibid, pp. 683, 696]

Madan Mohan Malaviya, too, expressed his concern at the possibility of Gandhiji fasting unto death. On 23 August when violence raged in Eastern U.P., he appealed to the people not to put non-violence to shame. He added: "Some of us are trying our best to persuade Mahatma Gandhi not to undertake a fast unto death. By avoiding any discouraging acts of violence, you will be helping to save the life of Mahatma Gandhi."

The fast did not come – at least not just then – to the great relief not only of the rulers but of the people.



CHAPTER XIV: THE QUIT INDIA MOVEMENT: REPRESSION AND RESISTANCE- I

1

The Quit India Movement has been variously described as spontaneous revolution — an explosion of popular fury against the country's colonial masters for which the latter had themselves lighted the fuse — and as India's second war of independence (the first having been the rebellion of 1857), a centrally organized and directed campaign to end British rule.

The spontaneous genesis of the Quit India Movement is beyond doubt. Though the forces involved in the movement were nationalist forces, and though it was carried on in the name of the Congress, above all of Gandhiji, under the Congress flag and in pursuance of the call contained in the A.I.C.C. resolution, neither Gandhiji nor the all-India leadership of the Congress had had anything to do with its organization and direction. It is conceivable that had Gandhiji and the Congress leadership not been taken away from the scene by the rulers, much of the violence and bloodshed that convulsed India in the weeks and months following the events of 9 August 1942 might not have taken place. Repression would have been met by non-violent resistance under Gandhiji's leadership. As Gandhiji was to state later in answer to the Government's charge that he had instigated the violence, he had not initiated the movement; he had "contemplated negotiations with the Government" for which he had not been allowed any opportunity, also that any movement he would have launched would have been necessarily non-violent, for he had told Congressmen that if they indulged in any orgy of violence they would not find him alive in their midst. The Congress leaders, too, had been anxious that the movement should remain non-violent, if only because "no violent movement in the existing circumstances could possibly succeed when matched against a most powerfully equipped Government". [C.W.M.G., LXXVII, pp. 155-56]

The city of Bombay, which witnessed the police operation against the leaders on the morning of 9 August was the first to react, and it reacted with considerable emotion. On that day a peaceful meeting at Gowalia Tank Maidan



which was to be addressed by Gandhiji and after his arrest by Kasturba, was brutally dispersed by the police with tear gas and lathis. Agitated crowds began pelting buses and trains with stones and soda water bottles. At places buses were burnt. Post offices were plundered. The police resorted to firing repeatedly, killing eight persons and injuring forty-four. There were similar scenes in Poona, in the suburban areas of Bombay and in Ahmedabad.

In Ahmedabad, when the news of the arrests of leaders broke, the mill-hands immediately struck work, students left their schools and colleges and shops were closed. Agitated crowds spilled into the streets. As news of police violence in Bombay reached Ahmedabad, policemen were attacked. A police station was set on fire. The police fired on the mob, killing one person. [Arun Chandra Bhuyan, *The Quit India Movement*, p. 67; Gyanendra Pandey, ed., *The Indian Nation in 1942*, Calcutta 1988, p. 84]

On 10 August, the crowds in Bombay were angrier and more violent. There were determined attempts to interfere with the running of buses, trams and trains. The police opened fire at the crowds no less than twenty-six times, killing sixteen and injuring fifty-seven persons. Thus in Bombay city alone in just two days there were 24 killed and more than a hundred injured.

Disturbances soon spread to other places in the Presidency, such as Kheda, Thane, Broach, Panch Mahals, Godhra, Surat, Ahmadnagar, East Khandesh, Nasik, Satara, Belgaum, Dharwar, Ratnagiri, West Khandesh, Sholapur, Bijapur, Kanara and Kolaba. At Broach the spinners in the local textile mill stopped work, so that the mill had to be closed down. There were processions and demonstrations and in Sarbhan in Amod taluka on 13 August a police party was beaten up by a crowd of demonstrators.

In Kheda, which had figured in a civil disobedience movement earlier, there were pitched battles between the roused demonstrators and the police. On 13 August at Dakor a crowd of 2,000 attacked the police, killing two policemen and injuring another two. In the police firing that followed two demonstrators lost their lives, one of them the secretary of the taluka Congress Committee. In the following few days two more agitators were killed in police firing. On 18 August the police opened fire on a group of students who had come from Baroda to distribute leaflets issued in the name of the Congress. Four lay dead and five were



seriously injured. Thus between 11 August and 18 August a total of 10 persons were killed in police firing in Kheda district. There was also widespread sabotage activity, such as cutting of telephone and telegraph wires. Two companies of British troops had to be rushed to the area to control the situation. [Gyanendra Pandey, ed., *The Indian Nation in 1942*, pp. 84-85]

In Baroda the storm centres were Baroda city, Mehsana and Navsari where there were huge demonstrations and protest meetings, not prohibited by the State authorities. On 17 August the Praja Mandal openly declared its support for the Quit India slogan and on 18 August the organization was declared unlawful and its leaders arrested. In the demonstrations and consequent firing that followed two persons were killed. The army and the police were pressed into service effectively and the upsurge was for the moment suppressed. However the strikes in the mills and educational institutions continued. [Ibid, pp. 85-86]

All over Gujarat workers employed in the textile mills — Gujarat's chief industry — were in the forefront of the movement. In Ahmedabad alone there were 75 textile mills employing 116,000 workers. Immediately following the arrest of the leaders on 9 August they struck work. The mills in Baroda, Nadiad, Petlad, Viramgam, Kalol, Kadi and Broach were also affected. The mill-owners, for their own reasons, supported the strikes. Though in the short run they stood to lose war time profits, which were huge, they perhaps calculated that in the event of a Japanese victory in the war they would be on a sounder footing for having taken a stand against the British. Even otherwise they could gamble on the Congress coming to power after the war, when they could seek their reward. Of course some of the mill-owners were also moved by sincere patriotic feelings. The strikes continued till almost the end of the year. [Ibid, pp. 92-95]

In the north, in Delhi, where there had been prior information of the Government's intended action against the leaders, there was a complete hartal on 9 August, with a procession joined by workers, students and others, including Communists, the followers of M. N. Roy being the only section to keep away. The hartal, processions and meetings continued on the 10th. On 11 August a crowd of demonstrators set fire to the Town Hall, Railway Clearing Accounts Office and a truck carrying petrol. The Income Tax Office too was burnt down. Officials received cuts from broken bottles. Troops were called out, there was repeated



firing resulting in the death of 12 persons including a boy of 8 and curfew was imposed on the city. On the following day there were more firings and more deaths. In the four days since the beginning of the agitation the number of dead had reached 22. By the following day the number, according to a *Statesman* report, had gone up to 45 dead. But the defiance of British rule remained stiff. The British were intensely hated and the feeling was universal that they deserved no quarter.

In the forefront of the agitation at this early stage were, according to C.I.D. reports, Radha Raman, Phool Chand Jain, Satyavati, Onkar Nath, Raghunandan Saran, Indra Dev of the Forward Bloc and some students. [P. N. Chopra, ed., *Quit India Movement: British Secret Documents*, pp. 12-18]

The rulers were not impressed by these preliminary outbursts of mass fury here and there and were confident that they could be controlled.

Reporting to the Secretary of State on 12 August, the Viceroy expressed his satisfaction that "we are doing very well". He said:

There is a good deal of quite subordinate damage to property, rioting, occasional molestation, etc. But that has got to be seen in its true perspective. The only area in which there has been any trouble that matters is Bombay Presidency, and even there what has taken place in Ahmedabad, Poona and Bombay city bears no relation at all to the seriousness in casualties and damage of bad communal rioting. In Delhi there has been a good deal of trouble. Casualties may be heavy and some damage has been done to property. Here again I attach no importance to it.

Amery, too, was relieved. Had action not been taken in time, he said, the situation might have been far worse. It was, however, too early to say anything. The real organized civil disobedience movement might yet get to work in a few weeks. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. II, pp. 669, 692]

The smugness of Linlithgow was premature. Even as he was drafting his telegram to Amery, serious trouble was developing in the east in Bihar. The Viceroy telegraphed to Amery on 15 August:



Serious reports have come in of major interference with railway lines around Patna.... It is clear from them that organized attempt is being made on a large scale to take up railway lines on both sides of Patna and to arrange a really major interruption of communications. [Ibid, p. 707]

This was an understatement. For from 11 August onward Bihar was in a state of near insurrection.

On 11 August in Patna, enraged by reports of firings in various places in the Bombay Presidency, a crowd of about 10,000 staged a march towards the Secretariat. The police fired upon the demonstrators, killing seven. The people retaliated by observing a complete hartal on 12 August. Even the rickshaws and *ekkas* (horse carriages) did not ply. In the afternoon a huge procession was taken out, ending in a meeting, at which the crowd decided to express its hatred of British rule through action. Telephone and telegraph wires all over the city were destroyed. A lorry carrying prisoners was stopped and all prisoners released. The city was completely in the hands of the crowds, effectively cut off from the rest of the country. On the following day British troops arrived and set about to undo the damage.

The rebellion spread to other areas in Bihar. At Sahasram in Shahabad district on 12 August students raided the Civil Court. When a rumour spread that a nationalist crowd had captured a train at Arrach and was proceeding south-west destroying and looting stations on the way, excitement rose. On 13 August a student mob raided the railway station, burnt papers and cut telegraph wires. A small contingent of troops, which was sent to control the situation, resorted to firing, which had no effect. The British authority in the town had collapsed. The situation was saved by the arrival of a company of Maratha infantry. [Gyanendra Pandey, ed., *The Indian Nation in 1942*, pp. 139-43]

On the same day, 13 August, an R.A.F. plane crashed near Fatwa in Monghyr district. Two Canadian members of the crew, who survived the crash, were pulled out of a train by a rampaging crowd and beaten to death. Later a military and police party visited the place, arrested 13 persons for the murder and imposed a collective fine of Rs. two lakhs.



In the following days the situation became worse. In the interior crowds armed with lathis, spears, swords and daggers were constantly on the move, looting, burning and blowing up bridges. A C.I.D. report said that during a march from Dumraon to Buxar a military force, meeting with much opposition, had to fire several times, killing 17 persons. Sitamarhi sub-division, the report said, was in a particularly disturbed state. After a Sub-Divisional Officer, three constables and a chaprasi were done to death by a crowd, officers from all the 11 outlying thanas were concentrated at Sitamarhi. On the 15th the gates of Hajipur sub-jail were broken down by a crowd. A large number of Congressmen imprisoned there escaped. In Saran in Marhowrah on 23 August two British officers and four men were ambushed and killed after they had shot down 40 persons by firing on a crowd.

After 13 August the situation in Bhagalpur too worsened rapidly following an attempted bid on the part of a crowd to reoccupy the District Congress Committee Office. The Nath Nagar Silk Institute was looted, and when the police tried to prevent a meeting at Lajpat Park, the police force was overwhelmed by the crowd. Firing had to be resorted to three times on crowds looting goods sheds and wagons at the railway station. At Sabour the Government Farm and the Agricultural Institute were looted.

In Supal and Madhepura sub-divisions, too, law and order had completely broken down.

In the Santhal Parganas Santhals and Paharias burnt down the Mahagama police station and post office. At Jaidh the police station was burnt.

In Hazaribagh the Koderama railway station was set on fire on 15 August. On the 16th the crowds attacked the railway station and post office at Tilaiya.

In Palamau there were several derailments and attempts at blowing up bridges.

At Jamshedpur the workers of the Tata Iron & Steel Co. went on a strike on 20 August, in which foremen and the senior staff also joined. By the following morning production had totally ceased. The sweepers also went on strike. A rumour went round that the workers of the B.N. Railway would go on strike from



the 24th and this resulted in a large-scale exodus from the town. It was widely believed that the Director and the Management of the Company had encouraged the workers to go on strike. [P. N. Chopra, ed., *Quit India Movement: British Secret Documents*, pp. 102-6]

Bihar continued for a long time to cause the white Sahebs in Delhi sleepless nights. The disturbances were widespread and prolonged. There was no question of any peaceful meetings and demonstrations. People took up whatever arms they could lay hands on and attacked means of communications, post offices, railway stations, police stations and assaulted officials. Spears and swords were manufactured in villages from fish-plates taken from railway lines. Tribals took up their bows and arrows and joined in the disturbances. Hundreds of policemen deserted.

Anti-social elements took full advantage of the situation. Dacoities increased sharply. In August there were 163 dacoities in the Province as against an average of 46 for the month during the preceding three years. For September the number was 265 as against the average of 41.2 for the month during the preceding three years. [Francis G. Hutchins, *Spontaneous Revolution*, pp. 277-78]

The police force had become entirely demoralized. On 3 September at Jamshedpur the town police went on strike. On 4 September the prisoners in Bhagalpur Jail murdered the D.S.P., the carding master and a warder. In the retaliatory action by the police 28 prisoners were killed and another 87 wounded.

In Darbhanga district all the *thanas* except five were attacked and looted by the crowds. For a long time Patna, Arrah, Darbhanga and Bhagalpur totally remained out of Government control. [Arun Chandra Bhuyan, *The Quit India Movement*, p. 70]

Machine-gunning from the air of saboteurs engaged in removing fish-plates from railway tracks was authorized by the Viceroy on 15 August and was widely resorted to. In answer to a question, Sir Alan Hartley, Deputy Commander-in-Chief, informed the Central Legislative Assembly on 25 September that crowds had been machine-gunned from the air in five different places in Bihar, Bengal and Orissa and that once railway gang coolies had been hit by mistake. [Pattabhi Sitaramayya, *The History of the Indian National Congress*, Vol. II, p. 876]



In his situation reports from the middle of August onward the Viceroy kept informing London almost every day that the situation in Bihar was causing him the greatest worry. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. II, pp. 731, 746, 754, 763, 782, 791, 825, 829, 842]

On 31 August Linlithgow telegraphed to Churchill:

I am engaged here in meeting 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. Mob violence remains rampant over large tracts of the countryside and I am by no means confident that we may not see in September a formidable attempt to renew this widespread sabotage of our war effort. [Ibid, pp. 853-54]

3

The situation in the U.P. was no better. On 9 August, as word spread that the leaders had been arrested, there were hartals, processions and meetings in all the major towns. From 10 August onward students began to attack Government buildings and railway stations. The students of the Benares Hindu University closed the gates of the campus and declared the University a free area. They moved into the town in processions and planted Congress flags atop various Government buildings. For almost ten days the students controlled the area till, on 19 August, British and Australian troops occupied the University. [Francis G. Hutchins, *Spontaneous Revolution*, p. 292]

In Etawah, Agra, Moradabad, Hapur, Lucknow, Meerut, Jaunpur, Mirzapur and Nainital, students went on a spree of cutting telephone and telegraph wires and attacking Government buildings. On 12 August at Allahabad, students, with women students in the lead, attacked the civil court. Firing was resorted to, but the students just lay down on the lawn and refused to budge. In the afternoon a large crowd attacked the police station.

On 14 August the students of Gurukul Kangri in Hardwar, joined by the *mela* pilgrims, almost took over the town for a short period. They looted money from a post office, burnt the railway station and attacked police *thanas*. On 15 August, at Azamgarh, crowds armed with spears and lathis and assisted by elephants surrounded a police party from three sides and engaged it in a pitched



battle which lasted for two hours. In Merrut, too, police parties were attacked and two tehsil offices were burnt down.

Ballia was completely in the hands of the crowds for about eight days from 15 August onward. On 14 August morning a train which had been hijacked by the students of the Allahabad University, flying the Congress flag and crammed with students from Benares and Allahabad, arrived at the Bilthara Road station in Ballia. The students addressed the crowds assembled there and called upon them to paralyse the Government by burning down railway stations, police stations and post offices. '*Station phoonk do; Thane jala do*', they shouted. The Bilthara Road station was burnt down. A little while later an army supply train carrying sugar was attacked and the cargo looted. The loot continued throughout the day, villagers carrying away the sugar in bullock-carts.

On 18 August at Bansdih, in Ballia district, a crowd of between 15 and 20 thousand attacked and looted the police station, the policemen having surrendered. Then the crowd proceeded to loot the tehsil office. Tehsil staff were "dismissed" and a local Congress leader was proclaimed the 'Swaraj Tehsildar'. All records were destroyed and a sum of Rs. 15,000 looted. At the police station the *Thanedar* not only surrendered, but donned a Gandhi cap and himself planted the Congress flag on the building. Later he joined the procession. The tehsil office, too, had been looted with the acquiescence, if not connivance, of the tehsildar. In the villages, it was clear, the British authority, both moral and administrative, had collapsed.

On 18 August it was announced that the people would proceed to Ballia town to seek the release of the leaders. Most of them had been in jail since before 9 August. The District Magistrate was scared. He initiated talks with the D.C.C. President Chittoo Pande, who was in prison, and offering to release him, sought his help in combating the "un-Gandhian" movement. Pande asked for the release of all political prisoners. But things had slipped out of the hands of the District Magistrate. On 19 August huge crowds assembled outside the jail demanding the release of the prisoners. Being unable to offer resistance, the District Magistrate ordered the release. At the same time he ordered currency notes to the value of Rs. 4,40,000 in the district treasury to be burnt.



In the evening a meeting was held in the Town Hall to celebrate the victory of the people. Chittoo Pande was proclaimed 'Swaraj Ziladhis' of Ballia at the meeting. Some other Swaraj appointments were also made. On 22 August it was notified that the people were not to go to the Government authorities but bring their complaints to the District Congress Committee. But by the evening of the same day a large military force arrived to restore order. The leaders fled. The military quickly quelled the spirit of rebellion. A collective fine of Rs. 50,000 was imposed on the town and the whole of the amount immediately realized.

In the short period from 14 to 22 August in Ballia, according to an official report of the disturbances, all but two of the police stations in the district were abandoned and every railway station with but one exception was sacked and burnt. [Gyanendra Pandey, ed., *The Indian Nation in 1942*, pp. 178-80; Hutchins, *Spontaneous Revolution*, p. 323]

The Government report on the sabotage activity in the U.P. stated:

One hundred and four railway stations were attacked and damaged, 15 being burnt down; 16 derailments were caused; about 100 instances of sabotage of railway tracks were reported.... Over 525 cases of sabotage to telephone and telegraph wires were recorded. A hundred and nineteen post offices were destroyed or severely damaged, and 32 employees of the Posts and Telegraph Department were attacked. Damage was caused to a large number of Government buildings, records, seed stores and some A.R.P. equipment. Attacks on Government servants resulted in the murder of 16 members of the police force and 332 were injured. Arrests totalling 16,089 were made in connection with the disturbances throughout the Province.

The total amount of collective fines imposed was Rs. 28,32,000, the bulk of which was promptly realized. Recoveries by the close of the financial year amounted to slightly over Rs. 25,00,000.

The movement was condemned by the Liberals, the Hindu Mahasabha, the Scheduled Castes and the Muslim League, but no political party or leader took any effective steps to check or control its progress. Labour remained staunchly unaffected by the movement in spite of



attempts that were made to induce them to go on strike. [Pattabhi Sitaramayya, *The History of the Indian National Congress*, Vol. II, p. 375]

4

In the Central Provinces the turbulence was of equally serious proportions. Things started with protest meetings, processions and hartals, but soon the crowds went berserk. At Nagpur, Wardha, Chanda, Bhandara, Amaraoti and Betul roaming, shouting mobs systematically went about cutting telephone and telegraph wires, attacking police outposts and burning Government buildings. Food stores were also looted. From 12 to 15 August Nagpur was in the grip of serious disturbances. Roads were barricaded and there were determined attacks on Government property and buildings. The District and Civil Courts were attacked. Within a span of four days the military had to resort to firing on 25 occasions, killing 30 and wounding 14 persons. The police fired on 13 occasions. On 13 August railway communications were disrupted over a large area. On the Nagpur-Chhindwara narrow gauge five stations were burnt, as a result of which traffic remained disrupted for many days.

At Wardha on 14 August the police fired several times on the crowds to disperse them. At Amraoti there were attempts to burn the Imperial Bank and the tehsil office. At Ramtek a sum of Rs. 3½ lakhs was removed from the treasury. On the 15th at Wardha a Magistrate and a police party were assaulted.

Government intelligence reports held the members of the Congress Socialist Party and the Hindustan Republican Army responsible for the violence, since all the local leaders of the Congress — barring only five who had gone underground — had been arrested and were in jail.

In some places policemen were brutally murdered during attacks on police stations. At Chimur, in Chanda district, on 16 August a Sub-Divisional Magistrate, a Circle Inspector of Police, a Naib Tehsildar and a constable were done to death. At Ashti, in Wardha district, a Sub-Inspector of Police, and four constables were murdered by the crowd. Indeed two of the constables were sprinkled with kerosene and burnt alive. In Nagpur one constable was speared. In the rural areas, too, individual constables were attacked, humiliated, and their uniforms burnt. They were forced to wear Gandhi caps and march carrying Congress flags



in processions. Branch post offices in different parts of the Province were looted and papers and records were destroyed. The police stations at Moudha and Kuhi and an outpost and timber depots at Khapa and at Seoner were burnt and destroyed.

At Akola the workers of the weaving department of Swat Ram Mills refused to weave cloth for the Army.

The administration struck back hard. A fine of Rs. 50,000 was imposed on Ashti and villages within a radius of ten miles of it. A fine of Rs. one lakh was imposed on Chimur and villages within a radius of ten miles. Muslims in the areas concerned were exempted from paying the fines. A number of district councils and municipal committees were superseded. Among them were the district councils of Raipur, Bilaspur, Betul, Chhindwara and Drug, the Murwara Local Board in Jabalpur district, the Deoli Municipal Committee in Wardha district and the Mowar Municipal Committee in Nagpur district.

The Press, too, was not spared. Among the papers suppressed were the Marathi *Harijan*, *Matribhumi*, *Majoor* and *Sarathi*. Many printing presses were seized.

The total number of casualties, according to official reports, was 98 killed and 68 wounded. The total amount of collective fines imposed on various areas was Rs. three lakhs.

By the end of August the Government had got the better of mob violence, but protest demonstrations and meetings continued through September. Ninth September was observed as Independence Day in the Province. Fifty-four men and eleven women were arrested for defying prohibitory orders. The number of arrested by the middle of September was 4,859. Of these more than 300 were whipped. [P. N. Chopra, ed., *Quit India Movement: British Secret Documents*, pp.34-41, 81-85, 129-32; Arun Chandra Bhuyan, *The Quit India Movement*, pp. 72-74]

In Bengal 9 August was the day of hartals in the various towns – total or partial – in which the students played a prominent part. In Calcutta, Dacca and other places there were also meetings and processions. Prominent P.C.C. leaders



who had not been arrested, such as Kiran Shankar Roy, were by and large of the view that violence of any kind would not have been contemplated by Gandhiji and should therefore be eschewed. Soon afterwards workers arrived carrying what purported to be the instructions issued in the name of the A.I.C.C. These instructions called for hartals, manufacture of salt in defiance of the Salt Act, non-payment of revenue, withdrawal of students from schools and colleges, resignation by Government servants or refusal by them to obey anti-people orders and refusal by soldiers to lathi-charge or shoot people. The instructions also called for "non-violent raids" on *thanas* and tehsils to put them out of action and to disarm policemen. The slogan was to be "do or die".

Councils of action were soon formed in Calcutta, Bankura, Howrah, Asansol, Nadia, Dacca and Barisal, in which workers of Jugantar and various revolutionary groups figured prominently.

From the middle of August mass action to paralyse the administration began and it took the usual form. Tramcars were interrupted, post offices and mail vans were attacked, electrical lamp posts were damaged, telephone and telegraph wires were cut and persons wearing European dress were molested.

In Dacca, the Munsif's court, a police station and six post offices were attacked, and their records burnt. In Burdwan, Murshidabad, Dacca, Faridpur, Bakarganj and Tippera post offices and Government buildings became targets of mob attack. At Siliguri on 9 September the police fired on a mob attacking a police station, resulting in death of many people. Similar attacks on post offices took place at Balurghat, Nadia, Hooghly, Rajshahi, Howrah and Noakhali.

On 19 September at Burdwan the police station, post office and railway station were attacked and severely damaged. On 28 September at Kalinagar the Collector's office and the Irrigation Department's buildings were burnt. On 19 September at Bhanga (Faridpur) a mob murdered a Sub-Inspector of Police and wounded two constables. On 23 September a mob of Tribals armed with bows and arrows attacked a police party at Dinajpur and snatched away some guns and ammunition. In the firing that the action invited three persons were killed and several wounded. [P. N. Chopra, ed., *Quit India Movement: British Secret Documents*, pp. 67-74, 182-83; Bhuyan, *The Quit India Movement*, pp. 75-76]



The mob violence in Bengal was not simultaneous with that in Eastern U.P. and Bihar. It was also more sporadic and on a lesser scale. But it was far more sustained and organized. Towards the latter half of September in many areas in the countryside civil administration wholly collapsed. In Hooghly, Bankipura, Purulia and in Rampurhat sub-division of Birbhum for a brief while the Government's writ did not run. In Belurghat sub-division of Dinajpur the Santhals, Rajbhajans and Palias were in a state of revolt.

In Midnapore the movement took an organized form, leading, in the ensuing months to a complete collapse of British authority and setting up of a "national government", which continued to function in the district till almost the end of 1944.

Things started moving in Midnapore immediately following the 9 August arrests. In Contai, Tamluk and Mahishadal sub-divisions there were meetings and processions in front of Government offices. Trained volunteers paraded before *thanas* and word went round that Government offices and courts were to be boycotted. War councils composed of Congress and Forward Bloc workers were formed in different sub-divisions. Volunteer forces were raised in strengths of 1,000 men for each *thana* and training was given to them in sabotage, in the use of lathis and other skills required in guerilla warfare.

On 8 September at Danipur a crowd of 2,500 tried to prevent the local rice mill owner from exporting rice and to take possession of the rice stocks. The police fired upon the crowd, killing three persons. On the following day 200 persons from the surrounding villages were arrested.

On 20 September police officers were attacked in Bhagbanpur and Picchabani. The next day a post office was burnt down and cuts were made on local metalled road. The administration forced a group of people to repair the road. This was opposed by the crowds of people, who were fired upon, resulting in the death of four persons. On 27 September there was firing at Ishwarpur in Nadigram *thana*, which resulted in the death of two persons. The mob pursued the police and while being dispersed by firing again destroyed schools, offices, buildings and ferry boats. During the same night the police opened fire at a camp of volunteers at Belbani, killing four persons.



On 19 September the war councils of Tamluk and Contai sub-divisions decided to launch concerted mass action to destroy the symbols of the Government. Police *thanas* would be the chief targets of attack. The assault on each *thana* was carefully planned as a combat operation. The tactics employed were to advance upon the *thana* concerned from two or three directions at once. The connecting road links were destroyed and telegraph wires cut.

Dozens of *thanas* in the following days were raided and destroyed. Police personnel manning the *thanas* were arrested, disarmed and their uniforms burnt. Bands mobilized for such attacks were huge. The attack on *thana* at Tamluk on 29 September was carried out by a group of 20,000 people, divided into five parties advancing from different directions. The firing from the other side was sustained. Ten persons were killed. In the attack on Mahishadal *thana*, which was attempted several times, thirteen persons lost their lives in police firing.

In Khejuri, Pataspur and Sutahata the *thanas* were attacked and captured by two groups of 20,000 each. The buildings were burnt and the police personnel arrested.

The whole of Contai and Tamluk sub-divisions were in the hands of rebels at the end of September. Troops were called in but the situation was not improved for the authorities. Armed police parties and military detachments came under attack from the people. The combined civil and military action proved ineffective in dealing with the situation.

But while the organized rebellion could not be subdued, the police, under the protection of the army, could ravage and terrorize the countryside, which it did. There was extensive looting, destruction of property, arson, physical torture of people and rape on a mass scale. However these tactics failed to subdue the spirit of the people. The resistance movement remained unvanquished throughout November and December 1942. On 17 December the Tamralipta National Government (*Jatiya Sarkar*) was set up, with Satischandra Samanta as its chief. The several volunteer bodies were reorganized and combined under a single command as National Militia.

Though the National Government functioned chiefly as an instrument of popular resistance to the alien rule, later it also took up work of relief following



the ravages of the cyclone that hit the area on 16 October 1943, leaving 15,000 persons dead, fifty per cent of the dwellings destroyed and seventy-five per cent of the livestock decimated. The district authorities for a time neglected relief work, insisting that the people first desist from participation in the movement and return guns taken away from the police. Later the administration relented, but even so very few people approached the official agencies for relief. It was left to the "National Government" (*Jatiya Sarkar*) to take up work for the alleviation of distress.

But though the resistance continued, the Government gradually came to have the upper hand. In February - March 1943, the "National Government" was driven underground. So long it lasted it did everything that a Government was supposed to do. It collected taxes, dispensed justice and provided alternative administration. It ran departments of defence, finance, revenue, home, police, external affairs, judiciary, health, education, agriculture and publicity.

In course of time, under the stress of sustained and severe repression, it came to adopt measures that alienated it from large segments of the people over which it claimed to rule and with whose support it functioned. It resorted to extortions, plunder and even kidnappings for ransom. It carried out tortures of informers and others it considered enemies and even killed them. By way of corporal punishment it amputated limbs of those found guilty. Its social base had largely been eroded by the time it wound itself up finally in 1944. [Gyanendra Pandey, ed., *The Indian Nation in 1942*, pp. 41-67]

The extent of the damage caused during the disturbances in Midnapore before and after the October cyclone was revealed by Sir Nazimuddin in the Bengal Assembly in February 1944. "Eighty-one *thanas*, offices, houses, etc. belonging to Government, public bodies and private persons" were burnt by the Congress, he said. The Government forces burnt, in the Tamluk and Contai subdivisions during that period, 193 Congress camps and houses, some along with all the household articles. [Pattabhi Sitaramayya, *The History of the Indian National Congress*, Vol. II, pp. 375-76]

In Assam disturbances erupted in the second half of August. In Nowgong on 24 August railway lines were dislocated and fish-plates from the tracks



removed. On 25 August an army officer was assaulted and his jamadar severely beaten. Railway stations and post offices were attacked and bridges damaged. At Kathiatali in the same district an inspection bungalow, some excise shops and the circle office building were burnt. In Kamrup at Palasbari a military depot was burnt. At Sarbhog on 29 August the Garrison Engineer's office, the post and telegraph office and an inspection bungalow were burnt. In Sylhet and Sibsagar, too, Government offices were attacked and burnt.

On 18 September the police fired at a public meeting being held at Berampur in Nowgong, killing three persons. When meetings were held to protest against the firing at various places, such as Bamankuchi, Chaukhati, Nityananda and Jalaha in Barpet sub-division, there were more firings. At Rahabari two persons – one of them a 14-year old student – were killed in firing, five others were wounded.

On 20 September 8 persons were killed in police firing and 12 wounded, when a crowd at Dhekiajuli police station in Darrang district attempted to hoist the Congress flag on the building. Among the dead were three women. A little later when a crowd made an assault on Gohpur police station, firing was resorted to, resulting in the death of two persons, one of them a girl.

At Barnagar, in Sarbhog district, following acts of violence and arson by mobs, a collective fine of over Rs. one lakh was imposed and ruthless methods employed to collect it, such as forcing women to part with jewellery worn by them.

At Tezpur on 21 September a crowd, while hoisting the national flag, was lathi-charged and bayoneted. 80 people were arrested and mercilessly beaten at the police station.

At Jorhat on 28 September an assembly of about 5,000 people, men and women, was fired upon, as a result of which 10 persons were wounded. About 100 others received injuries from lathis and bayonets. [Arun Chandra Bhuyan, *The Quit India Movement*, pp.76-77; P. N. Chopra, ed., *Quit India Movement: British Secret Documents*, pp. 212-14]

In Orissa serious disturbances took place in late August and early September in the districts of Balasore, Cuttak and Koraput. In Balasore an



outlying police station was attacked, buildings, including staff quarter, were burnt and police personnel assaulted. Later the crowds also burnt the post office and damaged roads and bridges. Telephone and telegraph wires were also cut. In Kendrapara sub-division post offices, canal revenue offices and P.W.D. bungalows were burnt. In the same sub-division on 26 August a large crowd attacked a police party, inviting firing, in which one person was killed.

In Angul sub-division, too, police parties were attacked, arrested Congress leaders rescued and police personnel injured. [Arun Chandra Bhuyan, *The Quit India Movement*, pp. 77-78]

In Malkangiri, the movement developed as a crusade not only against British authority but against opium and liquor vendors, sahu-kars and zemindars. Opium shops were raided and the stocks seized. In some cases the seized opium was distributed among the raiders. At places markets were raided and the merchandise looted or trampled underfoot.

At Maithili, on 21 August, a crowd, after raiding an opium shop, advanced on the police station, where those leading the crowd addressed it, declaring that the British raj had ended and Gandhi raj had been established. People were advised that they did not any longer have to pay forest and other dues. There was a lathi-charge on the crowd and then firing, in which eleven persons were killed, including a forest guard. Later the police said the forest guard had been murdered by one Laxman, who had been leading the crowd. Laxman was arrested, tried for murder and hanged in Berhampur jail on 29 March 1943. [Gyanendra Pandey, ed., *The Indian Nation in 1942*, pp. 197-201]

The disturbances continued through September. In Koraput district markets, police stations and liquor and opium shops were raided, roads and bridges damaged and telegraph wires cut. In Cuttak on 6 September mobs attacked a police barracks, a post office, a revenue office and tehsil office and destroyed records. In Balasore a crowd clashed with the police at Dhamnagar. In the firing that ensued eight persons were killed and seven injured. On 28 September a crowd attempted a raid on the Basudebpur police station at Eram. In the police firing that came twenty-five were killed. [Arun Chandra Bhuyan, *The Quit India Movement*, p. 78]



In the Punjab the disturbances were not so widespread nor of such magnitude as in the rest of North India. However there were hartals, complete or partial, in many towns, such as Lahore, Amritsar, Ludhiana, Sargodha, Lyallpur, Multan, Rawalpindi and Gurgaon. In a few places telephone wires were cut, letter boxes were damaged and a railway booking-office was attacked. In Sargodha a police party was attacked with brickbats. In Multan the police threw some students into a pond, as a result of which three were drowned. [Ibid, p. 78]

In Kashmir, N.W.F.P. and Sind the movement remained low-key. In Kashmir a silk factory engaged in manufacturing parachute silk was destroyed by fire in the last week of August. In the N.W.F.P. the Red Shirts under Abdul Ghaffar Khan started picketing of law courts in October, but there was not much enthusiasm behind it and on 27 October Abdul Ghaffar Khan was placed under arrest. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. III, pp. 222-23]

In Sind there were some protest demonstrations and meetings, but the movement did not pick up significantly, largely because the major part of the Province was under martial law. But the Premier, Khan Bahadur Allah Baksh, openly opposed the policy of repression adopted by the British and supported the Congress demand for independence. He also wrote to the Viceroy renouncing his titles of Khan Bahadur and O.B.E. The British Cabinet, which considered the matter, expressed the view that if he renounced the titles he would have to relinquish his post as Premier. Allah Baksh refused to resign and was in consequence dismissed by the Governor on 10 October 1942, on the ground that he had forfeited his confidence. Ghulam Hussain Hidayatulla, an inveterate opponent of the Congress, was then installed as Premier. [Ibid, pp. 86-87, 123-24]

7

In the southern Provinces, the Madras Presidency and Kerala, the movement did not acquire the intensity that it did in the north. There were a variety of reasons for this. In Madras there was first of all the influence of Rajaji and his followers which exerted itself against the movement. Then there was the Justice Party, with its substantial following among the non-Brahmins, which acted as a check on the Congress. There was the added factor that the Congress, during its brief rule between 1937 and 1939, because of its severity in dealing with



strikes, had to an extent alienated the working class, which was now largely dominated by the Communist party. This was particularly true of Kerala.

Nevertheless the arrest of Gandhiji and the Congress leadership on 9 August was not taken quietly by the populace, especially the students. The Madras and Annamalai Universities became centres of agitation. The students of Annamalai University organized boycott of schools and colleges, held meetings and staged demonstrations. They planted the national flag on the University building. The authorities were forced to close down the University from 10 September to 20 October. Between 11 and 20 August there was widespread cutting of telephone and telegraph wires, burning of post boxes and stopping and derailment of trains. There were also attacks on police stations and clashes with the police. One such clash took place around 20 August at Pulankurichi in Ramanathapuram and another a month later in the Koilpetti area in Tirunelveli.

During the movement in Madras the police fired on 21 occasions, inflicting 39 fatal and 86 non-fatal casualties, according to official estimates. The actual figures would be much higher. Collective fines were imposed at 41 different places amounting to a total of Rs. 10,34,359. There were 6,000 arrests and 295 sentences of whipping. 27 local bodies were superseded for passing resolutions supporting the Congress. [David Arnold, "Quit India in Madras: Hiatus or Climacteric?" in Gyanendra Pandey, ed., *The Indian Nation in 1942*, pp. 212-15]

In Indian States the Quit India Movement, being a campaign essentially directed against British rule, involved the States people on a much lesser scale. Nevertheless in many States there were serious disturbances. There was turbulence in the Saurashtra States, in Ujjain, Gwalior, Rajputana, Mysore, Baroda and Kashmir.

In Kotah, in Rajputana, following the arrest of local Praja Parishad leaders on 13 August serious disturbances broke out on the following day. The telegraph lines near the head post office were cut. A large crowd besieged the police station. Firing was resorted to, without, however, any fatal or serious casualties. But the crowd would not disperse. It demanded the release of those arrested and the dismissal from State service of the Chief Minister and the Inspector General of Police. A representative of the Ruler, Apji Saheb, then addressed the crowd and promised that the needful would be done. Only then did the crowd disperse.



Those arrested on 13 August were duly released and the Inspector General of Police was asked to go on long leave preparatory to retirement. There was also talk of responsible government being conceded by the Ruler. This turn of events was not to the liking of the British. The Political Agent, in a letter to the Ruler dated 28 August, expressed his displeasure, saying any surrender to the Praja Parishad would be disastrous, and would have serious repercussions throughout Rajputana and beyond.

There were hartals in Jodhpur, Palanpur, Sirohi and Udaipur. In Bharatpur, though most of the leading Praja Mandal workers had been arrested, there were nevertheless continuous demonstrations in the city from 9 to 14 August. On the 14th there was complete hartal in the town and schools and colleges were boycotted. Telephone wires between Kumher and Bharatpur were cut and on 27 August a crowd marched towards the Council Office to offer satyagraha.

In Jodhpur letters were issued by the Lok Parishad to the Europeans residing in the State to leave India. Quit India notices were pasted on the walls and meetings were held and processions taken out. There were also incidents of cutting of telegraph wires, burning of railway carriages and tampering with post boxes. Police resorted to lathi charges again and again and troops had to be called to stand by.

During the first week of September there were hartals, meetings and processions in Alwar, Boondi, Jaipur, Jhalawar, Palanpur and Udaipur. [P. N. Chopra, ed., *Quit India Movement: British Secret Documents*, pp. 106, 117-22]

In Mysore serious disturbances broke out on 16 August, and there were prolonged strikes in the Bhadravati Steel Works, the Kolar Gold Fields and the Hindustan Aircraft Factory. The Harihar railway line was dislocated. [Arun Chandra Bhuyan, *The Quit India Movement*, p. 79]

Strikes by workers in industrial establishments were of course not the most prominent feature in the Quit India movement, an important reason being that a sizeable section of the trade union movement was under the influence of the Communist Party which had committed itself to total support of the British war



effort. Nevertheless there were strikes in important sectors which seriously affected war production.

The chief among these was the textile sector. In Bombay and Ahmedabad the mills remained closed for a considerably long period. In Coimbatore workers remained on strike from 13 to 31 August, with a short interregnum from 19 to 23 August. In Delhi the strikes continued for full one month from 10 August to 9 September. The Buckingham and Carnatic Mills in Madras and Calico Mills also remained closed. The Buckingham and Carnatic Mills had been engaged in producing khaki drill for the Army and the strike caused serious shortfall in the supply of this item. The total loss in textile production was estimated at about 25 million yards.

Other important industries to be affected by strikes were: the General Motors of Bombay (10 August - 2 September), Lever Brothers (10 August - 2 September), Tata Iron and Steel Company, Jamshedpur, already mentioned (21 August - 3 September), Hindustan Aircraft Manufacturing Company, Bangalore (4-5 days), Birla Jute Mills, Calcutta (one week), Mysore Iron and Steel Works (already mentioned), Calcutta Port Trust, Calcutta Tramways, seven engineering concerns in Calcutta, the Cordite Factory at Aravankadu, the Indian Cable Company and the East India Railway Workshop, where the strike continued for quite a long period.

The Jamshedpur strike in particular gave the British many sleepless nights. The Viceroy was very particular that no publicity should be given to it. The strike had the connivance of the management and the supervisory staff. Linlithgow reported to Amery on 1 September:

The management seem in these last few days to have behaved with extreme weakness, Sir Ardeshir Dalal, I am told, having informed the supervisory staff that he would report to Delhi their demand that, as a condition of their return to work, either a National Government should be formed at the Centre or that they should have specific instructions from Gandhi to resume duty! ...I have given Mody a broad hint that ...if they continued to play the fool we may have to send our orders in another direction. [Ibid, pp. 82-84; *The Transfer of Power*, Vol. II, p. 869]



The first phase of the Quit India Movement, the phase marked by violent mass activity, was practically over by mid-September. Attacks by undisciplined, excited mobs on railway stations, police stations, tehsil offices, post offices and other Government buildings had been checked. According to the Government of India Home Department communication to the Secretary of State, dated 5 September, the number of railway stations damaged and the number of derailments in the various railway segments till the date of the report were as follows:

Bengal-Nagpur Railway 4 and 1, B.B. & C.I. Railway 11 and 3, Bengal and Assam 27 and 2, G.I.P. Railway 8 and 3, Madras and Southern Maharashtra Railway 13 and 11, North West Railway 4 and 1, Southern India 4 and 3. On East India Railway 58 stations damaged and on Bengal and North-Western Railway probably between 150 and 170. Number of derailments on these two lines not known. Damage to tracks and rolling stock very extensive ...damage to property must be in neighbourhood of crore of rupees and further information may show this figure to be conservative.

Reports as regards police firings and casualties, the same document said, were incomplete, as they did not include figures from Bihar. But police resorted to firing frequently. In Bombay alone firing was resorted to on more than 100 occasions. The casualties inflicted countrywide were 340 killed and 630 wounded. The number of policemen killed in mob attacks was 28.

Troops were called out in 60 places. At the height of disturbances 57 battalions were deployed. The number of those killed in firing by the military could not be immediately ascertained, but military casualties were 11 killed and 7 wounded. Full use was also made of the Royal Air Force for reconnaissance and firing against rail saboteurs from the air.

A later Home Department telegram to London, dated 12 September, mentioned that 318 had been killed in firing by the army. The telegram sought to correct the statement made by Churchill on 10 September that fewer than 500 persons had been killed and only a few brigades of British troops had to be moved in support of civil power here and there.



Thus in the first 25 days or so of the disturbances the number of people killed by the police and the army together came to 658 according to official reckoning. This figure did not include those killed in Bihar. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. II, pp. 906-8, 952-53]

These figures of course did not come anywhere near the truth, the revelation of which would have staggered human conscience. Mohanlal Saxena, a Congress leader of the U.P. and member of the Central Legislative Assembly, in a letter to Linlithgow, dated 10 September, mentioned the case of Sitapur, where peaceful demonstrators were fired upon. The number of those killed, at the lowest computation, had been 60. But the official report mentioned only 5 killed. [Ibid, pp. 940-41]

The number of those arrested in connection with the movement up to the end of 1942 was, according to the figures telegraphed to London by the Provincial Governors, slightly under 40,000. Of these 22,725 were those convicted under political sections of ordinary law or Defence of India Rules, 8,130 were those detained under Defence Rules, and 4,184 were those temporarily detained. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. III, pp. 535, 823]

But while the killings, maimings and imprisonments could be statistically enumerated, the most execrable part of the Government's doings during the period was the excesses committed by the police, the magistracy and the army units. Men were mercilessly flogged, those arrested were tortured, not allowed to sleep, cross-examined for hours, kept without food and water. Women were assaulted, stripped and raped. People were tied to trees and beaten. In East U.P. and Bihar these excesses reached horrendous proportions. Both the Provincial Governments later approached the Central Government for an Indemnity Legislation to protect the police personnel from departmental or legal proceedings for their acts. Hallett, the U.P. Governor, wrote to Linlithgow on 22 September:

There is no doubt that quite apart from firing upon looters and rioters, there were things done both by the police and by soldiers which are not covered by any provision of law.

As instances of such act Hallet later mentioned taking of hostages from



villages in the vicinity of railway tracks subjected to sabotage as security against repetition of sabotage, realization of collective fines without proper assessment, etc. Private residences were looted and burnt. The District Magistrate of Azamgarh admitted that acts of "official dacoity", such as imposing collective fines, looting and burning of the houses of Congress sympathizers, were resorted to, to penalize the Congress. In Azamgarh, Delhi, Patna and other places people were subjected to physical violence. Houses of even persons who were not in any way connected with the movement were entered and radio sets and firearms taken away. Even the Maharaja of Darbhanga felt obliged to protest against such high-handed action. At a meeting of the National Defence Council in November 1942 he said: "The firearms in the possession of respectable people were taken away from them by the authorities not because they had done anything wrong but on the ground that they had not come in actively to the assistance of law and order." [Arun Chandra Bhuyan, *The Quit India Movement*, pp. 99-101]

At Chimur in the C.P., where on 16 August some policemen had been murdered by a crowd, police and army frightfulness reached its height. There was not only indiscriminate looting but rape on a large scale. Demand for an enquiry, in which even the Hindu Mahasabha leader B. S. Moonje joined, was turned down, leading to a protest fast by J. P. Bhansali, a close associate of Gandhiji, which lasted from 12 November 1942 to 12 January 1943. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. III, pp. 440, 487]

On 24 September 1942 K. C. Neogy moved a resolution in the Central Assembly, seeking the appointment of an enquiry committee made up of members of the Assembly to go both into the nature of the organization responsible for sabotage activities and into the allegations of police excesses in dealing with the disturbances.

By way of excesses Neogy mentioned shooting at random, damage to property, use of excessive force in dispersing non-violent crowds and other kinds of assault. No less than 34 commercial associations in Bombay, he pointed out, had protested against such repressive measures as compelling householders, merchants and passers-by to clear the streets. In Patna a senior lawyer was caught during his morning walk and ordered to clean the road.



Jamnadas Mehta, while roundly denouncing the Congress and the Quit India Movement as a movement for the enslavement of India by the Japanese, nevertheless supported the demand for an enquiry committee. In the Provinces, he said, a policy of frightfulness was being pursued to terrorize the people.

The Home Member, Reginald Maxwell, rejected the demand. The Government, he said, would oppose all attempts to put their employees in the dock. No enquiry, he said, was possible into vague and indefinite allegations which represented only one side of the story. The violence, he pointed out, had been started by the mobs. He cited figures: 49 fatal and 1363 non-fatal casualties among the police force, 192 police posts, 494 Government buildings, 318 railway stations and 309 post and telegraph buildings, 318 railway stations and 309 post and telegraph offices destroyed; 103 cases of serious damage to railway track, and 11285 cases of serious damage to telephone and telegraph lines: 14 fatal and 70 non-fatal cases amongst the military.

He did not deny that in some cases excesses might have been committed by the police and military, but they represented isolated cases and did not constitute the policy of the Government.

The motion for enquiry was rejected. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1942, Vol. I, pp. 160-62; Vol. II, pp. 151-53, 160

9

From 8 August onward the Press remained effectively gagged. The regulations made it impossible for any news connected with the movement to be reported. The rulers were anxious that the world should not know that the people of India had risen against the regime or that the regime had launched a reign of terror against the people. The impression they sought to convey was that all was well in the country and that except for the Congress the whole of India was behind the British, enthusiastically supporting their war effort.

The restrictions imposed on the Press were wide, comprehensive and stifling. Also, they varied from Province to Province. Correspondents were obliged to register themselves with the local authorities, restrictions were placed on the number of messages to be sent, on the size of headlines and on the space to be devoted to the news concerning the disturbances.



On 25 August the Standing Committee of the Newspaper Editors' Conference in a note to the Home Department, protested against the restrictions and demanded that they be withdrawn. The restrictions appeared to be designed, the note said, not so much to prevent information reaching the enemy as to prevent the public in India, Britain and Allied countries from receiving an objective and correct account of the internal situation in the country.

Meetings of newspaper editors with Tottenham and some exchanges followed. These were chiefly concerned with the question of association of editors with the Provincial Press Advisory Committees in scrutinizing news that could be passed for publication. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1942, Vol. II, pp. 321-27]

Gandhiji in his speech at the A.I.C.C. in Bombay had called upon newspaper editors that if the Government should place any restrictions on the freedom of the Press they should stop running newspapers and tell the Government that they would resume publication only in a free India. In response to Gandhiji's call most of the newspapers in Calcutta, Delhi, Bombay and Madras suspended publication. Among them were *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, *Hindustan Standard* and *The Advance of Calcutta*, *The Hindustan Times of Delhi*, *Indian Express of Madras*, and *National Herald* of Lucknow. Numerous Indian languages newspapers similarly went on strike. Among these were nine Bengali, twenty Hindi, four Gujarati, six Tamil, nine Telugu, eight Marathi, two Sindhi, one Urdu, one Oriya, two Assamese, two Malayalam and three Kannada newspapers.

Most newspapers remained off the stands from 16 August (some from 21 August) to 6 September. The result was that rumours took the place of authentic news. The whole of the country was turned into a whispering gallery to the disadvantage of the Government. [Arun Chandra Bhuyan, *The Quit India Movement*, pp. 97-99]

As for *Harijan*, only two more issues, those of 16 and 23 August, could be brought out under the editorship of Kishorelal Mashruwala, before the authorities struck, destroying the equipment and all the files of the magazine and seizing the Navajivan Press. In the final issue of the paper Mashruwala, as editor, while regretting the acts of violence that had been committed by the people



refused to condemn the people, holding "those at Whitehall and New Delhi" responsible. He wrote:

Dislocation of traffic and communications is permissible in a non-violent manner — without endangering life.... Cutting wires, removing rails, destroying small bridges, cannot be objected to in a struggle like this provided ample precautions are taken to safeguard life. [Francis G. Hutchins, *Spontaneous Revolution*, pp. 272-73]

The publication of *Harijan* remained suspended for the next three and a half years, when it was resumed on 10 February 1946. [C.W.M.G., LXXVII, p. 382, footnote 2]

10

During this first phase of the movement, lasting approximately a month, the leading role was played by the youth, especially school and college students. In the U.P., Bihar, Bengal, Madras, Sind, mob violence was preceded, indeed ignited, by the strikes and demonstrations organized by students. In his situation report to Amery on 13 August the Viceroy said that the troubles, in which students had played a prominent part, had been spontaneous reactions to the arrest of Gandhiji and the Congress leaders.

In another report he wrote:

Taking the country as a whole the disturbances, though evidently planned by a common source, do not appear now to be coordinated by any single centre and are sporadic in incidence. I have not much doubt that desire of students to imitate subversive or destructive activities of students in other Provinces of which they become aware, and anxiety of hooligan element to turn to good an opportunity to profit, are responsible for a good deal, helped no doubt in certain areas by plans being worked out, or already in existence and implemented, by Congress support. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. II, pp. 683, 731]

In Bombay, at the very start of the trouble, on 10 August, students were in the forefront, tearing up rails, boarding trains, smashing windows, pulling alarm chains and ripping open cushions in first-class compartments. On 14 August at



Bardi some 600 students obstructed the train by standing on the track. [Francis G. Hutchins, *Spontaneous Revolution*, p. 281]

In East U.P., the disturbances, as we have seen, were initiated, organized and continued by the students primarily of the Benares Hindu University. The rulers were so enraged by the behaviour of the Benares students that at one stage they were ready to take over the University buildings and use them as a military hospital. Linlithgow wrote to Amery on 22 August:

In all the disturbances the students have been prominent and, as a particular example, the Benares University has been working as an organizing centre.... To the younger generation the non-violent non-cooperation of Gandhi had never made a really strong appeal. Either they have deliberately seized control and exceeded the instructions of the Congress, or the Congress leaders may themselves have instigated and subsidized a revolt the violence of which may have gone beyond their expectations.... What matters for the moment is that youth is in command and has been putting into execution a revolutionary programme which could hardly have sprung into existence at a moment's notice! [Arun Chandra Bhuyan, *The Quit India Movement*, pp. 86-87]

Linlithgow asked the Governors to report on the communal composition of the student crowds engaged in violent activities and was informed by most of them that the students were almost entirely Hindu except possibly some Muslim students who were Communists. [The Transfer of Power, Vol. II, p. 762]

With good reason, therefore, the students were at the receiving end of a large part of police brutalities and chastisement by special courts set up for trying offences connected with the disturbances. A particularly barbaric punishment devised was whipping.

It was the Bombay administration which first took recourse to this form of corporal punishment. On 11 August the Bombay Whipping Act (1941) was brought into force for dealing with offences of arson, rioting and personal violence. When news broke in England there was consternation. It was feared it would have adverse effect in America. Labour leaders also voiced their concern. So did the Press. *Tribune* wrote on 14 August:



Our armed cars are going into action against Congress supporters in Bombay. Our political warfare has reached new inspiring heights. We proclaimed a Whipping Act for the people of India. Every step taken by the Government of India since the dawn of the 9th August has been a stab in the back of the men and women who work and fight and die in the cause of freedom. [P. N. Chopra, ed., *Quit India Movement: British Secret Documents*, p.33]

The War Cabinet was seriously concerned, not so much by the fact that resort was being had to this barbaric measure, as by the way the Press had made it a headline matter. The Viceroy was asked to exercise stricter Press control. He was also told, at the behest of Cripps, that the War Cabinet would "strongly deprecate any extensive use of this penalty".

But the Provincial satraps in India thought otherwise. The Madras Governor informed the Viceroy that he had ordered that flogging *must be used* against saboteurs and as quickly as possible following the offence, for the sake of effect. Hallett desired that Press messages regarding whipping should be stopped in India if they could not be held up in England, for, he added, whipping and collective fines were the two main weapons in "fighting the rebellion". Amery admitted to the Viceroy that if things got critical, whipping might have to be inflicted "increasingly", and suggested that the best course would be to avoid publicity.

The Governors assured the Viceroy, and the Viceroy assured the Secretary of State, that there really had been no whipping sentences awarded except in the rarest cases. Yet according to the Government's own statement by the end of December 1943, no less than 2,562 sentences of whipping had been inflicted. This was of course an understatement. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. II, pp. 681, 738, 835, 838; Hutchins, *Spontaneous Revolution*, p. 338]



CHAPTER XV: THE QUIT INDIA MOVEMENT: REPRESSION AND RESISTANCE - II

1

The first phase of the Quit India Movement, characterized by spontaneous, angry and uncontrolled protest demonstrations and mindless mob violence in widely separated areas, was all but over in less than a month. It showed no awareness of the goal to be achieved and no clear line of action beyond burning police stations, post offices, railway stations and other Government property. The Viceroy's situation reports, addressed to the Secretary of State and repeated to British ambassadors in the U.S.A., Russia and China, constitute an approximately accurate graph of the disturbances. From 12 August onwards these reports were sent to London daily, covering events from the noon of one day to the noon of the next. This practice lasted till 7 September, after which it was considered that periodical reports would suffice. The intervals between reports became longer and longer till, finally, after 16 December they were discontinued altogether.

But though the police, aided by 57 battalions of the army which had been pressed into service, had been able to quell the unorganized mobs by indiscriminate and widespread firings, lathi-charges, arrests, tortures and punitive and collective fines, the cost to the war effort had already been heavy. In his situation report to Amery, Linlithgow, on 10 September, conveyed to the British Government the Commander-in-Chiefs estimate of the damage:

(a) loss of six to eight weeks' training in certain field army formations and training units due to employment [of] equivalent of 57 battalions on internal security, (b) training generally retarded by temporary dislocation of petrol distribution, (c) projected movements programme for Eastern Army retarded at least three weeks, possibly more, by railway damage, (d) probably minimum 50 per cent of aerodrome construction and building projects retarded four to six weeks due to shortage of coal, cement, bricks and labour difficulties, (e) loss to date of 10 per cent of annual steel production due to Tata's strike..., (f) loss of cotton for textiles due to delay in transportation..., (g) general effect of dislocation and unrest on



economic life of country extending over four to six weeks which will have repercussions on Army in supply and transportation fields. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. II, p. 935]

The damage to the war effort had not been merely an incidental or unintended consequence of the disturbances. From the very first stage of the movement paralyzing of the war effort had been conceived as the primary object of mob violence by those who had placed themselves in the forefront of it. In the second phase of the movement mob violence was replaced by more or less organized and sustained guerilla activity directed from underground command centres, but the aim pursued was still the dislocation of the war effort.

The assumption widely held all over India was that British defeat in the war was certain. A further assumption, equally widely shared, was that the sooner the British defeat came the better it would be for India, for she would then be freed of the British yoke. So widely held in political circles was the belief in the possibility of British defeat that at the Muslim League Working Committee meeting held in Bombay in August, the contingency of the collapse of the Central Government was seriously considered. According to intelligence sources, Jinnah's advice to his followers in that eventuality was that they should "be prepared to hoist the Muslim League flag in the Muslim majority Provinces and capture power from the Hindus". In his view the invasion by the Japanese would be a signal for the fight against the Hindus rather than against the Japanese who would "naturally place the stronger party in power". [P. N. Chopra, ed., *The Quit India Movement: British Secret Documents*, p.96]

It was thus the prospect of British defeat, entertained with hope by large numbers of people, which provided the impulse to the movement throughout.

Those who organized and led the movement forgot that the Congress, as represented by Gandhiji, Nehru, Azad and other leaders, did not share this view and that it was not in consonance with the resolution passed by the A.I.C.C. on 8 August, which had declared that a free India would assure the success of freedom and democracy in the war "by throwing all her great resources in the struggle for freedom and against the aggression of Nazism, Fascism and Imperialism". Moreover the struggle that the resolution sanctioned was to be "a mass struggle on non-violent lines" which would inevitably be under the leadership of Gandhiji.



Gandhiji in his speeches at the A.I.C.C., first in Hindi and then in English, had laid down the conditions that would govern the movement. It would be an "open rebellion", in which there would be no room "for fraud or falsehood or any kind of untruth". Nothing, he had warned, must be done secretly, for secrecy was a sin and a free man must not engage in a secret movement. Above all the movement had to be governed by the "policy" of non-violence, which was not relaxable.

But Gandhiji had had no opportunity to give a call for the movement. The Government had pre-empted the plan of a non-violent mass movement by arresting Gandhiji and all the leaders who could speak in the name of the Congress. Those that remained at large, most of them middle and lower rung political activists, were now obliged to interpret the terms of the resolution and Gandhiji's exhortations according to their own lights, and the interpretation of those who finally emerged as leaders of the movement differed radically from the intention of the resolution and the guidelines laid down by Gandhiji.

2

Soon after the crack-down on the leadership on 9 August, some of the Congressmen then in Bombay in connection with the A.I.C.C. meeting who had escaped arrest, secretly met and set themselves up as the A.I.C.C. Among them were Ram Manohar Lohia, Ram Nandan Mishra, Achyut Patwardhan, Sadiq Ali, Sucheta Kripalani and Aruna Asaf Ali. Later a number of others joined the underground "A.I.C.C." These included Girdhari Kripalani, B. V. Keskar, Dwarkanath Kachru, Ram Sewak Pandey, Purshottamdas Trikamdas, Mohanlal Saksena, S. M. Joshi, Sane Guruji, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya and Purnima Bannerji.

Ram Manohar Lohia, Achyut Patwardhan, Sucheta Kripalani and Aruna Asaf Ali also formed a separate cell, which they called the Central Directorate of the A.I.C.C. With the exception of Sucheta Kripalani, who later came to have serious differences with the others, this body, as may be seen, was composed entirely of the members of the Congress Socialist Party.

The Central Directorate functioned as the nerve centre of the "A.I.C.C.", receiving feed-back on the movement, preparing propaganda material and



drafting instructions to workers, which were then conveyed to the various Provincial command centres in the name of the A.I.C.C. Needless to say, the Directorate interpreted the Congress policy in its own way, which was the Congress Socialist way. The policy which was passed on to Congress Committees everywhere for implementation was thus not the policy of the Congress but that of the Congress Socialist Party. Overnight the party had become the controlling group of the Congress. As a Government report put it, the tail was now wagging the dog. [Arun Chandra Bhuyan, *The Quit India Movement*, pp. 103-5]

The first thing the underground "A.I.C.C." did was to issue a twelve-point programme for the guidance of Congressmen and the public. Briefly summarized it was as follows:

1. Hartals in cities and villages all over India in protest against the arrest of Gandhiji and other leaders, followed by meetings in the evening.
2. Manufacture of salt wherever possible in defiance of salt laws.
3. Withholding of payment of land revenue, except that the zemindars might be given their share if they threw in their lot with the people.
4. Students of over 16 years of age to leave their schools and colleges and take up the leadership of the movement.
5. As for Government servants, the days of the administration that gave them their bread and butter were numbered. They must refuse to obey orders designed to suppress and crush the movement. If in doing so they risked dismissal, they must be prepared to face the risk.
6. Soldiers should consider themselves Congressmen. They must refuse to obey orders to lathi-charge, teargas or shoot non-violent crowds, peaceful processions and meetings.
7. The States people should join the struggle against the British and if the Princes should side with the British, the States people must fight both against the British and the Princes.
8. As desired by Gandhiji, women must play their part in the struggle and endure sacrifices and sufferings.



9. Every man and woman must carry on his or her person a badge bearing the motto "Do or Die".

10. All Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Parsis and Christians had to participate in the struggle. There could be no communal distinctions in the struggle for freedom.

11. This was India's final struggle for freedom. If all did their duty it would finish in two months' time. All classes of people must take up the fight. The struggle would include all activities that a non-violent mass struggle could include. Subject to the "inexorable condition of non-violence" whatever helped to put an end to foreign rule was legitimate.

12. Last but not least, there was spinning, "so dear to Gandhiji". If millions should take up spinning, it would give a powerful stimulus to the struggle. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1942, Vol. II, pp. 212-16]

The instructions were of course unexceptionable and wholly in conformity with the letter and spirit of the A.I.C.C. resolution and the exhortations of Gandhiji. They summed up the conduct of a non-violent rebellion against the tyrannous foreign rule. Clearly at this juncture those who felt that the leadership of the movement had been thrust upon them by circumstances were conscious of the great responsibility they shouldered – that of canalising the mass upsurge into a revolutionary movement that would be non-violent. The question as to what was permissible under non-violence and what was not, was minutely debated. K. G. Mashruwala, who had taken up the editorship of *Harijan* after 9 August answered the question in the 23 August issue of the journal. He wrote:

I can give personal opinion only. In my opinion looting and burning of offices, banks, granaries, etc. is not permissible. Dislocation of traffic communications is permissible in a non-violent manner without endangering life. The organization of strikes is best and if that can be accomplished, it itself will be effective and sufficient.... Cutting wires, removing rails, destroying small bridges cannot be objected to in a struggle like this, provided ample precautions are taken to safeguard life. [Ibid, p. 233]



Mashruwala later regretted having approved sabotage activities if they did not endanger life. He said he had been misled by Amery's speech made in London after the 9 August arrests, enumerating the activities mentioned as the programme to be pursued in the course of the movement. [Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi: The Last Phase*, Ahmedabad, 1956, Vol. I, Book I, pp. 337-38]

It had not been the programme of the movement, if only because no programme had been chalked out by Gandhiji, the only person authorized to do so. As to whether Gandhiji would have sanctioned sabotage activity, Gandhiji himself, in his rejoinder to the Government's charges against him wrote:

I had always questioned the practicability of the interference [with bridges, rails and the like] being non-violent. Even if such interference could conceivably be non-violent ...it is dangerous to put it before the masses who cannot be expected to do such things non-violently.

The opinion that Mashruwala expressed, Gandhiji added, was not evidence of violent intention. It was at best an error of judgment. [C.W.M.G., LXXVII, p. 151]

3

It was, however, an error of judgment that had adverse consequences for the moral character of the movement. It led to the blurring in the people's minds of the distinction between violence and non-violence and enabled those political activists who never believed in non-violence to justify the violent acts they incited as legitimate conduct in a resistance movement.

The instructions to the workers flowing from the underground command in the name of the A.I.C.C., even though paying lip service to non-violence and unflinchingly invoking the name of Gandhiji, began more and more to advocate programmes that involved not merely non-violent defiance of authority but confrontation with authority of a kind that must involve violence. An early set of instructions called for "non-violent raids by thousands of people on the symbols and centres of British authority, the Thanas and the Tehsils". These, the instructions read, must be put out of action. "The police and other Government servants should be invited," the instructions said, "in the first instance to accept the authority of the people or, on their refusal to do so, should be dispossessed



both of their weapons and their Governmental positions." Elaborating the strategy of the campaign the instructions proceeded:

The culminating point of these raids will be reached when the spontaneously awakened but organized energies of the people in their thousands raid the district headquarters. The Government machinery will then not only be paralyzed but shattered. Either at this moment, or in the process while this is taking place, a parallel authority of the people will be formed.... The climax of this paralysis should be designed to reach in four weeks from now, or a little earlier or a little later. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1942, Vol. II, pp. 227-28]

The programme for the urban areas laid stress on the organization of a general strike, which should be made total in the twenty largest cities of India. Colleges and universities must close down and the students should either lead demonstrations in towns or proceed to the villages in pursuance of the four weeks' programme. All general establishments, such as wholesale trade, banks, etc., must be closed and their personnel brought out. Work in textile and other manufacturing industries must be stopped. While the indefinite general strike continued, workers in railways, godowns, telephone and telegraph departments, radio, electrical generation and distribution must be approached and persuaded to go on strike.

People must be ready to face police firing and must be ready to die. If the people had sufficient non-violent strength they could snatch away the arms of the sepoys without causing them injury. [Ibid, pp. 228-29; Gynendra Pandey, ed., *The Indian Nation in 1942*, pp. 118-20]

The programme elaborated in the above set of instructions for the towns and countryside was thus still a programme of total non-cooperation with and defiance of authority and was fully in keeping with Gandhiji's do-or-die exhortation, with which the pamphlet ended. Yet a new activity had been recommended that did not quite go with the programme: that of non-violently snatching away firearms from the police and military personnel.

Among the flood of leaflets and pamphlets circulating in Bombay, Baroda and a number of Gujarat towns during this early period of the movement, there



were a good many which, though ostensibly issued in the name of the Congress, unmistakably emanated from pro-Japanese sources. They relied for their appeal on anti-British and anti-Allied propaganda in which facts were often replaced by fabrications and the Japanese were pictured as liberators. One of the sheets, titled "Congress Bulletin No. 5", issued on 17 August, announced that an Indian army in Egypt and another in North Africa had refused to fight for the British and consequently many officers and ranks of those armies had been shot as rebels. Another regiment of the Indian army in North Africa; the bulletin said, had revolted and twenty per cent of its ranks had been shot or imprisoned. The Allied war effort, it went on, was crumbling. Marshal Timoshenko had given up hopes of saving the Caucasus, and within a few weeks the Germans would be driving towards the borders of Iran. Japan, the bulletin declared, had been consistently saying that she had no interest in conquering India and only wanted the British to be driven out. Burma, Malaya, Singapore, Batavia and other countries occupied by Japan were described as Free States.

Another bulletin, numbered 6, laid down a "war programme", which included, among other items, formation of guerilla bands for surprise attacks on "the Tommies" and inciting of cooks of Britishers to cook bad food for their masters. The emphasis in this bulletin was on the stoppage of war supplies to the British Army by organizing strikes in textile and engineering establishments and by picketing transport facilities. Shops dealing in British goods must be raided and if the proprietors could not be persuaded to stop selling such goods, the goods should be burnt in a bonfire in front of the shop. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1942, Vol. II, pp. 233-36]

4

Leaflets and pamphlets having been the only sure means available to the underground to disseminate information among the masses and convey instructions for the guidance of activists, there was a veritable spate of such propaganda material everywhere. In most cases such material was cyclostyled, occasionally printed.

In Bombay the Central Directorate also tried radio broadcasting. A makeshift transmission centre was installed at a private address in the closing days of August and it went on the air on 3 September, with the announcement:



"This is the Congress radio calling from somewhere in India". The material for the broadcasts was supplied chiefly by Ram Manohar Lohia and Purshottamdas Trikamdas. Those running the show included Vithaldas Khakar, Vithaldas Jhaveri, Usha Mehta and Chandrakant Jhaveri. To escape detection the transmission centre was required to be shifted repeatedly. Even so the police remained on its trail and on 12 November tracked it down. Usha Mehta and Chandrakant Jhaveri, then engaged in making a broadcast, were arrested and the equipment, comprising three transmission sets and 120 gramophone records, was seized. The police also recovered from the premises 22 cases of film reel running to 14,000 feet.

The authorities first thought that perhaps they had come upon evidence that would link the movement with the Japanese fifth-column activity in India. To their disappointment they found that it was merely Congress propaganda material including "directions to the public in furtherance of the civil disobedience movement". [Arun Chandra Bhuyan, *The Quit India Movement*, pp. 106-7]

The British would have loved nothing so much as evidence, however tenuous, to support the pet theory of Churchill that Gandhiji had links with Japan and that the movement was part of the Japanese fifth-column activity in India. The Home Department of the Government of India, in a telegram to the India Office dated 23 August, referring to this "alternative theory" of the genesis of the movement, said:

There is no direct evidence to support this theory; but that does not necessarily prove that it is not true; and the fact remains that most concentrated attacks on communications have, designedly or not, taken place in those areas in which complete success would have isolated the parts of India most likely to be invaded, while simultaneously immobilizing transport and industry elsewhere by cutting off coal supplies.

The War Cabinet pricked its ears, and on 24 August it asked Amery to enquire and report "on the extent to which the recent disorders might have been provoked by agencies working directly on behalf of the enemy." [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. II, pp. 800-1]



The intelligence agencies of the Government of India "devoted all their energies", according to the Home Department, to the task of gathering evidence of possible Japanese influence in the disturbances. But the effort was in vain. The A.I.G. of police, C.I.D., in the U.P., for instance, reported:

There is no evidence to prove directly controlled enemy activity in India except in so far as the Axis embassy in Afghanistan have financed agents for work in this country and except in so far as the Japanese Consulate in Calcutta had set up 5,000 fifth-column agents amongst members of the Forward Bloc and Terrorist Party in Bengal. All that I would say is that, despite continuous and very numerous enquiries in every possible direction, we have not been able to establish that there are agents in U.P. working under direct inspiration from the enemy or financed directly by the Axis powers.... My suggestion, therefore, is that the activities of the Axis powers in connection with the recent disturbances have been almost entirely confined to propaganda on the wireless. [P. N. Chopra, ed., *Quit India Movement: British Secret Documents*, p.171]

The Viceroy in his telegram to Amery of 3 October reported that the Government of India still had no direct evidence to support the theory of enemy influence in the disturbances, though the possibility could not be discarded, especially in view of the fact that among the large number of refugees who had returned from Burma there were sure to be some Japanese agents. The Viceroy laid the blame for the disturbances on the various "subversive organizations" in India. There were, he said, a large number of them, all committed to the independence of India, though following varying methods to achieve the aim. He mentioned especially the Congress Socialist Party, the Forward Bloc and the Hindustan Red Army. He added: "Congress may not have instigated these organizations to take action but must have been well aware that they would do so." [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. III, pp. 77-78]

Bombay remained the headquarters of the Central Directorate and the self-appointed "A.I.C.C." In the Provinces middle-rung leaders who had escaped arrest, similarly went underground and engaged themselves in organizing



defiance of the administration through strikes, sabotage and raids on Thanas and Tehsils in the rural areas.

In Gujarat, for instance, the core group had its headquarters in Ahmedabad. A Congress Socialist activist, Jayanti Thakore, assumed the title of *Shahersuba* (head of the city). Under him were a number of ward *nayaks* and *pol nayaks*. Various other underground groups also simultaneously came into being, such as the women's group, the sabotage group and the children's group.

The sabotage group came into being on 13 August. It comprised some 30 young men, who signed an oath of secrecy in their own blood. The group was led by K. G. Prabhu. It set itself the programme of cutting telegraph and telephone lines and damaging railways and other Government property. Soon many more joined the group, taking its strength to about 150. The scope of its activities also expanded. Its members made journeys to the various Princely States of Saurashtra to collect firearms, ammunitions and explosives for making bombs. In September four young men lost their lives in accidental explosions while engaged in manufacturing bombs. The bombs manufactured were crude, made largely from gunpowder. Beginning on 17 September the group threw eight or nine bombs at different places in Ahmedabad. The damage done was negligible. Writing to Linlithgow on 24 September, Roger Lumley, Governor of Bombay, remarked: "I cannot help being impressed by the feebleness of the attempts at sabotage with which we have had to cope."

Along with covert sabotage activity went overt mass protests and demonstrations, which continued throughout the months from September to December, and which were more effective than underground violence. The demonstrators frequently clashed with the police, thus inviting lathi-charges and firings. By mid-November 34 demonstrators had been killed in Bombay city, 10 in Kheda district, 9 in Thana district and 2 in Ahmedabad city. The poor record of police killings in Ahmedabad city was frowned upon by the Bombay Home Department, which considered that it was inadequate to check the militancy of the people. [David Hardiman, "The Quit India Movement in Gujarat", in Gynendra Pandey, ed., *The Indian Nation in 1942*, pp. 89-91, 104 Notes]

The raids on police stations, which was a high-priority item on the agenda of the movement drawn up by the Central Directorate, began in Gujarat in



September. But it did not assume the form of angry mass action as was evidenced in the U.P. and Bihar in August. The raids were carried out largely by groups of individuals. In Surat district in Jambusar Taluka on 22 September Chhotubhai Purani, Chandrashankar Bhatt and Meghji, an erstwhile dacoit, captured the Vedachi police station in a surprise raid and took away all the guns kept there. This started a campaign of rural terror against officials, policemen and others suspected of being supporters of the Raj in the districts of south Gujarat, such as Surat, Broach and Navsari. Village offices were attacked and records seized. Occasionally there were gun battles between the police and the raiders. On 15 December Purani, Bhatt and Meghji attacked another police station at Sarbhan in Amod taluka, killing a policeman and capturing others, who were stripped of their uniforms. Guns were taken away and the police station vandalized.

There were a large number of dacoities directed against persons considered to be anti-national. Patels were called upon to resign, and those who refused to do so were subjected to harassment. Their houses were set on fire or their crops were destroyed.

By the end of the year the Government, through police and army action, had managed to restore control in the villages of Gujarat, except for Panchmahals where dacoities continued in the following year and money-lenders continued to be attacked. In May 1943 a police station was also raided.

The call for withholding payment of land revenue did not elicit any response, partly because by the time the payment became due in January 1943, the movement in the villages had petered out and partly because the campaign for non-payment of land revenue in 1932-34 had not brought any dividends; it had only resulted in the confiscation of lands, leading to considerable hardships. [Ibid, pp. 95-99]

In the U.P., after the unorganized and sporadic mob violence had been got the better of by the end of August, the youth, who had remained unsubdued, set about organizing themselves in a more effective way for sabotage activity. The targets according to the instructions issued by the "War Council, U.P. Congress", were to be *kuchcha* and pucca roads, railway stations, railway bridges and



culverts, petrol and kerosene installations, aerodromes, Government grain stores, cantonments, war production centres, hydro-electric stations, police stations and post offices, etc. It was made clear that the cutting of wires should be continued, insulators on top of the poles should be destroyed and transport of war materials should be hindered. [Arun Chandra Bhuyan, *The Quit India Movement*, p. 109]

The movement in the U.P. had been placed under the overall charge of K. D. Malaviya, who toured all over the Province to organize the movement till he was arrested on 29 September in Kanpur. From the documents seized from him the Special Branch became wise to the plan that the underground intended to pursue. A circular letter to all S.P.s dated 5 October said:

The general plan appears to be still the capture of the rural areas and includes the establishment of the rule of the masses, the removal of all signs of the existence of Government, the winning over by persuasion, intimidation or social boycott of police, other officials and of all who assist Government, the rendering of police station useless and the seizure of police arms, the stoppage of recruitment, a no-rent campaign, regular hartals, the prevention of schools and colleges from functioning and the systematic tampering with the means of communication generally.

Dwelling on the activities of Malaviya, the circular informed district police chiefs that he had apparently toured the whole Province, particularly visiting Meerut, Agra, Kanpur, Allahabad, Bareilly and Benares and distributed thousands of rupees for printing of leaflets and buying of firearms. It was pointed out that considerable support for the movement had come, and was still coming, from students, women, traders and the intelligentsia and that criminal elements were also being used in the attempt to overthrow the administration. The number of terrorist acts, such as planting and throwing of bombs, armed hold-ups, etc. had been considerable. [P. N. Chopra, ed., *The Quit India Movement: British Secret Documents*, pp. 204-12]

Another Special Branch circular, dated 4 December, noted a general decline in the movement as reflected in the distribution of leaflets and general propaganda, and attempts to foster enthusiasm "through more determined terrorist activity". The circular said that after the arrest of Malaviya, Acharya Jugal



Kishore had been appointed the "dictator" of the U.P. who had been directing operations from Delhi. It appeared that for the purposes of the movement the U.P. had been divided into three zones with headquarters at Agra, Benares and Kanpur. A separate organization was formed for carrying out revolutionary and terrorist acts, the responsibility for which had been entrusted to the Socialist group headed by Chandra Bhushan Shukla. The police recovered a large number of cast-iron bomb-shells from Delhi and Agra. In all districts police was alerted to look out for and apprehend Socialist Party leaders and in particular Jayprakash Narayan (who had escaped from jail in November 1942), Yogendra Shukla, Prem Kishan Khanna, Gopi Nath Singh, Chandra Bhushan Shukla, Baswan Singh, and Raghunath Prasad Kulshreshta. [Ibid, pp. 259-61]

After the close of the year 1942 the police in the U.P. had to deal largely not with overt mass action, violent or non-violent, such as processions, meetings, demonstrations and raids by crowds, but underground sabotage activity carried on by groups of dedicated young men under the inspiration and guidance of the Congress Socialist Party. Constantly kept on the run by the police these young men did not find making and throwing bombs an easy vocation, and when caught they were frequently meted out third-degree treatment.

There was, for instance the case of Radhe Shyam Sharma. Hailing from Gwalior State, Sharma was professor of chemistry at the Benares Hindu University. In the disturbances following 9 August he had joined the students in raising the banner of revolt. On 19 August, when the University was occupied by British and Australian troops, Sharma went underground. He made his way to Allahabad, walking the distance of 70 miles and wearing a disguise to evade the eyes of the police. Thence he travelled to Delhi, where he made contact with other revolutionaries and got down to manufacturing bombs. He procured shells from an iron-monger and explosives from a forest contractor, both from Gwalior. Sharma was arrested on 31 December 1942 while on his way to one of his ammunition dumps in Delhi. Follow-up raids on other dumps in different localities yielded 186 gelignite sticks, 183 detonators, 1200 feet of fuse, 30 pounds of gunpowder, 46 cast iron containers designed for bombs, 3 incendiary or explosive bombs, large quantities of chemicals and some documents. [Francis G. Hutchins, *Spontaneous Revolution*, pp. 292-94]



On 9 November 1942 Jayaprakash Narayan, General Secretary of the Congress Socialist Party, who had been serving a sentence in the Hazaribagh Central Jail in Bihar, dramatically escaped from prison, along with five other political prisoners. These were Ram Nandan Mishra, Jogendra Sukul, Suraj Narayan Singh, Saligram Singh and Gulali Sonar of the Hindustan Socialist Republican Army: All of them were members of the Congress Socialist Party.

After his escape Jayaprakash immediately set about infusing new life into the sabotage movement and putting the organization on a sound footing. He travelled first to Delhi, then to Bombay, Madras and Calcutta. In Calcutta a secret organization was formed. He then made his way to Nepal, accompanied by Suraj Narayan Singh and a lady, Vijaya. Nepal was conceived as a suitable centre for the Azad Dasta that Jayaprakash intended to bring into being. The Azad Dasta would be an organization of guerilla fighters, properly trained and motivated, who would carry on the underground resistance movement.

In a series of pamphlets he delineated the ideology and tactics of the movement as he visualized it. These were *To All Fighters For Freedom*, *A.B.C. of Dislocation*, *Instructions - Sabotage and Communications* and a number of others dealing with the technical aspects of sabotage activity. In the means he advocated, Jayaprakash was clearly not bothered to consider the issue of violence or non-violence. Yet he denied that he was departing from the policy of the Congress, as contrasted with the position held by Gandhiji. He wrote:

Gandhiji is in no event prepared to depart from non-violence.... Not so with the Congress. Then Congress has stated repeatedly during this war that if India became free ...it would be prepared to resist aggression with arms. But if we are prepared to fight Japan and Germany with arms, why must we refuse to fight Britain in the same manner? . . .

My own interpretation of the Congress position — not Gandhiji's — is clear and definite. Congress is prepared to fight aggression violently if the country became independent. Well, we have declared ourselves independent and also named Britain as an aggressive power; we are therefore justified within the terms of the Bombay resolution itself to fight



Britain with arms. If this does not accord with Gandhiji's principle, that is not my fault. The Working Committee and the A.I.C.C. have themselves chosen to differ from Gandhiji and to reject his conception of non-violence as applied to the war. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1942, Vol. II, p. 226]

Jayaprakash did not admit that the mass upsurge of August-September had been "suppressed", notwithstanding the fact that the enemy had brought into play his military power and unleashed a reign of unmitigated goondaism, looting, arson and murder to suppress it. But it was true that the revolt was "going through a period of low water". There were, Jayaprakash wrote, two important reasons for this. First, there was no efficient organization. The Congress, and "quite a considerable number of influential Congressmen" were not tuned to the pitch to which the revolution was to rise. The urgency and determination shown by leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Dr. Rajendra Prasad and Sardar Patel were lacking. Secondly, after the first phase of the rising was over, there was no further programme of national revolution placed before the people.

The complete overthrow of Imperialism was the objective. The whole countryside was seething with the most intense discontent, anger and thirst for revenge. The situation was favourable for the next assault. [*Ibid*, pp. 224-25]

The *A.B.C. of Dislocation* advocated the formation of "Azad Dastas", bands of guerilla fighters with proper technical and political training, to carry on sabotage activity and guerilla warfare. India had 250 districts. Each district would have a band of 250 "Azad" fighters, organized into five *jathas* of 50 each or 25 *jathas* of ten each. Every member of the "Azad Dasta" would take an oath, pledging himself to ceaseless fight till the Republic of India was established, to obey orders of his superiors, observe strict military discipline, and be prepared to suffer any punishment, including death, at the hands of his comrades in the event of failure to keep to his oath or of betrayal of the interest of the people.

The organization would have a hierarchy of commands:

Subedar at the Provincial level, Ziladar at the district level. Self-sufficiency in the matter of food and other necessaries was advocated, but if necessity arose the Dastas could "loot mail bags, small post offices ...and other stores of the usurpers". They were enjoined not to get mixed up with professional dacoits.



The Azad Dastas were conceived to serve as supplement to the main part of the revolution, an open rebellion of the whole people. They would "keep up and radiate the spirit of resistance and also be a source of training in the act of resistance by example to the people in general". They would guide the masses when they once again rose as they had in August 1942. [Arun Chandra Bhuyan, *The Quit India Movement*, pp. 114-15; Hutchins, *Spontaneous Revolution*, pp. 303-4]

A set of instructions was prepared dealing with the technical aspects of dislocation, such as manufacture and use of incendiaries and explosives. The necessary information for this was derived from *Military Pamphlet No. 7 of 1940* and the recommendations of the "U.S. Bureau of Mines".

Dealing with incendiary bombs the instructions read:

After a good deal of experiment we have evolved a simple and very inexpensive blend for our purpose, costing only about 4 annas for an 8 ounce charge, which would burn for at least 4 minutes and is capable of igniting even wood above it provided a clear air space of at least three inches is allowed over the charge for the flame to play with unimpeded air supply.

The bomb was to be assembled from cardboard, sawdust, sugar and toy balloons and was to be activated by sulphuric acid. Detailed information was supplied on the best way to manufacture and use such devices. [Francis G. Hutchins, *Spontaneous Revolution*, p. 306]

The Central Directorate in Bombay, which included, along with Socialists, such Congress leaders as Sucheta Kripalani and Sadiq Ali, did not wholly agree with the importance given to guerilla raids and bomb-throwing. In July 1943 the Bombay police seized a cyclostyled letter addressed by the Central Directorate to the Bihar Provincial Congress Committee. The letter explained that in the area around Bombay the targets chosen were mostly small, belonging to Government and mostly in villages. For instance mail runners, mail buses, small post offices, post boxes, dak bungalows, village records, small culverts, railroads, roads etc., were chosen as targets, which could be raided without elaborate training and equipment. The idea was that villagers carrying on their customary activities



should be able to conduct such operations. "Most of the raids," the letter said, "were surprise raids by small groups carried out surreptitiously. But not a few were open, by broad daylight, by big numbers sometimes consisting of from 30 to 150 persons from around the villages. It has been kept in view that these raids are not an end in themselves. They are meant to lead to mass action or mass upheaval one day. Therefore open action is always preferable."

8

Jayaprakash remained at large for about ten months from November 1942, when he escaped from jail, to the end of September 1943, when he was rearrested in the Punjab. During this period the guerilla movement made limited headway in parts of the U.P., Bihar and Bengal. But the hope entertained by Jayaprakash that within a few months another mass uprising might take place had not been realized. In a second letter addressed *To All Fighters for Freedom*, issued in September 1943, he admitted as much. But he laid the blame for this on the leadership, not on the masses, who, he said, could not be expected to move till they were moved by the strength shown by the leadership in efficiency and organization.

He, therefore, called upon the workers to strengthen their organization and fight on ceaselessly, if need be, for ten years. To give the masses the hope of a bigger struggle to come, he recommended an interim plan of mass propaganda and overt resistance centring on the scarcity of food. Under the guidance of Azad Dastas, people, he said, could be induced to loot Government grain shops. The country could yet be converted into "a seething cauldron in which the Empire can soon be boiled to death". [Arun Chandra Bhuyan, *The Quit India Movement*, pp. 116-17]

Jayaprakash made Bihar his area of operations. With the assistance of Gulali Sonar and Suraj Narayan Singh he started a guerilla training school in the jungles north of Jaleswar in the Nepalese territory, where, besides other training, musketry practice was provided to the recruits.

During this time underground resistance activity made considerable advance in Bihar. Several independent groups sprang up, headed by members of the C.S.P., Forward Bloc and old revolutionaries. They started their own training



schools for guerillas and resorted to dacoities for funds needed for their operations. In places Swaraj Panchayats were formed. In Muzaffarpur the guerillas tried to form a parallel government. Some of the guerilla groups were highly mobile and efficient in their functioning. A Government official reporting on the guerilla activities in the Sahibganj area, said:

The political organization around this district is such the like of which has never been seen. They have a code of signals by whistle ...signalling by light – both flashlight and oil. The rapidity of the movement and operation of them is incredible. [*sic.*]

He further reported that guerillas had captured gangmen's tools from engine sheds and signal stakes from keymen, and that they hampered repair work by carrying away trollies, tools etc. He expressed the view that the repair of railway and telephone lines would not be an easy matter. [Ibid, pp. 117-20]

In the spring of 1943 Ram Manohar Lohia went to join Jayaprakash in his hideout in Kachar district, where the latter had set up the central organization of his Azad Dasta. Lohia became the head of the radio and publicity department of the centre.

On 21 May 1943 the Nepalese police succeeded in arresting Jayaprakash, Lohia and three others. They were taken to Hanumannagar police station. On the following day a batch of 50 guerillas attacked the outpost and, after a shoot-out in which a police guard was killed and another injured, rescued the arrested men. The Government of India was annoyed. The five men, it said, could have provided information enabling it "to assess responsibility for the rebellion with some finality".

After the incident Jayaprakash and others of the group left Nepalese territory and moved into Bihar. Here the activity taken up consisted in activists being sent to cantonments to give political education to soldiers and to nearby coalfields to procure dynamite for blowing up bridges, etc. On 30 July Jayaprakash narrowly escaped being arrested by the police at Muzaffarpur where, along with Gulali Sonar, he had gone to collect money from the local zemindars. Jayaprakash Narayan at that time had at his disposal a band of fifty young men who were ready to sacrifice their lives to protect him. On 9 August 1943, the first



anniversary of the Quit India rebellion, a police outpost in Bhagalpur district was attacked. In the exchange of fire that ensued four guerillas were killed and many drowned in the river near by, while four policemen were injured. A Bihar police report said:

There was a series of armed encounters between the police and elusive guerillas operating in jungle terrain favourable to the latter. A number of rebels were killed and quantity of arms and ammunition recovered. About 1,200 arrests were made.

The report mentioned "uneasy alliances" between the guerillas and professional criminals and unemployed youth attracted to the terrorist ranks by political glamour. Only a small portion of money looted reached the guerillas. The report mentioned gruesome crimes and atrocities being committed by the guerillas against informers and defectors. [Ibid, pp. 121-22]

The arrest of Jayaprakash Narayan in September 1943 signalled the collapse of the guerilla movement. Differences within the ranks of the resisters on the question of violence and non-violence, which had been there from the very beginning, now led to a cleavage, with many underground workers renouncing violence and advocating such forms of resistance as satyagraha, revival of spinning and khadi and organization of Gram Sangathan for the settlement of disputes.

The police made use of the opportunity to intensify its operations against the guerillas. Large areas were cordoned off, collective fines were imposed on villages, relatives of resisters were arrested and informers and those helping the police were rewarded. A large number of guerilla leaders were arrested and a few shot dead. [Ibid, pp. 122-23]

In the Bombay Presidency the use of bombs was much more widespread and did a great deal more damage than in Bihar. According to an official estimate up to the middle of February 1943 there had been 375 bomb explosions, while 243 bombs were discovered before they could be set off. The number of Government servants killed and injured was five and eighty-two respectively,



while thirteen members of the public lost their lives in the explosions and 108 were injured.

Guerilla bands, using bombs and firearms, were active in Kolaba, Broach, Satara, Surat, Belgaum, Poona, Ahmedabad and Bombay city. In Kolaba a guerilla band was engaged in sabotaging the hydroelectric system. It had its hideout deep inside the jungle. Police raided the hideout on 31 Decembr 1942. In the gun battle that ensued the leader of the guerillas was shot dead. A large number of guns, bombs and cartridges were seized. [Ibid, pp. 124-25]

In Satara district the guerilla movement was so successful that a parallel government came to be formed, which successfully defied the might of the established authority from 1943 to almost 1946.

The marches of crowds to capture police stations, on the pattern seen in East U.P. and Bihar, took place in Satara in the last week of August 1942 and continued till the second week of September. In the course of these marches eleven persons lost their lives in police firing. Such frontal attack on the centres of British authority thus having proved ineffective, covert attacks on the means of communications and other sabotage activity were tried. There was cutting of wires on a large scale, burning of C.P.W.D. bungalows in rural areas, stealing of rifles from military and police and quite a few armed encounters with the police. In some areas forest land was seized.

The authorities came down on the movement with a heavy hand. Collective fines were imposed on the affected villages and indiscriminate arrests were made. By the end of 1942 there were some 2,000 people from Satara in jail.

It was realized that British power could not be broken until it was struck at the village level, until the supporters of the regime, the police *patils*, *watandars* and *sowkars* were attacked. People therefore started physically assaulting the members of this fraternity. Towards the end of November 1942 public courts began to be held to punish police informers. The form that the punishment usually took was for the offender to be tied up and severely beaten on the legs so as to render him incapable of walking for a few days at least. These public courts increasingly became a vogue for dealing with the supporters of the Raj. They were found to be effective, for the pressure from the police considerably lessened.



The underground activists of the district held two meetings, first in February and then in June 1943, and resolved to carry on the movement in the area even if the struggle on the countrywide level should be crushed. Y. B. Chavan opposed the idea, but he was not listened to. The public courts (*nyayadan mandals*) gathered tempo and evolved into a full-fledged parallel government (*prati sarkar*) in the first half of 1943, when the movement in the rest of the country had all but died down.

The core of the *prati sarkar* consisted of about one hundred or so underground activists, who moved from village to village setting up various voluntary bodies, such as Rashtra Seva Dal, Toofan Dal, etc., and overseeing the functioning of *nyayadan mandals*. Nana Patil, who had never been a member of the Congress, became the leader and the symbol of the *prati sarkar*.

The *prati sarkar* settled disputes between villagers, carried on sabotage activities against Government institutions and properties and also gave protection from the dacoits. Special care was taken to ensure protection to the honour of women and cases of harassment of women, or rape, were severely dealt with. [Gail Omvedt, "The Satara Prati Sarkar", in Gyanendra Pandey, ed., *The Indian Nation in 1942*, pp. 237-48]

10

The underground resistance movement, as distinguished from the mass uprising of August-September 1942, was largely confined to Delhi, the U.P., Bihar, Bengal and Maharashtra. In Assam and Orissa it did not quite take off. In the remaining Provinces of India it did not have any organization. [Arun Chandra Bhuyan, *The Quit India Movement*, p. 131]

The movement was the brainchild of the "Central Directorate of the A.I.C.C." a conglomerate of C.S.P. activists headed by Ram Manohar Lohia and Achyut Patwardhan. In the beginning activities involving sabotage that were recommended were presented as being in conformity with non-violence and it was emphasized that such activities should not result in loss of life. But gradually, especially after the appearance of Jayaprakash Narayan on the scene in November 1942, violence began to be justified as means of resistance to a violent rule, and the emphasis shifted from mass defiance of authority to the employment of hit-and-run guerilla actions.



Orthodox Congressmen represented on the "A.I.C.C." and those engaged in the movement in the Provinces, at this stage began to have doubts as regards the character of the movement. When news came that Gandhiji had gone on a fast in jail (10 February - 2 March 1943), the differences within the "A.I.C.C." between the Socialists and the others came into a sharper focus. Sadiq Ali and Sucheta Kripalani then decided to distance themselves from the group. Sadiq Ali took up constructive work in the U.P.

On 23 May 1943 orthodox Congressmen involved in the movement held a meeting at Benares. Sucheta Kripalani, Baba Raghav Das and Dwarkanath Kachru attended. The Socialists were represented by Aruna Asaf Ali. The meeting discussed the possibility of reviving the constructive programme.

For the observance of the first anniversary of the 9 August events the two groups devised two different programmes. The Congress group decided to have *Gandhi Yatras*, in which satyagrahis drawn from all over the country would stage marches to the Aga Khan Palace in Poona, Gandhiji's place of detention. In the district headquarters and other towns, too, there would be marches to the local jails on 9 August. The Socialists wanted to observe 9 August as the August Rebellion Day, with mass demonstrations, strikes, attacks on Government officials, throwing of bombs on police stations and other acts of violence. This they justified as "retaliation or violence used by the police and the military against the satyagrahis".

The Government did not allow the *Gandhi Yatra* to proceed as planned. The 126 satyagrahis who assembled at Poona from different parts of the country were immediately arrested. Schools and colleges here and there observed hartals and there were some bomb explosions in Bombay.

In Karnataka the Provincial Congress Committee took a definite stand against underground activists issuing literature in its name. The P.C.C. also decided that sabotage even in stray cases should cease.

In September 1943 Sucheta Kripalani formally resigned from the Central Directorate. Soon afterwards she, along with Ananda Prasad Chaudhary, R. R. Diwakar, G. Ramachandran, Baldeo Narayan Verma and R. S. Dhotre started an All India Satyagraha Council. The Council was active for some time in Bengal,



Bihar, Bombay and Madras, but it did not make much impact. It began by proclaiming the idea of organizing the masses for "open successive raids" on the Government without inflicting any injury on anyone and ended by deciding, on 13 May 1944, that "all aggressive programmes should stand suspended till such time as Gandhiji made his mind clear on the present position".

But by May 1944, about the time of Gandhiji's release from jail, Congress Committees everywhere were beginning to extricate themselves out of the position into which the Congress Socialist leadership had trapped them. In Bombay for instance, on 9 May 1944, Nagindas Master, President of the Provincial Congress Committee, issued a warning to Congress workers to sever all connection with Congress Socialists and not to distribute any literature without his prior approval. He expressed distress at the fact that the Congress machinery had supplied funds for use in underground activities. [Ibid, pp. 130-39]

11

The Quit India Movement, especially in the form that it assumed after the suppression of the mass demonstrations and mass violence of August-September, owed its conception, organization and direction to the Congress Socialist leadership – to Jayaprakash Narayan, Ram Manohar Lohia, Achyut Patwardhan, Aruna Asaf Ali and some others. The propaganda line these leaders took to make the programme of sabotage and guerilla warfare acceptable to the people was that the programme was in conformity with Gandhiji's exhortation to the people to do or die. Later they openly rejected the principle of non-violence. Ram Manohar Lohia admitted as much. In a talk on 26 January 1944 he said that he would not use sophistry to hide his intentions; he would not care for Gandhiji's condemnation nor would he try to justify his stand. Achyut Patwardhan and Aruna Asaf Ali in a statement in January 1946 said:

The Congress has more than once sought the freedom to interpret the general policy of non-violence in a form not acceptable to Gandhiji The Indian National Congress is a political organization pledged to win political independence for the country. It is not an institution for organizing world peace. Honestly we cannot go as far as Mahatma Gandhi wants us to go. Most of us felt that we were not able to take up the grave



responsibility of declaring that we would completely eschew violence when we had to deal with widespread internal disorder in this country or external aggression. [Ibid, pp. 112-13 Footnote]

Gandhiji was of course distressed. In the Aga Khan Palace in the numerous conversations in which those who had been keeping him company engaged him from day to day, he made it very clear that he could not condone any sort of violence on the part of those engaged in the fight for freedom. During his fast in February 1943 many political personalities had the opportunity to visit him and seek his views on the many issues facing them, including the one of making up their minds as regards permissibility of violence in the movement for freedom. On 16 February 1943, for instance, speaking to Shantikumar Morarji Gandhiji said:

Let no one think that all that is going on outside has my approval. I can never permit resort to bombs. There can be satyagraha involving damage to railway, telegraph and telephone lines, but my conception of such satyagraha is wholly different from the general conception. If I were outside I would tell the people about it. In it there could be no place for clandestine activities. It could only be a way of laying down one's life. People who would take up such satyagraha must give open notice to the authorities of their intention to cut wires, specifying the time and the place, and inviting them to post their military and police. Satyagrahis in ones and twos could then go there and be shot. Where millions have to be involved, there can be no place for secrecy.

I shall not ask those who are underground to surrender, because it is possible that they may have to rot in jails for years and years. But if they themselves feel that it is right to do so and that secretive ways could do harm to the country, then they should openly surrender themselves to the authorities.

The very policy of secrecy, Gandhiji further told Shantikumar, was rooted in violence. It was violence even to issue bulletins clandestinely. [Sushila Nayar, *Bapuki Karavas Kahani*, Sasta Sahitya Mandai, 1950, entry under 16 February 1943]



Speaking to Devadas Gandhi on 20 February 1943, Gandhiji said had he remained free he would have never allowed such things to continue. Something that could be pursued only clandestinely was doomed to fail. Secrecy was inimical to truth, he said, and so inimical to ahimsa. It could therefore have no place in his scheme of things. He had often wondered, Gandhiji went on, if he should not have disallowed even theoretical discussion on the permissibility of sabotage. It was possible that in that event what had been happening might have been averted. [Ibid, entry under 20 February 1943]

Soon after his release from the Aga Khan Palace Detention Camp on 6 May 1944, representative underground workers met him and placed their position before him. They argued that organized sabotage as part of the resistance movement had come to stay, and that it was legitimate. Gandhiji told them:

...the evil resides not in bridges, roads etc., which are inanimate objects, but in men. It is the latter who need to be tackled. The destruction of bridges, etc., by means of explosives does not touch this evil but only provokes a worse evil in place of the one it seeks to end. To sterilize it needs not destruction of roads, etc. but self-immolation of the purest type....

Sabotage is a form of violence. People have realized the futility of physical violence, but some people apparently think that it may be successfully practised in its modified form as sabotage. It lacked the quality of non-violence and could not take the place of full-fledged armed conflict.... National struggles could not be won by "wooden guns".

Gandhiji again and again deplored secrecy in the conduct of the struggle. He said:

No secret organization, however big, could do any good. Secrecy aims at building a wall of protection round you. Ahimsa disdains all such protection.... We have to organize for action a vast [mass of] people that have been crushed under the heel of unspeakable tyranny for centuries. They cannot be organized by any other than open, truthful means.

Was it then his view, Gandhiji was asked, that the August upheaval had retarded the country's freedom? — That all the heroism and courage shown by the people had been useless?



No, Gandhiji answered. In the historical process the country would be found to have advanced towards freedom through every form of struggle. But if the movement had shown the non-violence of his conception, the progress towards the goal would have been much greater. In that sense the sabotage activity had retarded the country's freedom. He had, Gandhiji said, the highest admiration for the courage, patriotism and spirit of sacrifice of people such as Jayaprakash Narayan. But Jayaprakash was not his ideal. [C.W.M.G., LXXVII, pp. 265-68]

On 28 July 1944 Gandhiji in a statement to the Press said:

The question most discussed with me by visitors is whether I approve of underground activities. These include sabotage, the publication of unauthorized sheets, etc.... Some have contended that destruction of property, including dislocation of communications ...should surely be counted as non-violence.... I say unhesitatingly that underground activities, even though utterly innocent in themselves, should have no place in the technique of non-violence. Sabotage and all it means, including destruction of property, is in itself violence. Though these activities may be shown to have touched the imagination and enthusiasm [of the people], I have no doubt that they have harmed the movement as a whole.

Gandhiji then placed before the workers the fourteenfold constructive programme, which if pursued, could take the country to its goal in the quickest manner possible.

He called upon the underground workers, if they shared his conviction, to discover themselves and take the risk of being imprisoned. [Ibid, pp. 429-30]

Gandhiji gave the same advice to Achyut Patwardhan and Aruna Asaf Ali. To Aruna Asaf Ali he wrote on 30 June 1944:

If you surrender yourself, you would do so to raise yourself and the country with you. The surrender won't be out of your weakness but out of your strength.

Both rejected Gandhiji's advice and continued their underground activities till the beginning of June 1946 when the warrants against them were cancelled. [Ibid, p. 343 Footnote 2]



The Quit India Movement, notwithstanding its deviation towards violence, remained very much a Congress movement, even though not conducted under the leadership of Gandhiji and the Working Committee and the A.I.C.C. The final message of the A.I.C.C. resolution of 8 August, as Gandhiji reminded Aruna Asaf Ali in the letter quoted above, was that each Congressman was to be the best judge of what was proper for him to do. Every Congressman was to be the bearer, in his own person, of the Congress message which he was to carry out according to his own lights. The vast numbers of Congress workers, who had remained out of jail because the regime had chosen to arrest only the leadership at all levels of the organization, tried to do exactly that, and being unable to make up their own minds, accepted such leadership as came along. As S. K. Patil observed in October 1944:

...99 per cent of Congressmen who remained behind after the arrest of prominent leaders did not know what exactly they were expected to do. This is the reason why they accepted without critical examination any guidance that came from anywhere and from any person whether authorized or competent to give it or not. [Arun Chandra Bhuyan, *The Quit India Movement*, p. 133 Footnote]

Politically some of the consequences of the movement proved detrimental to the Congress. For almost three years the Congress remained outlawed, its leadership in prison, its funds seized and the organization virtually destroyed. It was a godsend for the Muslim League. It was able during the political vacuum thus created to build itself up into a mass party by appealing to the worst communal passions of Muslims and trading on Muslim fears. During the three years from 1942 to 1945 the Muslim League built up a membership of nearly two millions, thus transforming itself into a formidable political power to be reckoned with, claiming parity with the Congress, and finally partition.

Yet, as Nehru observed later, the movement could not have been avoided. He said:

I don't think that the action we took in 1942 could have been avoided or ought to have been avoided. It might have been in slightly



different terms; that is a different matter. Circumstances drove us into a particular direction. If we had been passive then, I think we would have lost all our strength. [Michael Brecher; *Nehru*, p. 294]

But while Gandhiji and the leadership did not disown the movement, which had been conducted in their name and for the achievement of the objectives of the Congress, they nevertheless detached themselves from the violent deeds committed in the conduct of the movement. This distressed those who had during the movement become the exponents of violent methods. Jayaprakash Narayan and others felt let down. He noted in his jail diary on 5 August 1944:

A revolution is disowned because it failed.... I feel bitter because I find we have been badly let down – not I personally, because I openly preached violence and was, therefore, prepared in the event of failure for severe censure and excommunication. But thousands, rather lakhs, of Indian patriots have been let down.... Those thousands of unknown soldiers of independence who participated in the stirring events of 1942 did not stop to consider whether the upheaval that caught them in its surge and flung them onward was technically, in accordance with the niceties of political formulae, a Congress movement or not. It was sufficient for them to know that their leader had declared an "open rebellion". [Jayaprakash Narayan, *In the Lahore Fort*, Patna, 1947, pp. 81-82, quoted in Bhuyan, *The Quit India Movement*, p. 141]

The Quit India Movement has come to occupy a very important place in the history of the freedom movement in India. It did not quite result in the seizure of power, but it gave a demonstration of power, which went a long way towards convincing the British that they could not go on ruling India as before, that the nation had awakened and the only practical course left for them was to quit India.



CHAPTER XVI: GANDHIJI IN DETENTION: DEATH OF MAHADEV DESAI

1

Gandhiji remained in detention for a little over a year and nine months (9 August 1942 to 6 May 1944). This relatively short period of confinement came to Gandhiji with great disillusionment and despair, great personal grief and intense agony caused by the torment and turmoil the country was passing through, besides the sudden death of Mahadev Desai and the passing away of Kasturba after prolonged illness during which there were frequent pinpricks in connection with her treatment, etc.

The greatest disillusionment came from the perfidy of the British ruling clique, headed in India by Linlithgow. In the first place, Gandhiji felt, the Congress had at no stage in the war acted in a manner inimical to British and Allied interests. It could not support the British, but it had not actively opposed them. Repeatedly the Congress had voiced sympathy for the British cause and showed its readiness to join them in the crusade against the Fascist powers if only India were given a modicum of freedom. Indeed in the Quit India resolution itself the A.I.C.C. had asserted that a free India would assure the success of the Allies in the war "by throwing all her great resources in the struggle for freedom and against the aggression of Nazism, Fascism and Imperialism".

In view of the position taken by the Congress, Gandhiji refused, till the end, to entertain the possibility that the British might be secretly perfecting plans to strike a crushing blow at the Congress.

Then there was the personal factor. Gandhiji had come to believe over the years that he had established a personal bond of friendship with Linlithgow and at every conceivable occasion he had given expression to this feeling. As early as on 5 October, 1940, after the Viceroy had turned down his plea for a degree of freedom of speech, Gandhiji, while regretting the Viceregal decision, had nevertheless said: "He and I have become friends never to be parted." [C.W.M.G., LXXIII, p.78]



Similarly in his speech at the A.I.C.C. after the passing of the Quit India resolution, Gandhiji had dwelt at some length on his friendship with Linlithgow. He had said:

It is a friendship which has outgrown official relationship. Whether Lord Linlithgow will bear me out I do not know; but there has sprung up a personal bond between him and myself.... His son-in-law, the A.D.C., was drawn towards me. He fell in love with Mahadev more than with me, and Lady Anne and he came to me [to seek my blessings]. She is an obedient and favourite daughter [of the Viceroy]. I take interest in their welfare. [C.W.M.G., LXXVI, p. 297]

Gandhiji had been pained by the way British propaganda had been consistently endeavouring to paint the Congress and himself black before world opinion. In the same speech he had asked:

Is it right for you to distrust us? Is it right to distrust such an organization with all its background, tradition and record of over half a century and misrepresent its endeavours before all the world by every means at your command? Is it right, I ask, that by hook or crook, aided by the foreign Press ...you should present India's stand in shocking light? [Ibid, p. 399]

There had been rumours, based on hints emanating from sources in the administration itself that the Government was planning to strike at the Congress as soon as the resolution was passed by the A.I.C.C. Gandhiji, and most of the leaders on the Working Committee, refused to lend credence to the rumours. Gandhiji was so sure that the Government had no reason to arrest him that he told Congressmen to take up spinning and devote themselves to constructive activities while he pursued negotiations with the Viceroy on the basis of the Quit India resolution — negotiations that would take at least two or three weeks to conclude. [Ibid, p. 391]

The city had been full of rumours on the evening of 8 August that Gandhiji would be taken into custody the following morning. Mahadev Desai was kept awake all night by constant phone calls from people concerned about the impending arrest of Gandhiji. Gandhiji, when informed, was categorical. "After



my speech of yesterday," he said, "they dare not arrest me. I cannot think they can be so foolish. But if they do, it will mean that their days are numbered." [Sushila Nayar, *Bapuki Karavas Kahani*, 1988, p. 32]

According to a Bombay C.I.D. report dated 29 September not a single member of the Working Committee had had any apprehension of being arrested on the morning of 9 August and none of them had made any preparations in anticipation of such an eventuality. The report proceeded:

What we do know however is that information reached Mr. G. D. Birla from Delhi, presumably by telephone, round about midnight on the 8th August, to the effect that Gandhi was to be arrested immediately. From the same gentleman we also learnt that when he conveyed this information to Gandhi the latter said that he did not believe it, in view of the fact that he had publicly expressed his intention of writing to H.E. the Viceroy, and consequently no action would be taken until the Viceroy had received his letter. Anyway when the police party visited him in his bungalow at 5 a.m. on the 9th August, Gandhi certainly did not expect to be arrested for the simple fact that he was not ready and his belongings had to be hurriedly collected before he was removed.

The same source reported that several functions had been arranged for 9 August: a monster flag salutation at 8 a.m., at which Nehru would be present, followed by his address to students at 9 a.m., then a public meeting to be addressed by Gandhiji at 5 p.m. and a meeting later in the evening of presidents and secretaries of P.C.C.s to be addressed by Gandhiji.

As for the allegation that Gandhiji and the A.I.C.C. had instigated sabotage and violence, the report said:

If, as alleged, it was decided to boycott courts and police, organize extensive strikes, sabotage telegraphic communications, destroy the larger bridges, win over the military by contact and leaflet propaganda, cut off grain supplies to cities not supporting the movement, it is interesting to note that the first circular leaflet picked up in Bombay on the 10th August refers only to a general hartal, meetings, disobedience of bans on meetings, resistance against the Salt Laws, appeals to students,



Government servants, soldiers and Indian States and women and *omits any reference to any of the subjects mentioned by your informant.* (Emphasis added) [P. N. Chopra, ed., *Quit India Movement: British Secret Documents*, pp. 195-96]

It is thus clear from the British intelligence sources themselves that the authorities were fully aware that in the movement that Gandhiji contemplated launching, destruction of communications and indeed violence of any kind would not be part of the programme. Yet Linlithgow, in league with Amery and Churchill, had chosen, for the purpose of the Empire, to misinterpret and distort the words and actions of Gandhiji, the purpose being to crush the Congress in order to still the cry of India for freedom.

Gandhiji's disillusionment with Linlithgow and the pain the latter had caused him found expression in the parting letter he wrote to that Viceroy on the eve of his departure from India on the conclusion of his term. In the letter, dated 27 September 1943, Gandhiji wrote:

Of all the high functionaries I have had the honour of knowing, none has been the cause of such deep sorrow to me as you have been. It has cut me to the quick to have to think of you as having countenanced untruth, and that regarding one whom, at one time, you considered as your friend. [C.W.M.G., LXXVII, p. 201]

Gandhiji had carried on his quarrel on behalf of India with several Viceroys before: Chelmsford, Reading, Irwin, Willingdon and later Wavell – all of them inimical to the Congress and the nationalist cause. Yet Gandhiji had not been driven to describe any of them to their face as having been to him the cause of "deep sorrow". They had the job of safeguarding British Imperial interests and they acted to type. Gandhiji had no complaints. But Linlithgow deceived Gandhiji. Posing as a friend he acted as a foe. The anguish that this caused Gandhiji continued to rack him throughout his period in jail, as is borne out by the numerous letters he exchanged with that Viceroy.

British perfidy and malice towards the Congress were further demonstrated in the high-handed manner in which the British police executed



the arrests. As soon as Gandhiji found himself lodged in the Aga Khan Palace Detention Camp, he voiced his protest. On 10 August he sent off a letter to the Governor of Bombay, expressing his sense of deep humiliation at the way others arrested with him were ordered into lorries, while he himself, Sarojini Naidu, Mirabehn and Mahadev Desai were taken in a motor-car. This time, he wrote, he proposed to accept no privileges and comforts which his comrades might not receive, except for the special food which his body needed.

He also drew the attention of the Governor to the rough-handling by an English sergeant of a co-worker who had been shoved into the lorry as if he was a log of wood. The struggle, he wrote, had become bitter enough without such scenes.

Gandhiji further requested the Governor that Sardar Patel and his daughter Manibehn, who had been arrested along with him, should be placed in the Aga Khan Palace. Sardar Patel, Gandhiji said, had been suffering from intestinal problems and he had been personally regulating his diet, etc. He made the point that on general grounds all those arrested with him for the same offence should be lodged with him, though not on the imperative grounds applicable in the case of Sardar Patel.

Gandhiji also asked for newspapers to be supplied to him, so that he could correct the grossly incorrect Government propaganda. [Ibid, pp. 404-5]

The Bombay Governor sought instructions from the Viceroy in the matter. Linlithgow wrote to him on 13 August:

My present view is that there should be a mild but very definite change in our attitude towards Gandhi and his complaints, and that he should be made to feel that he has damaged his reputation and reduced his status by what he has done. I think further privileges should be refused firmly but very politely.

Lumley was further instructed not to enter into any direct correspondence with Gandhiji and that the Collector of Poona should be sent to tell him that his request that Sardar Patel and his daughter should be brought to the Aga Khan Palace could not be acceded to and that he could not be given newspapers. The



Viceroy warned that the Collector should not allow himself to be won over by Gandhiji's charm. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol II, p. 683]

On 14 August, five days after his arrest, Gandhiji, for the first time, unburdened himself in a letter to Linlithgow. He told the Viceroy that the Government of India had been "wrong in precipitating the crisis", that they should have waited at least till he had initiated mass action. Had he been given an opportunity he would have dealt with every difficulty and would not have hastily begun action. Was the raising of demand for independence, which the British were pledged to concede, such a challenge that it could only be met by repression?

Gandhiji refuted the assertion contained in the Government of India resolution that the Congress had been making "dangerous preparations" for unlawful and violent activities directed towards interruption of communications, organizing of strikes, tampering with the loyalty of Government servants, interference with defence measures and the like. It was, Gandhiji wrote, a distortion of reality. Violence had never been contemplated at any stage.

Referring to the British offer that after the war India would have the freedom of decision to device for herself a form of Government embracing all and not only a single party, Gandhiji asserted that unless British power withdrew from India there was little chance of all parties coming to an agreement, for there were parties which really did not want independence. A truly representative Government, whether provisional or permanent, could be formed only after the end of British rule, declared Gandhiji.

Gandhiji made light of the claim advanced in the Government resolution that they had to discharge the responsibility of defending India and safeguarding India's interests. It was the mockery of truth after the experience of Malaya, Singapore and Burma. To check Nazi and Fascist aggression freedom of India was imperative, Gandhiji argued. It was not so much the Allied cause that weighed with the British Government, it had been the unexpressed determination to cling to the possession of India. The Government resolution, Gandhiji wrote, reeked of falsehood.

Gandhiji ended the letter by pleading with the Viceroy to reconsider the



whole policy of the Government of India. [Ibid, pp. 702-05]

The letter, communicated to the Viceroy by the Governor of Bombay over the telephone on 17 August, left the former unmoved. He told his Council and informed Amery that he proposed to tell Gandhiji in polite but concise terms that he could not accept his criticism of the Government of India resolution nor could he accede to Gandhiji's request that the whole policy of the Government should be reconsidered.

On 22 August he formally sent his reply to Gandhiji along the lines indicated. [Ibid, pp. 753, 786-87]

3

On 15 August 1942 Gandhiji and his small group of companions at the Aga Khan Palace were struck by a calamity so stunning and of such magnitude that it left everyone dazed and paralyzed. Mahadev Desai, Gandhiji's scholarly and devoted companion and secretary since 1917, had a sudden asystole of the heart and passed away in a matter of a few minutes. The present author and Dr. Bhandari, Inspector General of Prisons, who happened to be visiting, did all they could by way of emergency medical help, but the case proved to be beyond any help. What added to the shock and trauma of the tragedy was the fact that so far as was known Mahadevbhai had had no history of a heart attack and had not suffered from hypertension. The only symptoms he had ever shown were occasional fits of giddiness. In retrospect there must have been attacks of asystole which now can be controlled with pacemakers.

The loss to Gandhiji was unbearable. But he had to bear it and put on the veneer of philosophic calm that he did not feel. He requested Bhandari that Vallabhbhai Patel be brought over from wherever he was. Bhandari, after consulting his superiors, told Gandhiji that that was not practicable, as Vallabhbhai was not in the Poona prison. Gandhiji then asked if the body could be handed over to friends and relatives of the deceased. The I.G. Prisons said this could not be done but that the authorities could take over the body and make arrangements for the cremation. Gandhiji was flabbergasted. "Could a father hand over the body of a son to strangers!" he exclaimed. He asked that he be permitted to cremate the body himself in the Palace compound. Bhandari again



phoned Bombay and after much persuasion was able to secure permission for Gandhiji to carry out the cremation in the Aga Khan Palace compound.

Gandhiji was asked if he wished to send a message to Mahadevbhai's people. He said he would like to do so if the message was allowed to go without tampering. This was agreed to. Gandhiji then dictated a telegraphic message addressed to Chimanlal Shah, Manager of the Sevagram Ashram, in the following terms:

Mahadev died suddenly. Gave no indication. Slept well last night. Had breakfast. Walked with me. Sushila jail doctors did all they could, but God had willed otherwise.... Mahadev has died yogi's and patriot's death. Tell Durga [wife], Babla [son Narayan Desai] and Sushila [step- sister] no sorrow allowed.... Advise Durga remain Ashram but she may go to her people if she must. Hope Babla will be brave and prepare himself fill Mahadev's place worthily.

Gandhiji had insisted that the message should go as an express telegram. Later it was discovered that it had been posted as a letter, leading to stiff protest by Gandhiji to the Government of Bombay Home Secretary on 19 September 1942.

The funeral was over by 5 p.m. Gandhiji had remained standing by the burning pyre for full three hours and he was exhausted, physically and emotionally. So was everybody else. [Sushila Nayar, *Bapuki Karavas Kahani*, pp. 70-92; *C.W.M.G.* LXXVI, pp. 410-11, 413-14]

After the death of Mahadevbhai life in the detention was no longer the same. A pall of gloom hung over the place, and as people went about their daily chores they were pursued by the thought of tragedy that had struck them. The loss to Gandhiji was irreparable. Pyarelal, the only other person who could worthily do justice to the role of Gandhiji's secretary in the absence of Mahadevbhai, was lodged in another jail. Consequently Gandhiji had to make do with such inadequate help as the present author could render him in dealing with his correspondence.

The author was constantly troubled by the nagging thought that perhaps all that could have been done by way of medical help for Mahadevbhai had not



been done. Perhaps, for instance, if adrenaline had been administered to him through intracardiac injection it might have revived his heart's functioning. But at the time nobody had thought of it. Besides who knew whether Gandhiji, if the suggestion had been made, would not have put his foot down and disallowed it on grounds of non-violence. Gandhiji advised the author not to dwell on futile regrets. His view was that Mahadevbhai had accomplished his life's work in 50 years and there had been no cause left for him to go on living.

The place where Mahadevbhai had been cremated lay a little distance away from the barbed-wire fence enclosing the house. Gandhiji, accompanied by other detainees, would go there morning and evening, lay flowers on the spot and recite Chapter XII of the *Gita*, the Path of Bhakti — devotion. But after three days, when the ashes had been collected and stored, orders came from the Government that he and the other detainees must not any more step out of the barbed-wire fence. Kateli, the detention camp jailor, was himself distressed by the high-handed dictat. He offered to lay the flowers at the samadhi himself on behalf of Gandhiji. He also offered to have the bushes cleared that impeded the view of the samadhi from the barbed-wired gate. He had stones placed at the site in the shape of a rectangular platform to mark off the site. From the fourth day onwards, morning and evening, Gandhiji and his little group stood by the closed barbed-wire gate gazing at the samadhi and reciting the prayers while flowers were placed on it on their behalf. [Sushila Nayar, *Bapuki Karavas Kahani*, pp. 92-103]

4

On 26 August, the Inspector General of Prisons came with the orders that Gandhiji could receive newspapers. He asked Gandhiji to give a list of newspapers and books that he would like to have to the jail authorities.

This change of heart on the part of the rulers came more from the squabble of the Viceroy with one of his Executive Councillors than from any other circumstance. It came about in the following way, as became known much later.

After the arrests of 9 August, Sir C. P. Ramaswami Aiyar, who had joined the Viceroy's Executive Council as Member for Information and Broadcasting on 3 August and, as a Councillor, had advocated a hard line against Gandhiji, was



troubled by pangs of conscience. On 12 August he took it into his head to approach the Viceroy with a request that he be allowed to fly to Poona, meet Gandhiji and beg him to call off the civil disobedience movement. The Viceroy turned down the request. But he was left wondering what C.P. was after.

On 15 August Sir C.P. again tackled the Viceroy, repeating his request, and saying it had become a matter of religious conviction with him. The Viceroy was again left wondering as to the motives of Sir C.P., who had been regarded "completely dependable and solid".

Sir C.P. then addressed two letters to the Viceroy. In the first he adverted to acts of sabotage and violence going on all over the country and the necessity for him to acquaint Gandhiji with what was going on and persuade him to raise his voice against the outburst of violence. Gandhiji was the only person, C.P. emphasized, whose voice was "probably the only one that will be effectual". If the Viceroy considered that he, as member of the Executive Council, should not pursue such a course, Sir C.P. said, he might be "released" to enable him to carry on the work that he considered necessary without fear of any embarrassment to the Government.

In the second letter he reiterated his resolve to resign from the Council and enclosed a draft announcement saying he had resigned in order to oppose "mass action and concerted hooliganism that have flared up" in the country and to see Gandhiji and "appeal to him to set his face against" the campaign of violence.

In yet another letter, written on the 19th, C.P. again requested the Viceroy for permission to see Gandhiji, whether officially or non-officially, to forestall the Muslim League, which, the newspapers had reported, was anxious to have negotiations with Gandhiji. He also criticized the suppression of the Press by the Government.

The Viceroy did not relent. However, one upshot of this was that on 19 August the matter of letting Gandhiji see the newspapers, including the back numbers, was brought before the Council. The Council expressed the view that if Gandhiji "really believed in non-violence, the revelation of what had taken place since his incarceration might have some effect upon him". The Viceroy was doubtful, but, he wrote to Amery:



As it is most important if we can to keep whole of my team, and in particular to keep C.P. if one can do so cheaply, I accepted their view and am so informing Lumely. Lumely had independently suggested that time had now come to allow the Ahmadnagar detenus to correspond on purely family matters with their families. That also was accepted by the Council and as they have been cut off for at least ten days and it will be a few days more before working arrangements can be made, I am not unduly disturbed by it. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. II, pp. 668, 720, 724-30, 751-52]

Gandhiji being allowed to have newspapers was thus a side effect of the feud between the Viceroy and one of his loyal Councillors.

But if the Viceroy thought that with Gandhiji being allowed access to newspapers Sir C.P. would no longer consider it necessary to see him, since what Sir C.P. could tell Gandhiji, the latter could learn from the newspapers, he was mistaken.

On 20 August C.P. wrote to the Viceroy referring to a letter Gandhiji had written to a Muslim Leaguer on 8 August saying that the Congress would have no objection to the British Government transferring all the powers it exercised to the Muslim League "on behalf of the whole of India, including the so-called Indian India", and calling it a menacing move which should be countered. He wrote:

This sinister move has finally determined me to take my gloves off and definitely and publicly to arouse the States to a sense of impending danger....

I am now convinced that this work cannot be done from within the Executive Council.... My decision to resign my present office is thus final.

Sir C.P., Linlithgow informed Amery, had shifted his ground. Earlier he had wanted to resign in order to deal directly with Gandhiji. Now he wished to resign in order to counter by every means in his power the threat which he saw developing to the Indian States. The latter reason was better from the point of view of the Government, he wrote. But he was still not clear as to the real motives of Sir C.P. [*Ibid*, pp. 758-61, 765-66]



As asked, Gandhiji gave the jail authorities on 27 August a list of daily newspapers and weekly and monthly journals – 16 in all. As regards the permission granted to the security prisoners that they could write to their families exclusively on family matters Gandhiji expressed his difficulty. In a letter dated 27 August 1942, to the Secretary to the Home Department, Bombay, he wrote:

...it seems that the Government do not know that for over thirty-five years I have ceased to live family life and have been living what has been called Ashram life in association with persons who have more or less shared my views.... Nor can I be confined to writing about personal and domestic matters. If I am permitted to write at all, I must give instructions about many matters ...[that] have no connection with politics which are the least part of my activities.

Gandhiji in this connection mentioned the affairs of the All-India Spinners Association and the Andrews Memorial Fund, about which he must send instructions.

He further drew the attention of the Government to the fact that though he had been offered the company of Pyarelal at the time of his arrest, Pyarelal had not been sent to him, nor had he been able to get any information about Sardar Patel, who had been suffering from intestinal trouble and had been under his care. [Sushila Nayar, *Bapuki Karavas Kahani*, p. 106, *C.W.M.G.*, LXXVI, pp. 412-13]

The Government took nearly a month to answer the letter. The answer, when it came in the form of letter dated 22 September, was stiff and negative. Gandhiji was asked to furnish a list of the inmates of the Sevagram Ashram with whom he wished to correspond on personal and domestic matters only. His request that he should be allowed to write and receive letters on certain other matters was rejected.

Gandhiji informed the Government on 26 September that since he might not refer in his letters even to non-political matters mentioned in his letter of 27 August, he could not exercise the privilege extended by the Government.



[C.W.M.G., LXXVI, pp. 415-16]

Towards the end of August Gandhiji in his conversations began to voice his feeling that the Government could not keep him and others in jail for more than six months. He would say: "They cannot but release us. They cannot keep us imprisoned for years without trial. And on what charges can we be tried? Can they try us on the charge that we intended to hold meetings and make speeches? Mere intention, unless acted upon, cannot be deemed a penal offence."

India, he thought, would be a changed country at the end of six months, whether the struggle succeeded or did not succeed. [Sushila Nayar, *Bapuki Karavas Kahani*, pp. 108-10]

Delivery of old issues of newspapers to Gandhiji took some time and it was only on 10 September that he received the back numbers of *The Bombay Chronicle*. It cut him to the quick to observe that the reaction to the news of Mahadevbai's death had been muted and restricted. The Press had featured tributes from Vaikunth Mehta and S. A. Brelvi, but that was about all. After all, Gandhiji said, Mahadevbai had died as a prisoner. His blood was on the head of the Government. Had he not been in jail it was conceivable that he might have been alive. In jail he had been eaten up by anxiety for the country. That anxiety had killed him. He had died for the country, and yet the country had remained silent at his death. Gandhiji recollected that in 1931, when he had been travelling to Karachi from Delhi to attend the Congress after the hanging of Bhagat Singh, there had been crowds at every station, shouting: "Where is Bhagat Singh? Bring us Bhagat Singh." No such cry had been raised for Mahadev. But it could be that being engaged in a life-and-death struggle people had no thought of anything else. Still it rankled. [Ibid, pp. 117-18]

On 11 September the newspapers carried the report of a statement made by Winston Churchill in the House of Commons on 10 September. Churchill said that the Congress party did not represent the whole of India, that the recent activities of the Congress might well have been aided by the Japanese fifth-column and that fewer than 500 persons had been killed in police action in the disturbances throughout India. He added that Gandhiji and others would be kept in jail till the trouble subsided. He again repeated that the 90 million Muslims, 50 million Depressed Classes and 95 million subjects of the Princes were opposed



to the Congress. In all, he said, these three large groupings made up 235 millions out of India's 390 millions. Then there were many Hindus, Sikhs and Christians who deplored the policy of the Congress, which had abandoned the policy of non-violence and was engaged in promoting disorder, looting of shops and sporadic attacks upon the police, accompanied by revolting atrocities. The martial races of India, Churchill added, would never consent to be ruled by the Congress. "The situation in India at this moment," Churchill concluded, "gives no occasion for undue despondency or alarm." [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1942, Vol. II, pp. 344-45]

The report made Gandhiji's blood pressure shoot up alarmingly to 188/112-116. "Any kind of untruth and deceit," he said, "makes me lose my temper."

6

Memory of Mahadevbhai continued to occupy the thoughts of Gandhiji as of everyone else at the detention camp. Permission to visit the samadhi having been restored, Gandhiji religiously went there every morning and evening. Frequently he would reminisce about the departed companion. "Mahadev," he said once, "was my spare body. Maganlal went, Jamnalal went and then Mahadev. All of them were unique in their different ways. What Maganlal did Jamnalal or Mahadev could not have done, and what Jamnalal did the other two could not have done. And yet I would not describe either Jamnalal or Maganlal as my spare body. That epithet applies only to Mahadev." [*Sushila Nayar, Bapuki Karavas Kahani*, pp. 130-31]

The newspapers, operating under strict censorship, continued to present a very one-sided picture of the events happening outside and had been forced to become a vehicle of Government propaganda against the Congress. Spokesmen of the British Government felt free to mouth vicious lies about Gandhiji and the Congress leadership with the latter having no opportunity to counter them. Thus in the British Parliament, replying to a debate on India on 11 September, Amery, twisting and distorting what Gandhiji had written, quoted him as saying that though no doubt non-violent way was the best, where that did not come naturally — and it did not come naturally to most people, Amery had added in parenthesis — violent way was both necessary and honourable and inaction was rank



cowardice and unmanly. Amery cited instances of sabotage and violence – 300 railway stations attacked, 24 cases of derailment; 65 police stations attacked, two police officers burnt alive and so on, and declared that it all had been specifically planned in accordance with the general directions given by the Congress. Justifying his all-out war against the Congress and its leadership, he said:

We were confronted with something very serious and if the organization of that movement had been allowed to develop for several weeks while a smokescreen of discussion as to whether the British would leave India was going on, the result might have been disastrous.... It would have made it impossible to defend India or relieve China ...and it is impossible to resist the conclusion that this movement was in its main outline deliberately organized and intended by those who unfortunately succeeded in establishing control over the Congress movement. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1942, Vol. II, p. 352]

On 18 September, during a debate in the Central Legislative Assembly, Sir Sultan Ahmed, the Law Member, justified the decision taken by the Viceroy's Executive Council to suppress the Congress. "We were aware," he said, "of the preparations that were being made in the name or on behalf of the Congress, for the various acts of sabotage, and if there was any doubt about the accuracy of the estimate that we made of the situation at that time that doubt is completely dispelled by the events that have followed."

B. R. Ambedkar, the Labour Member, said there was no reason to suppose that if the Congress leaders had not been arrested they would have kept their followers non-violent. There had been a virtual landslide in the Congress policy of non-violence. Congressmen, he asserted, were saturated with violence under the very nose of Gandhiji himself.

M. S. Aney, who, some eight years earlier had acted as President of the Congress, winding up the debate on behalf of the Government, justified even the police excesses. He said that the Government had to meet an uncommon situation. In putting down "riotous and rebellious people" force had to be used and a certain degree of latitude had to be given to the persons who were on the spot. As for arresting the Congress leaders his view was that "the collective wisdom of the Council was right".



Not having allowed Gandhiji time to meet the Viceroy, Aney said, was also the right decision. The A.I.C.C. resolution had left no scope for negotiations and an interview between Gandhiji and the Viceroy would have done no good. Gandhiji would only have said to the Viceroy: "My friend, here is the resolution. It is in the interest of England and the world. If you do not give that demand God help you." [Ibid, pp. 151-56]

Gandhiji did not mind the fulminations of Sir Sultan Ahmed and Dr. Ambedkar against him and the Congress. Nothing better, he said, could have been expected of them. Dr. Ambedkar had always been opposed to him, and even if Dr. Ambedkar were to kill him he would understand. But M. S. Aney of all people! That was the unkindest cut of all. After Aney's performance, he said, with what face could he accuse the British of any sins. Only a few years earlier he had appointed Aney the dictator during a satyagraha struggle. He had been so close to him. He had praised him to the Viceroy and prevailed upon him to take him into his Executive Council. How could he now tell the Viceroy that Aney was lying? It was like Rajaji saying things against him. After what Aney had said, Gandhiji said, he no longer had the urge to write to the Government. [Sushila Nayar, *Bapuki Karavas Kahani*, pp. 132-33]

But write he did. In a letter to the Home Secretary, Government of India, written on 21 September but posted two days later, he said:

In spite of the chorus of approval sung by the Indian Councillors and others of the present Government policy in dealing with the Congress, I venture to assert that, had the Government but awaited my contemplated letter to His Excellency the Viceroy and the result thereafter, no calamity would have overtaken the country. The reported deplorable destruction would have most certainly been avoided.

...I claim that the Congress policy still remains unequivocally non-violent. The wholesale arrest of the Congress leaders seems to have made the people wild with rage to the point of losing self-control. I feel that the Government, not the Congress, are responsible for the destruction that has taken place.

Gandhiji suggested that the only right course for the Government was to release the Congress leaders, withdraw all repressive measures and explore ways



and means of conciliation. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. II, pp. 1002-3; C.W.M.G. LXXVI, pp. 414-15]

The Home Department on 5 October informed the Viceroy's office that it proposed to send Gandhiji a mere oral acknowledgment of the letter through the officer in charge of the detention camp. This was done. The letter was not even included in the correspondence between Gandhiji and the Viceroy released to the Press, leading to a protest by Rajagopalachari on 9 March 1943, and a question by Sorenson in the House of Commons on 24 June 1943 why no reference had been made to it either by the Viceroy or the Secretary of State. [C.W.M.G., LXXVI, p. 415 Footnote]

Clearly the Government found Gandhiji's explicit statement of his and the Congress position damaging for its image.

7

Soon after arriving at the Aga Khan Palace Gandhiji settled down to a routine of study – spiritual and other. He took up regular reading of the Bible and the Koran and studied Arabic and Urdu.

On 27 August he also took up writing, selecting health for his subject. During his South African period he had written in 1913 a series of articles on health – 34 in all — which had been published serially in *Indian Opinion* under the title *General Knowledge About Health*. The articles were later brought out in book form under the title *Guide to Health*, which gained a wide readership in India and abroad and was translated into several European languages. Gandhiji noted that it had become the most popular of all his writings.

It occurred to Gandhiji that a revised version of the work would be in order. He did not have with him at the Aga Khan Palace a copy of *Guide to Health*. But it did not matter, since his general approach to the question of health had remained the same and his ideas on the subject had not undergone any fundamental change in the thirty years that had elapsed. He was satisfied that he could place the same ideas before the readers in a revised form and under a new title: *Arogyani Chavi (Key to Health)*.

Gandhiji started with the Preface, which he finished on 27 August. On 28 August he began the first chapter and went on writing with regularity every day.



There were however gaps in between writing and he could finish the last chapter only on 18 December 1942. As instructed by him the present author translated each chapter, as he wrote it, into Hindustani and English under his supervision. The translations were again edited by him before they received their final shape. Gandhiji also meticulously and painstakingly prepared a detailed index of the topics dealt with in the booklet. [C.W.M.G., LXXVI, pp. 411-12; LXXVII, pp. 1-48]

Gandhiji had almost given up the hope of Pyarelal being sent to him, when on 11 September he suddenly arrived at the Aga Khan Palace. His arrival brought much relief to everyone. He right away took up a great deal of work, including physically ministering to Gandhiji by way of giving him massage, etc. Bapu could now also discuss with Pyarelal political, economic, social and spiritual questions, during the morning and evening walks.

Madame Curie's biography, written by her daughter Eve Curie, which Gandhiji read with much interest, greatly impressed him. He said of Madame Curie:

She was a real seeker and ascetic. No Indian scientist has had to put up with such severe hardships as she and her husband had to. Because of our English education we have taken to working like the English. There are so many laboratories, some run by the Government, some set up by the Tatas and other private individuals. A great deal of money is spent, but the results are disappointing. They are so many white elephants. I wish I could go to Paris and visit Madame Curie's house.

He recollected meeting Eve Curie, daughter and biographer of the great scientist, during the days of the Cripps mission in Delhi. She was representing the *New York Herald Tribune* and other newspapers in London and had interviewed Gandhiji in connection with the negotiations then going on with Cripps. "I wish," said Gandhiji, "I had known that young lady a little better." He then turned to the present author and said, "You must translate this book into Hindustani." [Sushila Nayar, *Bapuki Karavas Kahani*, pp. 169-70]

During one of his morning walks Gandhiji referred to the way English-speaking countries were devising plans to gain control of East African trade. Gandhiji said England was not the only country which had an eye on East Africa.



America was also with it in this. America had been spending enormous amounts of money on the war and it wanted returns for the money so spent. He expressed the hope that America would not join in the exploitation of India. He expressed his admiration for the valiant resistance being put up by the Russians. If the British should win the war, he declared, it would be in a great measure due to Russian valour. Gandhiji said he could understand the concern of Jawaharlal regarding Russia. Should Russia go down fighting, it would be a great disaster. Who would then stand up for the poor? Russia had used violence and brute force, but it had done so for the poor. Still, Gandhiji said, he would stick to his own way, that of non-violence. It could be that his was only a day dream. Nevertheless he would not like to give it up.

Pyarelal said: "If we analyse history we find that it does not reveal the working of a moral purpose. The dialectics of history does not appear to have its basis in morality and immorality."

"That may be so," Gandhiji answered, "but there is an endeavor to impart to history a moral character."

The discussion turned to Utopian ideals. The peaks of mountains looked alluring from a distance, Pyarelal said, but on reaching them one discovered that there was nothing special about them. From there other peaks appeared attractive. Thus one proceeded from peak to peak, without stopping to think where it would all end. The dialectical process was without beginning and without end. The millennium, therefore, was destined for ever to remain a dream, however useful the idea of it might be to keep up the zest of the workers. In the primitive stages of human society myths were necessary to set man along the path of progress. But with all the scientific and historical experience behind him man was not any longer in the infantile stage where he would need the support of myths. He had matured.

Gandhiji said: "The millennium need not be dismissed as a myth simply because it cannot be found in its fulness in the real world. The point and line in Euclidian geometry do not exist in the physical world. They are only axioms. Yet Euclid's geometry and even physics could not proceed one step without assuming them to be true. Similarly even though the dialectical process of history is without beginning and without end, one cannot dismiss the millennium as an illusion."



In the second week of November 1942 newspapers came with the story that J.P. Bhansali had undertaken a fast of indefinite duration at Sevagram in protest against the Government's refusal to conduct a public enquiry into the British military brutalities at Chimur in the wake of the murder of two policemen by mobs in that village. The news was to the effect that Bhansalibhai had given up taking even water. Gandhiji was much perturbed.

On 24 November Gandhiji sent a wire to the Secretary, Home Department, Government of Bombay, seeking permission to communicate with Bhansalibhai in order to persuade him to give up the fast. The Government took its time to consider the matter. A reply came on 3 December. The Government could not permit Gandhiji to communicate with Bhansalibhai either by letter or telegram. But if he wished Bhansalibhai to give up his fast, the Government could convey Gandhiji's advice to him.

Meanwhile the newspapers continued to bring disturbing bits of news about Bhansalibhai. On 19 November, when he had completed one week of his fast, he had embarked on a journey to Chimur on foot, and having covered the 80 miles distance in 68 hours, had arrived there on 22 November. Most of the news about Bhansali was carried in Indian languages newspapers. English newspapers did not seem to have the guts to publish anything about his fast. [Ibid, pp. 188-200; C.W.M.G., LXXVI, pp. 417-18]

It appeared, however, that Muslim League newspapers were free to debunk the fast and make light of it. Jinnah's paper *Dawn* carried a series of damaging leaders about the fast accompanied by captions featuring Bhansali with a pot of glucose, suggesting that the fast was a sham. This performance on the part of *Dawn* pleased Linlithgow no end. Reporting on the matter to Amery he wrote : "The more we can show up these sham fasts and cast doubt, or even ridicule, on the whole technique of fasting, the better." [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. III, p. 546]

Full of anxiety as Gandhiji was about Bhansali, he carried on his usual routine and discussions between him and Pyarelal during the walks continued. Talking about Russia Gandhiji said: "Russia has achieved a great deal. But her



achievements will not be enduring so long as the means employed are not pure. Only what is achieved through truth and non-violence can be enduring."

Pyarelal said: "The laws of nature are eternal and immutable. They are not a product of human mind. Would the laws of capitalist development, as discovered by Marx, fall in the category of laws of nature? Or should one say that they have been formulated by human mind and derive their validity from historical experience of man, that they have no existence independent of man?"

Gandhiji replied: "Laws of nature certainly are independent of man. Even if there were no human beings the sun and other celestial bodies would continue to move in their courses, the pull of gravity would continue to operate, and so on. But the law of capitalism has its basis in human action and has been conceived in human mind. It cannot be true for all time. It cannot be immutable like the laws of nature." [Sushila Nayar, *Bapuki Karavas Kahani*, pp. 191-92]

On another occasion Pyarelal asked Gandhiji: "How can the poor rid themselves of the servitude of the rich?"

Gandhiji answered: "I shall say they can easily rid themselves of the servitude once they become conscious of their power. No one can make me do as he wants. I have the charkha. I can earn my livelihood from spinning. I do not have to depend on the charity of others. And what I can do others too can do. My whole conception of social transformation is based on this premise."

"Can we tell people that later we can secure State intervention for this?"

"Since we do not have State power, it is futile to promise State intervention. It was a coincidence that Congress came to form Ministries in the Provinces in 1937. Linlithgow had then been determined to reach a compromise. He himself was the chief architect of the Act of 1935. Then there was also pressure on him. So the Ministries came. But the British quickly found that they could not manipulate the Ministries as they wanted. Besides, all the Ministries were run by the Parliamentary Board. That sort of thing could not have continued for long. It so happened that the Congress Ministries had to resign on the question of India's participation in the War. Had it not been the War they might have had to resign for some other reason." [Ibid, pp. 192-94]



During another evening walk Gandhiji clarified to Pyarelal his conception of trusteeship. Trusteeship, he said, did not imply that there would be no laws for the operation of trusteeship. Trustees would have their commissions or salaries fixed by law. All that he wanted was that capitalists should not be eliminated. He wanted to make use of their talent. In Russia capitalists had been eliminated. They were told either to turn themselves into peasants or pay the price. What he wanted, Gandhiji said, was a change of heart on the part of capitalists. An atmosphere should be created in which capitalists would be led voluntarily to sacrifice their self-interest for the larger interest of society. Should an odd capitalist prove recalcitrant the force of law could be brought to bear against him. Capitalists, after all, constituted a small minority and they would have to bow to the will of the majority. He would take away a good many things from them, said Gandhiji, such as their titles, their feeling of class superiority, and so on, but he would not deprive them of their capital.

What he was not clear about yet, Gandhiji confessed, was the question of land ownership. He had not given sufficient thought to it. Clearly India's poverty could not be eradicated solely through khadi and village industries. Something had to be thought about the land. [Ibid, pp. 194-96]

Pyarelal remarked: "Many of the prescriptions of Karl Marx can be adopted without any change, with just this proviso that where he talks of violence we can insist on non-violence. Why should it be taken for granted that non-violence is less effective? Our experience teaches us the opposite. In either case one has to be prepared to lay down one's life. That being so, non-violent self-sacrifice will any day prove much more effective than violence."

Gandhiji answered: "Willingness to lay down one's life is of course an important condition. And here we find that the party adhering to violence possesses this quality in a much greater measure. Look at the harakiri squads of Japan. They think nothing of embracing death. They have raised self-destruction into a religion. The moment adherents of non-violence develop the spirit of self-sacrifice to that level, non-violence will surely surpass violence in its effect. Today it has to be admitted that the votaries of non-violence do not show the willingness to die in the same measure as the votaries of violence."



Pyarelal said: "The results that the votaries of violence wish to bring about cannot be enduring because of the inherent deficiency of the means employed. They also take longer to achieve. Take Russia. The State, according to Marxism, must in time become redundant and wither away. Yet in Russia, State apparatus is becoming even more rigid. Stalin cannot be held responsible for this, because in the philosophy of communism the role of the individual is held to be negligible. So what is happening is because of the inherent fault of the means employed."

Gandhiji replied: "An immature Marxist may perhaps be impressed by this argument, but not the hard-boiled people such as Jayaprakash, who are preparing themselves for a forcible seizure of power." He went on: "I do not blame them. From their experience they have come to the conclusion that non-violence will not work. They see our non-violent struggle as a preparation for the final violence struggle. I am not concerned with that. I have to test, as a scientist, what power non-violence has and what it can achieve. Until the world has before it the complete results of a scientific experiment, it will continue to view the hypothesis behind it with a great deal of doubt. I am trying to complete the experiment. What the result will be I do not know." [Ibid, pp. 198-200]

Another day, adverting to the principle of trusteeship advocated by Gandhiji, Pyarelal said: "The Congress Ministries, when they were in power, did not dare to touch the capitalists. It therefore seems doubtful if, when we have complete power, we shall be able to achieve anything in this direction within the framework of non-violence. That is so because capitalist interest is too deeply rooted in society, not excluding the Congress."

Gandhiji said: "I have the faith that non-violence can produce the desired results. When I first introduced satyagraha to the country there was a wave of awakening never seen before. People like Motilal Nehru came to feel that real pomp lay in sacrifice. The impression went round that freedom was round the corner. When freedom did not come and I went on making the conditions more and more strict, they stepped back. Another Anand Bhavan came up, more magnificent than the first. Even Jawaharlal made himself a party to it. Khadi remained, but the spirit of khadi had left.

"Then when elections came round, there was another wave of awakening, so that the Congress hardly incurred any expenditure on the election. Many had



doubted the victory of the Congress, for the organization had not money to spend on the election campaign. And yet the Congress was returned with a thumping majority, even in such places as Orissa, where there was hardly any Congress organization. What I want to say is that whenever a revolutionary moment comes, it brings with it a wave of awakening that transforms people and can bring about many results. Carried on the wave, people spontaneously and willingly make sacrifices. When such an awakening comes, capitalists too will be swept along. Today the capitalists are protected by the British bayonet. When that bayonet is not there to protect them, they will have to bow before the will of the people.

“If they do not, the alternative will be civil war. It is my feeling that achievement of independence by India will be followed by a spell of civil war in the country. But I also feel that people by nature are non-violent, therefore the anarchy resulting from the civil war will be only of a short duration. Should I, however, be proved wrong, and should the people not be sufficiently non-violent, civil war may be a prolonged affair. If anyone representing my views survives the turmoil he will again take up the task of organizing society on the basis of non-violence. [Ibid, pp. 211-14]

The question of economic self-sufficiency for the masses and the means of achieving it occupied a great deal of Gandhiji's thought in the Aga Khan Palace, and constituted the theme of his discourses during many morning and evening walks. He said during one of the walks: "The more thought I give it the more intricate the question becomes. If the only need of man were cloth, it could be met by everyone spinning for himself. But cloth forms only a small part of human needs. As a means of earning money to meet other needs spinning fetches very small returns. Wages of spinners could be increased here and there but not uniformly everywhere. It was thus realized that spinning alone would not answer the purpose. So various other village industries were added as supplementary occupations. But even doing so does not take us very far. I realize that in the end we shall have to take up the question of redistribution of land. But this is a matter which requires much thought and I do not at the moment know what conclusion I shall finally arrive at."



Pyarelal said: "Isn't it a pity that with so many competent economists in the country, no one has seriously undertaken a study of the economics of spinning and village industry?"

Gandhiji said: "Yes. Take K. T. Shah. When he came along I had hoped that he would be able to render substantial help. He was so full of the spirit of village self-sufficiency. But he did not proceed very far. Jawaharlal wanted to drag me into the National Planning Committee. But I refused to be drawn. I knew I had no place in it. The planning he had in mind did not conform with what I had to offer. Kumarappa, too, realized it and kept himself away. But Satis Babu went. He worked hard. He showed me the report he had prepared. I asked him to tear it up.

Of the other economists there was only one who made an attempt to understand our point of view but he too did not go beyond a point. The thing is that orthodox economists cannot get out of the strait-jacket of their system. They merely want to add what we propose to their system. This blocks our progress. Can it be that there is inherent fault in my conception? I wonder. Is it folly to propound a scheme which relies for economic well-being on spinning and village industry, on production by the masses rather than mass production by machines? If somebody should prove to me that I am mistaken, I would admit my mistake. Today I am proceeding by faith. I am open to new ideas but I cannot let the new ideas undermine my faith. I have the faith that we can meet all our requirements through the labour of men and animals. I do not worry about the machines. Let others worry about them. If the railways go, I shall not shed any tears. I shall make do with the bullock-cart. I know I cannot persuade the country to give up the railways but I must go on doing my work, whatever the results it may bring."

Pyarelal offered the opinion that to make village industries work, a particular kind of economic order, a particular kind of social structure was required, which would involve giving up a number of things and limiting of one's wants. Doubt as regards the success of the village industries movement arose because the prevailing environment was inimical to it.

Gandhiji said he was not deterred by that consideration. He must make his way through a hostile environment.



Pyarelal suggested that it was necessary first to decide how far one would be prepared to go. He again said that even if railways were dispensed with as being the means of exploitation by taking away raw materials from the villages, perhaps motor-cars and aeroplanes could be permitted.

Gandhiji said even if Pyarelal's argument was valid, his own mind did not run in the direction of motor-cars and aeroplanes.

Pyarelal then suggested use being made of sun, wind and water as alternative sources of energy.

Gandhiji said: "I am prepared to go much beyond wind-mills and the like. Should it be found necessary I would take electricity to every village. Vallabhbhai introduced electricity at Bardoli Ashram and told me that he wished to have electricity brought to Sabarmati Ashram. I told him that he could go ahead, but that so far as I was concerned, I would rather not do it myself. I want to restrict myself to what can be achieved by the labour of men and animals. I have many ideas in my head. I do not give expression to them because in the present circumstances, ground does not exist for them to take root. [Ibid, pp. 214-17]"

10

December 1942 came. Gandhiji had all along been nourishing the hope of being released in six months' time. That time was now only two months away, but there appeared no signs to indicate the possibility of an early release to the detenus.

From the newspaper reports it had for some time been apparent that the tide of war was finally turning in favour of the Allied. In Russia the German armies had been halted at Stalingrad. In North Africa Rommel's Afrika Corps was on the run all across Egypt and Lybia, pursued by Montgomery and awaited by the Americans, who had landed in strength under Eisenhower all along the coast line of Algeria and Morocco. German positions in French North Africa were falling like nine pins under determined American attack.

Pyarelal said to Gandhiji during a walk: "You hold the view that the result of the war will be all to the good. I have my doubts. The general rule is that victorious countries turn to fascism, the defeated countries to communism."

Gandhiji said: "I have no such doubts."



The talk then turned to another direction. Pyarelal said: "You do not accept the thesis that material environment affects men's thoughts. You hold, on the contrary, that a man's thoughts affect the environment and change it.

You further hold that chance (*daiva*) is also a factor in historical change. Marxists hold, on the other hand, that while individuals may undergo a change of heart their class character does not change. The operation of chance is included in the historical process."

Gandhiji said: "Supposing Hitler were suddenly to die of an illness. It would be the result of the operation of *daiva*, and yet it would affect the course of history. Or suppose an earthquake occurs and all the capitalists perish in it, would not class struggle assume a very different character?"

Gandhiji further said: "It is a mistake to distinguish between individuals and classes. What one individual can do, the whole Society can do."

Pyarelal said: "Marxists assert that if material environment were transformed, for instance, if private ownership of the means of production were done away with, the thinking of capitalists would automatically undergo a change. I think there is much truth in this. Does not your Wardha Scheme of Education lend support to the materialist theory of knowledge?"

"The Wardha Scheme of Education," Gandhiji said, attempts to develop the mind through the development of manual skills. But Marx and his followers assign no place to manual work in a developed society. They substitute the machine for the hand. Mankind, in their view, cannot be happy without the use of machines. Manual work, in the view of Marx, characterizes serfdom. My view is the very opposite of this. I am engaged in discovering all the different things that human hand can do."

Pyarelal said: "The theories propounded by Marx are of great importance. His diagnosis of social ills cannot be challenged. The cure he suggests, however, is not on the right lines. He considers only physical force. He had no knowledge of the power of non-violence. You interpret the *Gita* as a work that teaches non-violence, though that is not the generally accepted interpretation. Can we not similarly use Marxist analysis for the creation of a social structure based on non-violence? After all, Marx is on the side of the poor."



Gandhiji said: "My interpretation of the *Gita* as supporting non-violence is not meant for those who believe in violence, nor is it meant for those who believe in non-violence. It is addressed to those who are in between. Similarly we argue about Marxism in this way with a view to influencing the thinking of Marxists, for there are very good men among them, such as Jawaharlal, Narendra Dev and Jayaprakash. Why should we lose them? If we can draw them to us, we should try to do so. No other purpose is to be served by attempting a synthesis of Marxism and non-violence."

Gandhiji continued: "I do not believe that Marx has contributed something new. Ruskin had said similar things before Marx. The importance of Marx and Ruskin lies in the fact that they took the whole human race into view. They broke the bonds of their class and spoke for the poor. It is this that sets Marx apart from classical economists. But what is it that so much attracts you to Marx?"

Pyarelal said: "The diagnosis of Marx of the ills of human society differs from the diagnosis of economists preceding him as much as alchemy differs from chemistry. He clearly shows how economic environment affects each and every facet of human life: art, literature, law, ethics, even religion and how society develops by the working of dialectical materialism. Take, for instance, wars between nations. All sorts of nostrums used to be suggested for preventing wars. No one paid any attention to the economic causes that led to wars. The wisdom of the dictum "property or peace" was not realized. We now know that the two are enemies of each other. It was Marx who taught us that imperialism represents the logical outcome of capitalism."

Gandhiji said: "I do not agree that economics is the root cause of all the sins of human society. Nor do I believe that all wars have economic causes. When the present war started Chamberlain was the Prime Minister of Britain. He tried to the very last to avert the war. How did his attitude change overnight? He was afraid that his party would disown him. Had there been a more astute politician in his place the war might have been averted. Was not Helen of Troy the cause of the Trojan War? Why go so far back? Nearer home the wars fought by the Rajputs had certainly no economic causes."



Pyarelal mentioned the various steps taken by the Soviet Government for the benefit of the people: food for all, medical care, old age pension, maternity care and various other things.

Gandhiji said: "All that is very well. But we shall watch how long it all lasts. The general rule is that a thing that comes too quickly also goes quickly."

Pyarelal asked: "Do you think that the kind of social set-up you want will presuppose for its continued existence similar social set-up all over the world? Is it your view that unless we transform the whole world, the world will swallow us?"

"Either eventuality is possible," Gandhiji answered. "But if we can build a new society in India I believe it can endure. Take Russia. It has established a new social order in a world that is hostile to it."

"But the Russian experiment is still incomplete. That is why Russia wants to bring about a world revolution," Pyarelal said.

"Let us see how much of Russia survives the war," Gandhiji said. "All I can see at present is that the civilization that had been created is being destroyed. It cannot go on hereafter in the old way. [Ibid, pp. 220-28]

11

Pyarelal again took up the question of trusteeship with Gandhiji. During a walk he asked him: "You say that when power comes to the people the principle of trusteeship will be given a statutory form. This will require first preparing public opinion for it. Does this mean that trusteeship will come into operation only to the extent that we are able to persuade capitalists to accept it? – that it will be enforced bit by bit, in instalments? And would we be able, by piecemeal reforms, to maintain popular enthusiasm at the desired pitch? In Russia the need for dictatorship was felt because they wanted to do away with one stroke the private ownership of the means of production."

Gandhiji answered: "The elimination of capitalists in Russia led to an increase in people's incomes. That added to their revolutionary enthusiasm. Here in India when reforms come, they will surely ensure higher wages for the workers. In Russia they only gained control of the capital of the capitalists. Here we shall gain control not only of the capital, but also of the talent, experience and



efficiency of the capitalists. Capitalists over the years have perfected the art of making money. When that talent is used in the service of the people it will make for an improvement in the economic condition of the people. So long as we do not have State power we can only use persuasion. But even when we come to possess State power we can use laws to enforce reforms only to the extent that there is a degree of public support for them. Take for instance sanitation. We may make laws to enforce sanitation, but people will ignore them."

Pyarelal asked: "How are we to take over state power? Marxists say this cannot be done through the parliamentary method."

Gandhiji said: "Our weapon is non-violent non-cooperation. We have been in the process of honing that weapon for the last twenty years."

Pyarelal expressed his doubt: "But you yourself once said that ahimsa might not be a fit instrument for capturing power."

"Yes," Gandhiji agreed, "but the votaries of ahimsa can exert an influence on those who wield power even while remaining outside the power structure. That is enough."

There was then a discussion on the element of coercion in State power. Gandhiji said: "In a family the father has the power to punish. The children are not irked by it. In the same way coercion by the state can be light as a feather. People quite happily accepted the Congress rule, for it sat lightly on them. People so willingly place powers in my hands and obey me. During the Khilafat days who was irked by the power that the Congress or I exercised? Even the Ali Brothers willingly accepted my power. I became their 'Sarkar'."

Pyarelal referred to *Shrimad Bhagavata*, Canto XI, which mentions the various qualities that a law-maker must possess. He must give up family, undergo all kinds of hardships and reduce himself to zero. He must renounce the world and free himself from feelings of love and hate, honour and dishonour, praise and blame. And if he should find that he is not equal to all this, he must be prepared to consign his body to the flames. Only thus can he become a fit instrument to wield power.

Gandhiji said: "That may be so. But what is required more than anything else is the readiness to sacrifice oneself. There is no short-cut in this business,



there cannot be. People should be awakened, but the people in general do not have to make sacrifices to the same degree. One man's striving is enough. Jesus and Mohammad are not born every day. They come once, do their work and leave it to the people to carry it on." [Ibid, pp. 229-33]



PART V
GANDHIJI IN DETENTION IN
THE AGA KHAN PALACE



CHAPTER XVII: SHADOW OF THE FAST

1

While Gandhiji was lodged safely in prison, in the country outside, amid the raging storm of mob violence and police and army atrocities, the sufferings of the people continued unabated. All those who could raise their voice against the situation, were shut up in jails. In England and America, however, voices began to be raised for a fresh effort towards the solution of the political deadlock. Rajagopalachari, an inveterate optimist that he was, launched yet another initiative that he thought would break the impasse.

On 21 October 1942 he gave an interview to Press reporters and told them: "If I can get a plane and a passport, neither disinclination nor work will stand in the way of my going to England." The British people, he said, had been misled in connection with the Indian problem and he could make them see the truth.

As a step towards settlement of the Indian problem, he outlined a scheme for a Provisional Government, which he said would necessitate the minimum of parliamentary enactments and which, he was convinced, both the Congress and the League would accept.

The scheme was that the Viceroy should act as the Crown did in England. He should select a team of most popular and most responsible Indian leaders and immediately form a Government. This Government, then, should hold elections, direct to the Provinces and indirect to the Centre from Provincial Legislatures.

The Viceroy, he said, could select five Congressmen who, in his view, would top the list in elections anywhere at any time and would command the respect and loyalty of the people. The list would include people then in detention. The Viceroy could ask Jinnah to join the Government with as many Muslim Leaguers of his choice as he liked. This would meet his fear that the formation of the Provisional Government might prejudice the issue of Pakistan. The Government would be responsible to the newly elected Legislature and would enjoy all the powers except that the Commander-in-Chief would continue to be responsible for the war strategy. [The *Transfer of Power*, Vol. III, pp. 213-15]



Cripps and Smuts thought it might be a good idea to let Rajagopalachari visit England, "as it would be some continuation to action in contradistinction to inaction" and promote an impression, especially in America, that the British were trying their best to get a settlement. Cripps also thought that Rajagopalachari might also be allowed to see the Congress leaders in detention before his visit to England. [Ibid, p. 192] Some British newspapers, too, among them the *Daily Herald*, argued that C.R. should be given facilities for the visit.

But Amery and Linlithgow would have none of it. The Viceroy said Rajagopalachari would be a nuisance in England. He represented nobody and if he was allowed to go, Muslims would want similar facilities, and so would the Depressed Classes and the Sikhs. [Ibid, p. 178]

The India Office came out with a note picking holes in the scheme adumbrated by Rajaji. First of all, the control of defence, which the scheme envisaged would be retained by the Commander-in-Chief responsible to the War Cabinet in London, would not be effective without the Viceroy having overriding powers enabling him to control and intervene in almost every branch of civil administration. The note pointed out that the issue of the control of defence had been crucial in the breakdown of the Cripps negotiations.

Then what would be the size of the Central Legislature to which the Provisional Government would be responsible, and what would be its make-up? If the size should be as laid down in the Act of 1935, that is, 250 members from British India, going by the results of the elections held in 1937, the number of Muslims, all of whom would not be members of the Muslim League, would be at the most 90, while the strength of the Congress would be around 116, making it the largest single party in the Legislature. Could such a Legislature be expected for long to support a ministry in which the Muslim League held half or more of the seats?

Rajagopalachari's scheme, the note concluded, was another device for securing by the Congress and the Hindu elements the immediate control of India.

Jinnah, the note pointed out, had not been taken in and had roundly condemned Rajagopalachari's proposals. [Ibid, pp. 215-18]



Rajaji continued his efforts. On 11 November he met Jinnah. Jinnah harped on the Pakistan demand. The line he took was that he had made an offer and it was for the Congress to make a counter-offer.

On 12 November Rajaji sought an interview with the Viceroy and requested him that he be permitted to see Gandhiji and ascertain his views. Linlithgow brusquely refused the permission. The Civil Disobedience movement, he said, still remained dangerous and unless Gandhiji recanted and withdrew the movement there could be no question of anyone being given facilities for any discussions with him. Rajaji in a statement regretted the Viceroy's decision. He said in his conversations with Jinnah he had seen a distinct prospect of settlement, but that the Viceroy with his refusal of permission to see Gandhiji had blocked the prospect, for, as the British Government themselves were aware, there could be no settlement without Gandhiji. [Ibid, pp. 237-40]

Gandhiji, who could gather only the vaguest idea from the newspaper reports, effectively trimmed by the censors, of all that had been going on outside, refused to comment on Rajaji's activities. "How do I know what he has in his heart?" he said. "He is a close friend and I have the highest respect for his intellect. If he is doggedly pursuing a certain course, I must assume that there must be something in it." Then, thinking aloud, he went on: "Rajaji evidently thinks that by approaching things in this way he can induce the Muslim League to give up the demand for Pakistan. He told me that he is as much anxious to prevent India being vivisected as I am. I say that his way is erroneous. It is not non-violent. If we think Pakistan is a bad thing, we must say so clearly. Muslims are after all our brethren and if they are caught up in an evil design we must free them from it. Pakistan would mean the ruin of Muslims. Indian Muslims are more fanatical than Muslims anywhere else in the world. They have never shown the tolerance of the Hindus. But the Hindus might not be willing to carry their tolerance to the extent of allowing the Muslims to vivisect the country." [Sushila Nayar, *Bapuki Karavas Kahani*, pp. 237-38]

The reign of repression unleashed in India by the British and their obstinate refusal to initiate any steps to mollify Indian public opinion continued to disturb influential circles, official and non-official, in the U.S.A. and China, who were



anxious to promote India's whole-hearted cooperation in the war. The one-sided propaganda campaign launched by the British public relations machine headed by Ambassador Halifax, did not appear to be cutting any ice, at least in the official circles in the U.S.A. An India Office note dated 21 September 1942 was already expressing a doubt whether in the days to come the State Department would continue to give unqualified support to the British policy in India. In England itself, the note acknowledged, there was a substantial body of opinion which was dissatisfied with the way the Indian problem was being handled. The note pointed to the need for new directives with regard to the propaganda in the U.S.A.

It stressed the importance of pushing the "firm line", on the authority of the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State, that the British had no intention of initiating any further negotiations or discussions during the war, that there would be no "Indian Munich". [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. III, pp. 10-12]

Since the departure of Louis Johnson from India following the debacle of the Cripps negotiations in the spring of 1942, there had been no American representative in India. The U.S. Government decided to fill the vacancy by sending to India a senior diplomat. This made the British rulers prick their ears. They suspected that the Americans planned to mount a diplomatic effort in India to pressurize the British Government to reverse their policy and find ways of arriving at a reconciliation with the Congress. They made it clear to the Americans that such interference would not be welcome. The War Cabinet at a meeting on 24 September approved a proposal that it should be made clear to the Americans that while the British Government "would welcome a more authoritative representation, there could, of course, be no question of his undertaking negotiations for a settlement of the Indian political situation". [Ibid, p. 36]

Throughout the closing months of 1942, the British continued to press with the State Department that while the appointment of a "responsible officer" to fill the post of Commissioner in Delhi would be welcome, the appointment of a "prominent American", going to India to mediate would have the most serious effect on the peace in India, for though the revolutionary movement started by the Congress to render the Government of India helpless in the event of a



Japanese attack had been defeated, the trouble was not over, and any offer of mediation by America would only help to prolong the disturbances. [Ibid, pp. 53-54]

The Americans refused to be browbeaten. On 3 December President Roosevelt wrote to Linlithgow that he was appointing William Phillips as his Personal Representative in India with the rank of Ambassador. [Ibid, p. 335]

Phillips arrived in India on 9 January 1943. Linlithgow at once set about trying to prejudice him against the Congress. When Phillips went to the Punjab on a visit a fortnight after his arrival, the Viceroy put the Governor of the Punjab on the alert. Phillips, he wrote, should be taken to the countryside so that he could gauge the Muslim sentiment and realize how difficult it was to look at India too much through the spectacles of the Congress. He told the Governor that Phillips was impressed with the possibility of settling the Indian dispute by the immediate formation of a Provisional Government, for which, he was led to believe, Gandhiji would be ready to make liberal concessions. Phillips should be disabused of the idea that it was all so simple. [Ibid, pp. 551-52]

But Phillips was already sending his own impressions of the situation to the President. The Viceroy, he wrote, was a representative of the old school of imperialists and that there was lack of faith in the country in the promises of the British Government. He even suggested, for the solution of the political deadlock, a conference of leaders of Indian parties to be invited by the President of the U.S.A. and under the patronage of the King of England. [Tara Chand, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Vol. IV, p. 394]

He persevered with the Viceroy for an initiative to end the deadlock. Linlithgow reported to Amery on 28 January 1943 that Phillips had expressed the view that a definite advance and possibly a settlement in the direction of the establishment of a Provisional Government was possible, that Devadas Gandhi had assured him that Gandhiji would take a liberal view and that Muslim League circles too had given a hint that if representatives of the Hindus approached them they could be relied upon to be most reasonable.

It was necessary, Linlithgow wrote, to make it clear to Phillips that he was under a misapprehension if he thought the British Government would agree to



any intervention by him or the American Government in the conduct of Indian affairs, and he, the Viceroy, did not propose to suffer any interference of any sort from Phillips. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. III, p. 555]

Any sort of suggestion, whether coming from Rajaji or the Americans or anyone else, that something should be done to end the impasse, was thus wholly unwelcome to the British masters of India, who made it clear that the Congress would be shown no quarter so long as the war lasted.

3

Gandhiji was so sure of the transparent sincerity of the A.I.C.C. resolution and the unequivocal support of the Allied cause it spelt out that he persisted throughout 1942 to hope that the British would come to realize the injustice they had done him and the Congress and discharge the detenus before six months were out. In his conversations with the co-workers detained with him at the Aga Khan Palace he repeatedly gave voice to this feeling. There was also another feeling building up inside him: the feeling that a fast was in the offing and might any day force itself upon him with the inevitability of fate. He only hinted at it in his conversations. The very contemplation of the prospect was enough to drive his companions to distraction.

It was towards the end of December 1942, while he was engaged in finalizing a letter he proposed to send to the Viceroy, that Gandhiji gave expression to his feeling that a fast on his part might be imminent. He told Pyarelal on 27 December: "You are going to have to shoulder a very great burden."

On the same day, when Col. Bhandari paid a visit to the detention camp, Khan Bahadur Kately reported to him, on the authority of Mrs. Naidu, that Gandhiji intended to go on a fast from 8 February. In a written note Kately informed the authorities that Gandhiji intended to write to the Viceroy giving notice that he intended to undertake a fast beginning on 18 January and ending on 8 February, the date on which he would be completing six months in detention. [*Ibid*, p. 460]

Gandhiji's letter to Linlithgow, marked personal and dated the New Year's Eve, started on a friendly note.



Gandhiji wrote:

This is a very personal letter. Contrary to the biblical injunction, I have allowed many suns to set on a quarrel I have harboured against you, but I must not allow the old year to expire without disburdening myself of what is rankling in my breast against you.

Gandhiji mentioned in this connection his own arrest, the Government communique justifying the action, Government's reply to Rajaji (justifying the withholding of his letter to Gandhiji) and Amery's attack on him, all of which showed that at some stage the Viceroy must have suspected his *bona fides*. Gandhiji then wrote:

I find that all the statements made about me in the Government quarters in this connection contain palpable departures from truth.... I am expected to condemn the so-called violence by some people reputed to be Congressmen, although I have no data for such condemnation save the heavily censored reports of newspapers. I must own that I thoroughly distrust these reports.... I had given myself six months. The period is drawing to a close, so is my patience. The law of satyagraha as I know it prescribes a remedy in such moments of trial. In a sentence it is "crucify the flesh by fasting".... I do not want to use it if I can avoid it. This is the way to avoid it: convince me of my error or errors, and I shall make ample amends... [Ibid, pp. 439-40; C.W.M.G., LXXVII, pp. 49-51]

Linlithgow transmitted the text of the letter to Amery on 3 January 1943. He then wrote to the Secretary of State expressing his view that the letter showed Gandhiji's uneasiness and uncertainty as to his position, now that the movement had been crushed, and that it was an attempt on Gandhiji's part to regain the initiative and try to get out of the fix on terms advantageous to the Congress.

Amery found the letter ambiguous and was amused that Gandhiji had used Hitler's phrase: "my patience is running out". He suggested that the Viceroy in his reply might recount briefly and forcibly the case against the Congress. It was possible, judging by his behaviour during the Rajkot affair a few years earlier, that Gandhiji might then cry "*Peccavi*" (I have sinned).



Linlithgow, transmitting the draft of his proposed reply to Gandhiji, told Amery that there could be no question of the Congress being given the chance of saying that they had made a mistake and thereby wanting to be taken back into grace again. Not only must the August resolution be withdrawn, there must be no demands for enquiries and indemnities. There would also have to be some understanding as to the future. Gandhiji would have to understand that the British Government did not propose to be blackmailed by his threat of fasting.

Amery still insisted that it would be desirable to state the case against the Congress forcibly and authoritatively. It would then be up to Gandhiji to "make ample amends" as his letter said. He however left this to the judgment of the Viceroy and suggested some minor amendments to the wording of the draft reply.

The War Cabinet considered Gandhiji's letter and Linlithgow's proposed reply on 7 January. And here the conclusion is difficult to avoid that had it not been for the obduracy of Linlithgow, Gandhiji might have been released soon after – almost a year and four months before he actually was. For the War Cabinet considered the matter in the context of Gandhiji's intention to fast and did not at all feel comfortable at the implications of such a fast for the British Government. The Cabinet expressed the view that –

If conditions were now such that Gandhi could be released without serious risk, they would prefer that he should be set at liberty on compassionate grounds (e.g. his age, health and the fact that he had already been detained for nearly six months) rather than be able by fasting to secure his release at any time.

Linlithgow put his foot down. He told the Secretary of State that he was more familiar with "Gandhi and his tactics" than anyone on the War Cabinet and knew best what he was doing. Releasing Gandhiji on the grounds suggested, he wrote, would be a tactical success for Gandhiji and humiliating surrender for the British.

The War Cabinet, when it met again on 12 January, threw up the sponge and authorized Linlithgow to send his reply to Gandhiji as finalized. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. III, pp. 449-50, 457-58, 461-62, 464, 465, 469, 482-83, 491-92]



In the Aga Khan Palace, waiting for Linlithgow's reply to his letter, Gandhiji was more and more occupied with thoughts of the fast, which he thought had become unavoidable. On 10 January in the course of the morning walk he broached the subject with Pyarelal. He said: "The fast, I see, is coming. On the surface I go on with my everyday routine, but inwardly I am listening to the voice within. I do not yet know when the fast will come, but I do know that I cannot escape it. I am telling you this so that you can prepare yourself for the ordeal.... We can get no information here about what is happening outside. This may mean either that notwithstanding the escalating violence the people at large have remained non-violent and are acting accordingly, or it may mean that the violent party is working much more skilfully and effectively and votaries of non-violence find themselves helpless. I can only counter this by fasting."

Gandhiji said the fast might be averted if there was a favourable response to his letter from the Viceroy. Pyarelal pressed Gandhiji to spell out the exact reasons for his contemplated fast and the conditions under which it might be avoided.

"People are starving," Gandhiji said. "Is that not adequate enough reason? People have nothing to eat — no rice, no millet, no wheat, nothing. What must a man like me do? — just watch the whole thing silently? The pursuit of unmanifest ahimsa is like the worship of unmanifest Brahman. It is enough for the votary of ahimsa to take just one step forward. The next step automatically becomes clear to him."

Sarojini Naidu argued strongly against Gandhiji's plan to undertake a fast. Gandhiji must remember, she said, that thousands were languishing in jails at his bidding. He had been entrusted with all the powers. Many had not been in favour of the struggle, and yet they had followed him. Was it right for him to go on a fast behind their backs? He was not a free man. After getting out he could divest himself of the responsibility entrusted to him and go on a fast, but not while in detention. She knew, she said, that he was destined to die through fasting, but the time for it had not come. It was not God's command that he should fast. God could not be so cruel as to command him to fast and leave the people in the lurch. His fast would be violence against the people.



Having said her piece Mrs. Naidu stalked out.

Gandhiji reiterated his position that he would give up the idea of fasting only if there was a favourable response to his letter from the Viceroy. The likelihood of such a response from that quarter, he said, was remote. He decided, in the meanwhile to compose another letter to Linlithgow. [Sushila Nayar, *Bapuki Karavas Kahani*, pp. 259-68]

The newspapers of 13 January carried the news that J. P. Bhansali had ended his fast on 12 January. Everyone at the Aga Khan Palace heaved a sigh of relief. There was much rejoicing, with sweets being distributed among the convicts and warders. Gandhiji said: "The news about Bhansali strengthens my belief that there is God." [Ibid, p. 268]

Bhansali, it later became known, gave up his fast and dropped his demand for a public inquiry into the police outrages at Chimur on the intervention of Dr. Khare. The Central Provinces Government, in return, agreed to lift the ban on Press reports relating to Chimur and Bhansali's fast. Bhansali was further assured that M. S. Aney, member of the Viceroy's Executive Council, would accompany Dr. Khare and himself on a visit to Chimur to meet the people. Before beginning his fast in November Bhansali had approached Aney in Delhi and requested him to intervene in the Chimur affair. On Aney's refusal to do so he had attempted to fast at Aney's house but had been removed.

After the conclusion of the fast Aney met the Viceroy and told him that he had no intention of visiting Chimur with Bhansali and that the assurance given to Bhansali that he would do so had not been authorized by him. His visit to Chimur, he said, might give the impression that some sort of private enquiry into the Chimur affair was taking place, to which he was wholly averse. The Viceroy advised Aney to play for time.

In the end, on the persistence of Bhansali, Aney did condescend to visit Chimur along with Bhansali on 31 January but later again changed his mind and did not go. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. III, pp. 487, 501, 509, 565, 567]

Towards the middle of January the non-receipt of the Viceroy's reply had become the cause of heavy mental strain for Gandhiji. He produced the draft of



a reminder, mentioning in it a fast to begin on 1 February and end on 21 February. The co-workers in the detention camp to whom he showed the letter expressed themselves dissatisfied both with the tone and the language of the draft. Sarojini Naidu, Mirabehn, Pyarelal, each picked holes in the composition. Mirabehn later suggested that Gandhiji should wait till 26 January to despatch the letter and fix 9 February as the date for beginning the fast, for on that day Gandhiji would have completed six months of his detention. Gandhiji agreed. [Sushila Nayar, *Bapuki Karavas Kahani*, pp. 270-74]

The Viceroy's reply came on 18 January. Dated 13 January and marked personal, as Gandhiji's letter had been, it said:

Thank you for your personal letter of December 31 which I have just received. [This, as we know, was not correct. He had transmitted the text of the letter to London on 3 January.] . . .

I was glad to have your letter, for to be as open with you as our *previous relations justify* [the words italicized were Amery's amendment, Linlithgow's draft had said "close relation justifies"], I have been profoundly depressed during recent months; first by the policy that was adopted by the Congress in August, secondly, because while that policy gave rise, as *it was obvious* it must, [in place of the italicized words Linlithgow's draft had said "I knew"] throughout the country to violence and crime ...no word of condemnation for that violence and crime should have come from you, or from the Working Committee.... You may take it from me that the newspaper accounts you mention are well-founded.... I well know the immense weight of your great authority ... and I wish I could feel ... that a heavy responsibility did not rest on you.

But if I am right in reading your letter to mean that in the light of what has happened you wish now to retrace your steps and dissociate yourself from the policy of last summer, you have only to let me know and I will at once consider the matter further.... [C.W.M.G., LXXVII, pp. 445-46]

Everybody at the detention camp was struck by the friendly tone of the letter. Gandhiji himself did not express any view.

Early on the following morning he sat down to deal with the letter and had had a reply ready by 7 a.m. [Sushila Nayar, *Bapuki Karavas Kahani*, pp. 275-76]



Gandhiji began his letter, dated 19 January and again marked personal, by remarking that while his earlier letter to the Viceroy had been a growl, the Viceroy's reply had been a counter-growl, which meant that the latter still maintained that he had been right in arresting Gandhiji. Then referring to the Viceroy's statement that if Gandhiji should retrace his steps he would be willing to consider the matter again, Gandhiji wrote:

You want me to make a positive suggestion. This I might be able to do only if you put me among the members of the Working Committee of the Congress.

As for the Viceroy's suggestion that he should own the responsibility for the violent happenings in the country, Gandhiji said he was not convinced of his error. He proceeded:

Of course I deplore the happenings which have taken place since 9th August last. But have I not laid the whole blame for them at the door of the Government of India? Moreover I could not express any opinion on events which I cannot influence or control, and of which I have but a one-sided account. You are bound *prima facie* to accept the accuracy of reports that may be placed before you by your departmental heads. But you will not expect me to do so.... It was for that reason that, in my letter of 31st December, I pleaded with you to convince me of the correctness of the information on which your conviction was based.

Reiterating that he was a confirmed believer in non-violence and reminding the Viceroy that he had condemned any violence on the part of Congress workers in the past and indeed had done public penance more than once, Gandhiji declared that in the present case, it was the Government which had to do the retracing. Nothing would have been lost if the Viceroy had stayed his hand and granted him the interview which he had announced he would seek. To sum up, Gandhiji concluded:

1. If you want me to act singly, convince me that I was wrong, and I will make ample amends.



2. If you want me to make any proposal on behalf of the Congress, you should put me among the Congress Working Committee members. I plead with you to make up your mind to end the impasse.

Linlithgow replied on 25 January, reiterating the charge that the Congress movement and Gandhiji himself as its fully empowered spokesman were responsible for the disturbances. He again expressed his readiness "to consider the matter further" should Gandhiji inform him that he repudiated the resolution of 8 August and the policy which it represented. He concluded: "It is of course necessary to be clear on that point, and you will not, I know, take it amiss that I should make that clear in the plainest possible words."

Transmitting the texts of Gandhiji's letter and his reply to Amery the following day Linlithgow told him: "I have avoided most of his direct questions. My letter will have made it clear that we cannot accept his suggestion as to the responsibility of Government and that preliminary to any arrangement must be abandonment of the resolution of last August ...if he positively tells me that he is going to fast, I shall then make it clear to him in unmistakable terms what our policy on that point is going to be." [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. III, pp. 517-19, 535-36, 540; *C.W.M.G.*, LXXVII, pp. 51-53]

Ever since 1930, the 26th of January had been observed by the Congress each year as Independence Day. On that day every Congressman took a pledge committing himself anew to the struggle for freedom. The little group of detainees keeping Gandhiji company in the Aga Khan Palace felt they could not miss the observance and requested Gandhiji to draft a pledge to be read out at the observance. Gandhiji did so on 25 January. The pledge as drafted by him ran:

"My immediate objective is and for years has been for India to gain her independence, complete in every sense of the term, by truthful and non-violent means. And in prosecution of that objective, I repledge myself on this thirteenth anniversary of Independence Day not to rest; nor will I let those on whom I have some influence to rest, till it is granted. I seek for the fulfilment of my pledge the assistance of that Divine and unseen Power which we recognize by such familiar names as God, Allah and Paramatma."



The Independence Day was duly observed on 26 January with great solemnity. Gandhiji hoisted the National Flag and patriotic songs were sung. [SushilaNayar, *Bapuki Karavas Kahani*, pp. 280-81; *C.W.M.G.*, LXXVII, pp. 54]

6

The Viceroy's letter of 25 January was delivered to Gandhiji in the afternoon of 28 January. When its contents were made known everyone at the camp felt depressed. But Gandhiji had not expected anything different from the Viceroy. He was prepared. He sat down to draft his reply the same evening and had it ready by 8 p.m.

He told Pyarelal: "This is really your draft. Only the language is mine." [Sushila Nayar, *Bapuki Karavas Kahani*, pp. 282-83]

In his letter dated 29 January Gandhiji again pleaded with Linlithgow at least to make an attempt to convince him that the August resolution of the Congress was responsible for the violence that broke out on 9 August. Was not the drastic and unwarranted action of the Government responsible for the violence? Gandhiji proceeded:

You have not even said what part of August resolution is bad or offensive in your opinion. That resolution is in no way a retraction by the Congress of its policy of non-violence. It is definitely against Fascism in every shape or form. It tenders cooperation in war effort under circumstances which alone can make effective and nationwide cooperation possible.... As you should be aware, the Congress was willing and prepared for the Government inviting Quaid-e-Azam Jinnah to form a National Government, subject to such agreed adjustments as may be necessary, for the duration of the war, such Government being responsible to a duly elected assembly.... Is all this open to reproach ? . . .

But you throw in my face the fact of murders by persons reputed to be Congressmen.... My answer is that the Government goaded the people to the point of madness. They started leonine violence in the shape of the arrests already referred to.... Add to this tale of woe the privations of the poor millions due to India-wide scarcity which I cannot help thinking might have been largely mitigated, if not altogether prevented, had there been a



bona fide National Government responsible to a popularly elected assembly.

Then came the notice of the proposed fast. Gandhiji wrote:

If then I cannot get soothing balm for my pain, I must resort to the law prescribed for satyagrahis, namely, a fast according to capacity. I must commence after the early morning breakfast of the 9th February, a fast for 21 days ending on the morning of the 2nd March. Usually, during my fasts, I take water with the addition of salts. But nowadays my system refuses water. This time, therefore, I propose to add juices of citrus fruits to make water drinkable. For, my wish is not to fast unto death but to survive the ordeal, if God so wills. This fast can be ended sooner by the Government giving the needed relief. [C.W.M.G., LXXVII, pp. 54-56]

Linlithgow, on 30 January reported to Amery that he had received Gandhiji's reply to his latest letter to him and drew the attention of Amery to the fact that in the letter Gandhiji had extended the scope of his "grumbles" and wanted to make use of the food situation for publicity purposes. His expressing readiness to see a National Government formed under Jinnah was just a red herring.

In the days that followed there were hectic consultations between the Viceroy and the Secretary of State, the Viceroy and the Provincial Governors and the meetings of the War Cabinet in London and the Executive Council of the Viceroy in Delhi, as regards the best course to be followed to deal with Gandhiji's fast. The choice, as the Government of India formulated it, lay between one of the following courses: (a) Gandhiji to be retained in confinement until his death; (b) to be released when in immediate danger of death; (c) application of the cat-and-mouse procedure.

Linlithgow, who personally expressed himself as favouring the first course, i.e., to let Gandhiji starve himself to death in detention, sought the views of the Governors in the matter. Lumley, the Governor of Bombay, who was immediately concerned, expressed the view that keeping Gandhiji in jail until he died from fasting would have very serious and long-term consequences. He quoted the opinion of Candy, the Surgeon-General, who had been in charge during Gandhiji's



earlier fast in 1933, that Gandhiji's power of resistance was very small and that fruit juice would not materially increase it; indeed once acidosis set in, the chances of recovery would be slight. The best course, Lumley suggested, would be to release Gandhiji one or two days after he began his fast.

The majority of the rest of the Governors favoured letting Gandhiji die from fasting in jail.

The Executive Council, to begin with, were by and large of the view that Gandhiji should be released as soon as danger point was reached. Later, however, on the suggestion of Firoz Khan Noon, an alternative course was preferred. This was that Gandhiji be informed that the Government would have nothing to do with the political blackmail that his fast represented, would not let it be used as a means of applying coercion and that, therefore, he would be released for the period of the fast, viz. 21 days (or less) on the understanding that on its completion he would return to detention. No restraints would be imposed and there would be no discussions with him on behalf of the Government. He would be treated as being on ticket of leave.

Lumley supported this new course. The objection to keeping Gandhiji in until imminent danger of death was that at his age he would probably die and the reaction to his death would be the same as if he died in prison, Lumley said. Gandhiji dead would be a greater menace than Gandhiji at large.

Amery said if policy was to be adopted to "deflate" Gandhiji by releasing him for the duration of the fast, as suggested by Firoz Khan Noon, it would be advantageous to avoid the word "fast" and use a more accurate and telling phrase such as "restricted diet".

Linlithgow reported to Amery that though his own preference still was for letting Gandhiji starve to death if he wanted to, it was of very great importance from the point of view of the left wing at home and of the U.S.A. to have the unanimous support of the Council in the matter. As for imposing any conditions on him during the days he should be out of prison, Linlithgow said Gandhiji was not likely to accept any conditions. Indeed, said the Viceroy, Gandhiji might not even accept release for the duration of the fast, but in the event of his refusal the position of the Government would be much stronger *vis-a-vis* Indian and general world opinion.



Linlithgow transmitted to Amery the draft of the statement proposed to be issued by the Government of India in the event of Gandhiji going on with his fast. In summary it read:

The Government of India deplore the use of the weapon of fasting to achieve political ends. The Government of India can only express its regret that Mr. Gandhi should consider it necessary to employ such a weapon on this occasion. The Government of India have no intention on their part of allowing the fast to deflect their policy. Nor will they be responsible for its consequences on Mr. Gandhi's health. They cannot prevent Mr. Gandhi from fasting. But if he decides to do so he must do so at his own risk and under his own arrangements. *They have accordingly decided to release him* for the duration of the fast and any members of his party living with him who may wish to accompany him.

The statement then proceeded to challenge Gandhiji's claim that neither he nor the Congress was responsible for the violence that followed the arrests of 9 August. Picking words and phrases from Gandhiji's utterances and writings it sought to show that Gandhiji was prepared to take any risks, that he wanted it to be a fight to the finish, that he had ruled out any negotiations and had wanted to make the struggle short and swift, all of which showed that Gandhiji was prepared to countenance violence. Then it cited the Andhra P. C. C. circular. The fact that in attacks on communications identical methods had been used throughout the country showed a central organization. The violence, the statement said, could not be explained as arising from popular resentment at Government action, for the tens of thousands of people who had indulged in violent activities belonged to the Congress ranks.

The political parties and groups outside the Congress, the statement went on, were aware of the designs of the Congress in raising the slogan "Quit India". It wanted the supreme control of the Government of the country. The Muslim League and various other political elements had expressed themselves categorically against the movement.

The statement concluded by repudiating Gandhiji's charge that Government of India were responsible for the violence. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. III, pp. 568-603]



The War Cabinet, at its meeting on 7 February, with Churchill himself in the chair, raised an eyebrow at this new plan devised by the Government of India to deal with the fast. The idea of releasing Gandhiji for the duration of the fast seemed, it said, to involve an undertaking by Gandhiji to return to detention after the fast was over, which was open to objection since it implied an arrangement or understanding with Gandhiji. And what would happen if immediately after his release Gandhiji stopped his fast? Would he be immediately redetained? This was the old cat-and mouse procedure, which the Cabinet had earlier rejected. The Cabinet directed that the Viceroy be told to reconsider the scheme and to suspend action on it "until further notice".

Churchill in particular wanted to have no part of a scheme that could even remotely be interpreted as involving an understanding with Gandhiji. As Amery wrote to Linlithgow later, Churchill "worked himself into one of his states of indignation over India". Amery tried to bring him to the point that whatever the best method of dealing with Gandhiji, the issue was whether the Viceroy could override his Council. Churchill brushed the point aside, saying he did not care if all the Executive Councillors resigned, the Viceroy could carry on just as well without them. It was the hour of triumph for the British everywhere in the world [he was referring to the retreat of the Axis armies in divers theatres of war in recent times], and it "was not the time to crawl before a miserable little old man who had always been our enemy".

In a private and personal message to Linlithgow on 8 February he pleaded with the Viceroy not to consent to a scheme that went against his own better judgment and which, he feared, "would bring our whole Government both in India and here at home into ridicule".

Linlithgow answered London that the Council remained firmly committed to their proposal and even though he himself would have preferred that Gandhiji should take the consequences of his decision, he did not feel justified in differing from the unanimous view of his Council in the matter. Besides, no arrangement with Gandhiji was contemplated. His release would be the Government's counter-move, and he would be left with no choice. The release would merely be "an interruption of his confinement for a specific period". As for suspending



action on the scheme, Linlithgow said the Government were not the masters of the time-table in the matter. The fast was scheduled to start at 5 a.m. on the following day, 9th February and the Government could not afford to have it appear to the public that it had no scheme ready for dealing with the fast. He therefore proposed to go ahead with the scheme. [Ibid, pp. 611-21; 631-32]

In the Aga Khan Palace, unaware of the fevered exchanges going on between Delhi and London, Gandhiji impatiently awaited Linlithgow's reply to his letter of 29 January, giving notice of the fast. The Viceroy appeared to be taking too long to reply to the letter.

The reply, dated 5 February, finally arrived on 7 February. It was a prolix diatribe against the Congress and Gandhiji and a reiteration of the charge that Gandhiji and the Congress leaders were responsible for the violence, sabotage and terrorism that had occurred in the country. For good measure the Viceroy enclosed a copy of the speech made by the Home Member in the Legislative Assembly on 15 September, stating the case against the Congress. Congressmen, Linlithgow wrote, had organized and freely taken part in acts of violence and murder. He mentioned the case of Aruna Asaf Ali, "the wife of a member of the Congress Working Committee", who had been actively engaged in planning bomb outrages and other acts of terrorism. The Government, Linlithgow said, had long been aware of the preparations for violence that had been going on and should have acted earlier. But with a patience that was perhaps misplaced, it had decided to wait until the resolution of the All-India Congress Committee. There could be no further toleration of the Congress attitude.

Linlithgow regretted, having regard to Gandhiji's health and age, that he should have taken the decision to fast. But the decision was one which must be taken by Gandhiji alone and the responsibility for which must rest on him alone. He hoped Gandhiji would think better of it, not only because by undertaking the fast he would be wilfully risking his life but also because the use of fasting for political purposes was a form of political blackmail for which there could be no moral justification. [Ibid, pp. 587-90; *C.W.M.G.*, LXXVII, pp. 446-48]

Gandhiji answered the letter the same day, 7 February. He categorically rejected the Government's unsupported imputations against the Congress and wrote in conclusion:



You have left me no loophole for escaping the ordeal I have set before myself. I begin it on the 9th instant with the clearest possible conscience. Despite your description of it as "a form of political blackmail", it is on my part meant to be an appeal to the Highest Tribunal for justice which I have failed to secure from you. If I do not survive the ordeal, I shall go to the judgment seat with the fullest faith in my innocence. Posterity will judge between you as a representative of an all-powerful Government and me as a humble man who has tried to serve his country and humanity through it. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. III, pp. 614-16; *C.W.M.G.*, LXXVII, pp. 57-60]

The die having been cast, the inmates of the Aga Khan Palace braced themselves up for the ordeal to come. Sarojini Naidu told this author: "Sushila, the responsibility is yours. I am going to take my orders from you. Do not hesitate to tell me what you want me to do."

In the early hours of 8 February, Dr. Bhandari, the Inspector-General of Prisons, and Dr. Shah paid a visit to the camp. It was suggested to them that before Gandhiji began his fast his blood examination and ECG should be done. The prison officials were reluctant, especially because they had to be very careful that no word about the fast leaked outside. "Had this been done during the earlier fasts?" Bhandari asked.

"Yes," said Pyarelal. [*Sushila Nayar, Bapuki Karavas Kahani*, pp. 291-92]

In Delhi and Bombay, too, the authorities were getting ready to come to grips with the crisis that faced them. British Agents-General in Washington and Chungking had already been informed about Gandhiji's impending fast, the proposal for dealing with it and the Press arrangements. They were further informed that should Gandhiji accept the Government's proposal, the Viceroy would telegraph the code word "codex" and if Gandhiji rejected the proposal he would telegraph the word "repudiation".

On 8 February the Viceroy told Amery in a message that the Governor of Bombay would be telegraphing the appropriate code word direct; it was also being ensured that no message should leave the country either by wireless or cable until London, Washington and Chungking had had time to receive Lumley's telegram and that no reference was made in A.I.R. before 9 a.m. transmission.



Earlier the Viceroy had told the Bombay Governor that in the event of Gandhiji rejecting the Government proposal and going on with the fast, he should cable to the other Governors, Chief Commissioners and Residents the code word "Lime Juice". On 8 February the Viceroy's Secretary told the Governor's Secretary that steps should be taken to synchronize Press conferences all over the country immediately after Gandhiji's early morning breakfast on 9 February and put through the "lime juice" message by telephone and telegraph to the various Governors, the Secretary of State and British missions in Chungking and Washington.

Linlithgow also sent a message to Lumley that if Gandhiji refused to be released as proposed, "the best course would be to leave all our material, whether staff or equipment, entirely at his disposal, and if he does decline to take any action himself, to continue as hitherto to give him medical comforts, care, servants, etc." [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. III, pp. 623-24]

On 8 February, at 6 p.m., Joseph Irwin, Secretary to the Government of Bombay, brought to Gandhiji a letter signed by Tottenham of the Home Department, Government of India. The letter, the text of which had been finalized, with information to London, the previous day and was marked confidential, expressed the reluctance of the Government of India to see Gandhiji fast. Nevertheless if he were to persist in his intention to do so, they proposed to set him at liberty for the purpose and for the duration of the fast. During the period of the fast there would be no objection to his proceeding where he wished, though the Government hoped he would be able to arrange for his accommodation away from the Aga Khan Palace.

It was Gandhiji's day of silence. So he wrote on a slip of paper that Irwin should call again later at 9 p.m. for the reply. As Gandhiji was keeping old time this meant 10 p.m.

Gandhiji in his reply handed to Irwin said that if the release was offered for his convenience, he did not need it. He would be quite content to take his fast as a detenu or prisoner. If it was for the convenience of the Government he was sorry he was unable to suit them, much as he would like to do so. He however assured the Government that as a prisoner he would avoid, as far as humanly



possible, every cause of inconvenience to the Government save what was inherent in the fast itself.

The fast, Gandhiji went on, had not been conceived by him to be taken as a free man. If therefore he was released there would be no fast. He had no desire to be released on false pretences.

Gandhiji further said he did not want to hustle the Government into a decision. In order to give them time he would suspend his fast, if necessary, to Wednesday, the 10th February.

Irwin caught on to this and requested Gandhiji to do so. It would assist the Government in considering his reply. Gandhiji agreed to postpone the fast for twenty-four hours. [Ibid, pp. 606-7, 641-42; C.W.M.G., LXXVII, pp. 61-62]

This seemed to upset the whole scheme of the rulers. When Gandhiji's reply reached the Viceroy later during the night, his Executive Councillors were all in bed. He collected them "shivering from their warm beds, and very diversely dressed, for a Council at 12.30 a.m." The meeting lasted three hours. The question considered was whether Gandhiji should be held in prison until he died or released when in imminent danger of death. A majority of the Councillors expressed themselves in favour of letting Gandhiji die in detention. Mody, Sarker, Aney, Jogendra Singh and Sultan Ahmed opposed the course and hinted that they might resign over the issue. As a sop to them Linlithgow agreed to their pleading that some small concession be made as regards Gandhiji being allowed to have his own medical attendants and to have visits from friends with the permission of the Government.

The Council met again later in the morning and the decision to hold Gandhiji till death was confirmed by a majority, consisting of Ambedkar, Mohammed Usman, J. P. Srivastava, Firoz Khan Noon and the three Englishmen: Maxwell, Benthall and Raisman. Wavell was not present. The earlier solidarity of the Council, Linlithgow reported to Amery, had been shattered by Gandhiji's reply, which was a masterpiece and deserved full marks. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. III, pp. 639-40, 643-44]



In view of the crisis that now faced the rulers, Amery was anxious that the Home Department of the Government of India should expedite preparation of material regarding the Congress responsibility for the disturbances, so that, he said, he could be ready in case he had to make a statement in Parliament.

Replying on 8 February Linlithgow informed Amery that the case against the Congress was almost ready. The case, he said, had been made to rest on the following:

1. The speeches, writings and utterances of Gandhiji and the members of the Congress Working Committee before the resolution of 14 July and between 14 July and 8 August, showing that they had planned anarchy and rebellion.

2. The expression "every man and woman to function for himself or herself" in the event of the arrest of the leaders, occurring in the resolution of 8 August.

3. The evidence showing that the disturbances were not spontaneous but deliberate, such as: that attacks on communications started simultaneously in widely separated parts of India, that they displayed technical knowledge, that they occurred in the areas of the greatest strategic importance, that labour generally did not give trouble except under political pressure, and that the actions of the mob were not those that might be expected from people venting indignation at the arrest of their leaders, but were attacks on certain limited and selected objectives.

4. The programme drawn up by members of the A.I.C.C. left in Bombay after the arrests and various circulars issued in the name of the Congress, which formed the basis of the campaign of violence and sabotage that followed.

5. The fact that many known Congressmen had been convicted for acts of violence by law courts.

Then there were secret reports of meetings by Congress groups at different times and in different Provinces and statements by Congressmen arrested by the police. [ibid, pp. 579, 625-29]

With the case against the Congress having been made, as they thought, cast-iron, and the death of Gandhiji in the course of the fast appearing as a



certainty, Amery and the India Office began to turn their minds to the way they could fashion India's future constitution. In a rambling private communication to Linlithgow on 8 February, Amery let his mind dwell on how best to provide "protection" to the Scheduled Castes. The fundamental weakness of this section of population, as Amery saw it, was that they were neither one thing nor the other. How much easier it would be to legislate for them if only they could turn Christian or Muslim *en bloc*. As it was, they remained a part of the Hindu system, which made it difficult to protect them. There was nevertheless a way. It was to have an Executive in which each main element, including the Scheduled Castes, was represented, and which was "reasonably independent" of the Legislature. "Possibly too," Amery chuckled, "after Gandhi's death, it might be worth considering whether the present anomalous electoral arrangements for the Scheduled Castes should not be altered and a direct communal basis substituted."

Amery visualized for the governance of the post-war India an Indianized Executive consisting of the nominees of the Viceroy and the Secretary of State, with which the British Government could come to "practical treaty arrangements". The trend of thought after the war, said he, was not going to be democratic on the subject of giving everybody self-government. The Atlantic Charter was an exposition of 19th century ideals. Nevertheless the British had to come to grips with the "growing intensity of nationalism in the oriental world". Hence the need for an Indianized Executive Council, with, say, the Jam Saheb as the Viceroy! [Ibid, pp. 631-37]

9

According to his notice to the Government, early on 10 February, after breakfast Gandhiji started his 21-Day fast after a short prayer. On that first day of the fast there was no break in his usual routine. He went for his morning and evening walks, placed flowers on Mahadevbhai's samadhi and wrote and studied during the day.

He told this author: "You have to shoulder the main responsibility of serving me during the fast. You must therefore forget about your studies and your writing of the diary while the fast lasts."



To the Government's message that he could have his own medical attendants, Gandhiji's answer was: "I have Sushila here to attend on me. If she needs any help she will ask for it." But this author was not sure that she could shoulder such an onerous responsibility all by herself. The Government might not even attach any weight to bulletins issued by a junior medico. She therefore asked for Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy, Dr. M.D.D. Gilder and Dr. Jivraj Mehta to be sent to the Aga Khan Palace to join her in the task of looking after Gandhiji. For Gandhiji's message it was proposed to enlist the services of Dr. Dinshaw Mehta, an eminent nature cure expert. [Sushila Nayar, *Bapuki Karavas Kahani*, pp. 293-94]

As soon as the fast began the Governor of Bombay, as previously arranged, announced the fact to London, Chungking and Washington by telegraphing the code word "Repudiation". From London Attlee sent telegrams to the Prime Ministers of Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, informing them that Gandhiji had started his fast, as a result of which a serious situation had developed. He further informed them that the Government's offer to Gandhiji that they were prepared to release him for the duration of the fast had been rejected by him and he had therefore been told that the responsibility for fasting in detention would rest solely on him and that they would not allow the fast to deflect them from their policy. [*The Transfer Power*, Vol. III, pp. 648, 649-50]

When the news of the fast broke in the country, people were struck with foreboding. A wave of emotion swept across the land. Thousands of political prisoners in jails all over the country went on sympathetic fasts, lasting for varying periods from one day to three weeks. In the jails of Bihar alone, according to the report of Governor Rutherford sent to Linlithgow, 400 prisoners refused food in Gaya Jail — 399 for twenty-four hours and one for a week; in Chapra Jail 100 fasted, three of them for a prolonged period; in Patna Camp Jail 90 persons fasted and in Dumka 36 persons refused food. [Ibid, p. 672]

Industrial centres all over the country observed hartals for periods varying from one day to three days. In Bombay and Ahmedabad exchange markets did not function for nearly two weeks. In Ahmedabad, especially, the textile workers were greatly disturbed, with 10,000 of them leaving the town. [Arun Chandra Bhuyan, *The Quit India Movement*, p. 155]



As reactions to the fast convulsed the country the Executive Council of the Viceroy began to show signs of heightened nervousness. Having given their whole-hearted support to the policy of letting Gandhiji die in jail rather than press for his release, many among the Indian members of the Council were gripped by apprehension that should Gandhiji not survive the fast, a contingency that to most informed opinion appeared almost certain, they would be seen in the public eyes as having been instrumental in bringing about his death and they would lose all public esteem.

Twice on 11 February 1943, M. S. Aney met the Viceroy and urged him, now that the Government of India had made its point, to release Gandhiji unconditionally, that being the only way to prevent his death.

Linlithgow remained adamant. He said the Council had burnt its boats and could not go back on the decision. He said he would regret it if the Hindu members resigned over the issue, for then Jinnah might come in with two or three Hindu officers plus the existing Muslims other than Sultan Ahmed.

The strain on the Councillors increased as the fast progressed. Mody, Sarker, Sultan Ahmed (who the Viceroy said normally worked with the Hindus in the Council), Srivastava and Jogendra Singh all individually met the Viceroy several times and pleaded for the release of Gandhiji.

On 17 February, when Gandhiji's condition was pronounced serious by the doctors attending on him, Mody, Aney and Sarker resigned from the Viceroy's Council, on the ground that "the majority decision not to release Gandhi unconditionally, even when danger to his life accrued from the fast he had undertaken, is one which we cannot possibly support." [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. III, pp. 651-52, 654-55, 674-75, 682-83]

In the United States, too, much concern was felt at the British Government's obdurate refusal to arrive at some accommodation with Gandhiji and thus avert the development of a situation which was bound to have an adverse effect on the war effort.

On 8 February William Phillips, President Roosevelt's Special Representative in India, had met the Viceroy and expressed a desire to see Gandhiji. Linlithgow had told him that that was of course out of the question,



that any sort of attempt on the part of Phillips by way of mediation would be most unwelcome to the British Government. He had further told Phillips about Gandhiji's imminent fast and the likelihood of his dying in prison.

On 18 February Phillips again sought a meeting with the Viceroy and handed him a message received from Secretary of State Hull. This instructed Phillips to convey to the Viceroy "an expression of our deep concern over the political crisis in India" and express to him the hope that "means may be discovered to avoid deterioration of the situation which would be almost certain to occur if Gandhi dies". Phillips also told the Viceroy that the President was deeply concerned.

Linlithgow told Phillips that "to rehabilitate Gandhi" at that stage by conceding his demand for unconditional release would be disastrous. In the event of Gandhiji dying there would be "six months unpleasantness steadily declining in volume; little or nothing at the end of it". The prospect of a settlement, he told the President's representative, would be greatly increased after the demise of Gandhiji.

Amery told Linlithgow that Hull's message to Phillips had probably been dictated by the President himself. Eden, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, would, he said, be visiting Washington and would emphasize in strong terms British objection to any U.S. intervention. Meanwhile, it was important to keep the story of the "show-down" between Britain and the U.S.A. over India, dark, for if it should get out to the Press, the immediate effect on the Anglo-American relations would be very serious like that of Gandhiji's death on the situation in India.

The British Foreign Office on its part told Washington that if the U.S. wished to express any views on India, it should be done through His Majesty's Government, and that Phillips should be instructed to keep quiet on the subject.

In Washington when Halifax met the U.S. Secretary of State, the latter told him that the President wanted the British Government to know that "our biggest desire is not to see the fellow die in prison". Halifax reported to London that he anticipated that as anxiety about the issue of the fast grew, so also would "the tendency to question the wisdom of the policy of letting him die on our hands". [Ibid, pp. 652-53, 687-90, 694-95, 709-10]



With sizeable American forces stationed in India for operations against Japan, American official circles were keen that the U.S.A. should not be seen to support the British in a course that was calculated to harden Indian nationalist sentiment towards it. Phillips was constantly being approached by the Press and by public men in India asking what the U.S.A. was doing to save Gandhiji's life. Phillips was instructed to say that any phases of the Indian situation which required discussion would be dealt with by the ranking officials of the American and British Governments. Any hope that the statement might have roused soon faded away. Gandhiji remained in prison while the rulers daily awaited his death. Phillips, in one of his reports to the President, pronounced his judgment on Linlithgow. "Perhaps," he said, "he is a chip off the old block that Americans knew something about in 1772." [Ibid, pp. 379]



CHAPTER XVIII: GANDHIJI'S 21-DAY FAST

1

The correspondence between Gandhiji and the Viceroy was released to the Press by the Government on 10 February 1943 and it was carried in the newspapers of 11 and 12 February, along with the Government's statement announcing Gandhiji's fast. It was only then that the members of the Working Committee, confined in the Ahmadnagar Fort first became aware of the charges against them which had led to their arrest, of Gandhiji's repudiation of the charges and of the fast he had been obliged to impose on himself to vindicate his position and that of the Congress. The Working Committee was as much flabbergasted at the falsity of the charges labelled against it, as Gandhiji had been, and felt that it could not let the accusations pass unchallenged. Maulana Azad accordingly took up the matter with the Viceroy. In the course of a long letter to the latter, dated 13 February, he sought to make it clear, on behalf of the Congress, that, "so far as we are concerned, both as individuals and in our corporate capacity, speaking on behalf of our organization, your charge that the Congress had organized a secret movement of violence is wholly false and without foundation."

He wrote:

To make serious charges against those who are prevented from replying to them, to make those charges without producing evidence, to support them by the vast propaganda machine of a powerful Government and, at the same time, to suppress news and views which are contrary to them, are not evidence either of fair play or a strong case.

Referring to the charge that sabotage had been conducted under secret instructions circulated in the name of the All India Congress Committee, Azad said he could state with authority that "the A.I.C.C. at no time contemplated such a campaign, and never issued such instructions, secret or other." Azad pointed out that with most of the members of the A.I.C.C. having been arrested on 9 August, the A.I.C.C. could not function. As for the wife of a member of the Working Committee (Aruna Asaf Ali) being a member of an underground Congress organization and "actively engaged in planning the bomb outrages and other acts



of terrorism", Azad asserted that the Working Committee knew nothing of such Congress organizations and no Congressman or Congresswoman could be engaged in acts of violence and terrorism.

Azad also disowned the Andhra P.C.C. circular, to which reference had been made in the statement of the Government of India. "We know nothing of this," Azad wrote, "and cannot believe that improper instructions, against the fundamental principles of the Congress, could have been issued by any responsible Congress authority."

Azad concluded the letter by denying "with all vehemence" the false charges labelled against the Congress by the British rulers. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. III, pp. 659-64]

Linlithgow took no notice of this letter from the imprisoned chief of the Congress organization that he and his Government were vilifying by one-sided propaganda and did not bother even to acknowledge, leave aside answer it!

2

In the Aga Khan Palace Gandhiji's fast proceeded along its course. On 11 February, the second day of the fast, Gandhiji's body could still function normally. Though there was some weakness, there was yet no nausea.

Gandhiji drank enough water. He could still walk to Mahadevbhai's samadhi and back in the morning.

In answer to the request made by this author, Dr. M.D.D. Gilder was transferred from Yeravda Prison to the Aga Khan Palace on 11 February.

On 12 February Gandhiji was weaker, though he could still drink water without difficulty. The weight, it was observed, was going down at the rate of 2 lb. every day. There was slight nausea but no vomiting. He was not any more in a position to walk to the samadhi. In the afternoon Col. M. G. Bhandari communicated to Gandhiji the Government's proposal to leave the initiative regarding visitors to him, saying they would send him names of applicants to whom they saw no objection, that interviews would take place in the presence of an official and that accounts of interviews would not be published without official approval. [Ibid, p. 665]



Gandhiji in a letter to Bhandari the same evening expressed the view that it was not fair to leave the initiative as regards visits of friends to him. If the Government wished that he should see visitors there was no need for the names to be referred to him. Anyone wishing to see him should be given the required permission. Gandhiji further saw no justification for the ban on publication of the accounts of interviews. If visits contemplating discussions were to be allowed, he wrote, the Government should make the announcement right away so that such visits could take place at the early stages of the fast.

Gandhiji proposed to the Government that those who had nursed him at the Ashram and during his previous fasts should be allowed to stay with him if they should desire to do so.

Gandhiji then referred to a news item in the papers of that day that J. P. Bhansali had undertaken a fast in sympathy with him, and requested the Government to communicate to Bhansali a message from him, dissuading him from going on with the fast since he had just ended his long fast over Chimur, and it was necessary for him to rebuild his body to fulfil his self-allotted task.

The Government answered that (1) no public announcement could be made about the visitors, (2) no account of the interviews could be published without prior Government approval, (3) requirement of extra nurses would be considered sympathetically, (4) the message to Bhansali could not be communicated because of the reference in it to Chimur, but he would be informed that Gandhiji wished him to give up his fast. [C.W.M.G., LXXVII, pp. 62 64]

On 13 February, the fourth day of the fast, Gandhiji suffered from increased nausea. In the country anxiety with regard to his health also began to grow and people started to converge on Poona in the hope of being allowed to visit him. Newspapers reported that Mahadevbhai's widow Durgabehn and son Narayan had arrived in the city along with Kanu Gandhi and awaited permission to visit Gandhiji. Would Gandhiji give his approval to the visit? Gandhiji, in keeping with the decision he had conveyed to the Government, refused to involve himself in the matter. It was for the Government to permit or not to permit any visitors, he said. However, at the intervention of Kasturba, after a couple of days, permission came from the Government for the three of them to stay at the Aga



Khan Palace for the duration of the fast. [Sushila Nayar, *Bapuki Karavas Kahani*, p. 296]

From London British Prime Minister Churchill conveyed to the Viceroy concern of another kind. In a cable he asked Linlithgow: "I have heard that Gandhi usually has glucose in his water when doing his various fasting antics. Would it be possible to verify this?"

Linlithgow answered by a "most secret" cable two days later:

This may be the case but those who have been in attendance on him doubt it, and present Surgeon-General Bombay (a European) says that on a previous fast G. was particularly careful to guard against possibility of glucose being used. I am told that his present medical attendants tried to persuade him to take glucose yesterday and again today, and that he refused absolutely. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. III, pp. 659, 669]

From 14 February onwards Gandhiji began to experience greater and greater difficulty in drinking water. A little lime juice with a little salt or soda was added to the water. Nausea and restlessness became more pronounced. On 15 February Dr. B. C. Roy arrived in the Detention Camp to join the team of medical attendants.

The Government doctors, Maj.-Gen. Candy and Col. Bhandari, reported to the Government on 14 February that while Gandhiji's condition just then could not be described as critical or dangerous, danger was approaching. The Viceroy directed that Candy and, if he agreed, Gilder, should formally intimate to Gandhiji that he would not be able to carry on the fast for 21 days. [Ibid, p. 668]

3

In the Central Assembly, which had started its budget session on 10 February, the very day on which Gandhiji had started the fast, the matter came up on 15 February, when L. K. Maitra introduced an adjournment motion demanding immediate and unconditional release of Gandhiji. Maitra appealed to all members of the House to set aside all political considerations and unite in saving the life of "a great Indian who was revered by all classes of people". N. M. Joshi, Sardar Sant Singh, Dr. P. N. Banerjee and T. T. Krishnamachari spoke supporting the motion.



The Muslim League group, the European group and Cowasji Jehangir opposed the motion.

Liaqat Ali Khan, speaking for the Muslim League, made it clear that his group would neither support nor oppose the motion. It was the Government's duty to maintain law and order, he declared, and it was their responsibility to decide for themselves whether this could be done by Gandhiji's release or his remaining in detention. Civil disobedience, he said, had been going on to achieve Congress domination.

Henry Richardson (European group) described Gandhiji's fast as a threat to authority and an invitation to chaos.

Reginald Maxwell, Home Member, speaking for the Government, informed the House that Gandhiji had been offered release for the purpose and for the duration of the fast and that Gandhiji had declined the offer, saying that he had conceived the fast only as a prisoner and that if he were released he would not fast. The fast thus amounted to little more than a demand for release. Gandhiji, he declared, was "the acknowledged leader of an open rebellion aimed at overthrowing the existing Government", and had thus forfeited the right to be heard by the Government so long as he remained a rebel. He could not take part in public life under the protection of the law that he denied.

The motion was talked out. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1943, Vol. I, pp. 156-58]

On 15 February Gandhiji continued to be troubled by nausea, vomiting and restlessness. On 16 February Governor Lumley informed the Viceroy that in the opinion of Surgeon General Candy Gandhiji probably would "not last longer than a further five days. Pleading for Gandhiji's release, he wrote:

I remain ...of the view that though we have a strong logical case for keeping him in detention ...his death in detention would do great permanent damage to Indian sentiment; and would provide a serious obstacle to eventual settlement. That he will be a nuisance if he is released, is certain. But in my view that is likely to be a lesser evil than the long-term reactions which would follow his death in detention. I have not canvassed the views of officials here, but ...I am probably safe in saying that it is the



general view of the European officers of the I.C.S and Police in this Province that it would do irreparable damage to British-Indian relations. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. III, p. 671]

Linlithgow ignored the plea and did not even answer. He was willing to see Gandhiji die and watched with secret satisfaction the gradual deterioration in his condition. On the same day (16 February) as Lumley was pleading with him to release Gandhiji, Linlithgow was writing to Amery how great were the chances of Gandhiji having a sudden heart attack, given his age and his arteriosclerosis. Gilder, he informed Amery, had suggested that he should take glucose, but that Gandhiji had refused, insisting "on submitting himself to the full vigour of the game". Linlithgow reiterated his determination, supported by the Cabinet, to stand firm. If by doing so he were to lose some of his Hindu Councillors, he was ready to replace them by civil servants, if necessary. [Ibid, pp. 675-76]

Amery on his part expressed the hope that if Gandhiji "does not call off the fast the whole thing may be over quickly and the period of suspense and growing hysteria not be prolonged indefinitely". [Ibid, p. 679]

4

On 17 February, as he entered the second week of the fast, Gandhiji seemed unable to drink any water. He had always had an aversion to plain water and had marvelled how people could drink it by glassfuls. Adding honey to water was out of the question during the fast and he would not permit even adding *mosambi* juice to water which he had permitted in terms of the fast. The time for it, he said, had not come. To prevent the possibility of oedema, adding of salt (sodium chloride) and soda (sodium bicarbonate) to water was stopped.

Among the many visitors was Thakkar Bapa. Talking to him Gandhiji said: "This Government has crossed all limits. From the very beginning its case has rested on falsehoods. I say put me on trial, produce the evidence against me and if I am proved guilty I shall make amends. Even in Russia the accused are given the benefit of trial. I am denied that right. All I seek is justice." [Sushila Nayar, *Bapuki Karavas Kahani*, pp. 301-3]

In the light of the bulletin issued by General Candy, Linlithgow, on 17 February, informed his Council that Gandhiji's condition was serious. Upon this



Mody, Aney and Sarker tendered their resignations from the Viceroy's Council saying that "the majority decision not to release Gandhi unconditionally, even when danger to his life accrued from the fast he had undertaken, is one which we cannot possibly support".

Linlithgow accepted the resignations. He told Amery on 18 February that he was prepared to "face the music whatever the outcome". India would become the base for extensive operations only in another eight months and by that time the situation would have been brought under control.

On the same day Linlithgow sent a telegraphic communication to all the Provincial Governors telling them that they "must be fully prepared for Gandhi's death and must be ready to take common action" to deal with the situation that might arise. When death occurred, Linlithgow said, the Bombay Government would send to all Provincial Governments, Chief Commissioners and Political Residents a most immediate *en clair* telegram containing the code word "RUBICON". All telephone links with Poona would be cut off for two hours after the despatch of the telegram. A bare announcement of death would then be given to the Press by the Bombay Government.

Public cremation would be allowed subject to such regulations in the matter of route, place of cremation, etc., as might be necessary to preserve order.

Keeping in view Gandhiji's position as a prisoner and a declared rebel, Linlithgow further told the Governors, there could be no question of half-masting flags or sending official messages of condolence to his widow.

In another telegram he told the Governors to send him "formal confirmation" that their plans for dealing with any emergency that might arise were all in order, that they had the necessary forces at their disposal and could, in consultation with military authorities, deal with anything that might happen. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. III, pp. 684-87]

On 18 February the bulletin on Gandhiji's health read: "Although Mr. Gandhi had a total of 9 hours sleep he is not refreshed nor mentally alert. There is other evidence of uremia which is progressive. The heart action is feebler. Anxiety as to his condition deepens." It was signed by Dr. M.D.D. Gilder,



Maj.-Gen. R. H. Candy, Dr. B. C. Roy, Lt.-Col. M. G. Bhandari, Dr. Sushila Nayar and Lt.-Col. B. Z. Shah.

The blood examination of Gandhiji showed that toxins and fluid had accumulated in the body.

On 18 February Thakkar Bapa visited again. Talking to him Gandhiji made the point that while he did not at all approve of the violence that had been going on outside, he, as a prisoner, had no right to comment on it or denounce it. It was the violence of the Government more than the violence of the people that he must condemn in the severest terms. The Government was bent on provoking people into acts of violence and it had succeeded. Common people, after all, were not angels. When there was no one to guide them along the path of non-violence, it was easy for them to drift into violence. He went on:

There has not been the slightest diminution of my faith in ahimsa. If anything it has been further strengthened. There certainly has been a change in my views in certain respects. I shall not now say that ahimsa can only succeed when the atmosphere in the country is wholly non-violent. If I were to stop the practice of non-violence at the slightest violence anywhere in the country, which the Government can easily provoke, I should not be able to demonstrate the power of non-violence. Violence can be conquered only by developing the power of non-violence. [Sushila Nayar, Bapuki Karavas Kahani, pp. 303-5]

Thakkar Bapa along with Purushottamdas Thakurdas immediately afterwards sought an interview with Governor Lumley and reported to him what Gandhiji had said, viz., that he could not be blamed for the arson and violence going on in the country and that he could not countenance violence. They offered the opinion that if Gandhiji was released he would be certain to condemn the sabotage and might even ask those engaged in it to surrender to the Government. Lumley assured them that he would convey what they had said to the Viceroy but could offer them no hope that it would be any use.

He did so, with predictable results. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. III, p. 693]

On 19 February Gandhiji's condition showed further noticeable deterioration. He became so weak that he could not even hold a glass of water.



His hand trembled. The pain in the ear, which he had been experiencing for some time, became worse. Doctors requested visitors to avoid putting too much strain on Gandhiji and the time allowed to each visitor was shortened to two or three minutes. Among the visitors was Vaikunth Mehta. He spoke about khadi work. Gandhiji told him: "If people even now take the path that I have shown, India can be free in a matter of weeks."

5

As reports about Gandhiji's deteriorating condition spread, anxiety about his health increased not only in the country but also outside.

In England Viscount Simon in a note asked Amery: "Gandhi announced that he was going to fast 'to capacity', but that he was not going to fast 'to death'. Then why do not doctors tell him that capacity is now reached, and that he ought to stop?"

Amery said the matter had been considered by the doctors and that they had decided not to give him the warning, for there seemed to be a possibility that "a communication of this kind might precipitate a heart attack, which is the greatest danger to Gandhi's life". Amery expressed his doubt if the phrase 'to capacity' could be interpreted by Gandhiji to mean that if the fast proved beyond his powers he would give it up rather than die. [Ibid, pp. 697, 707]

In Delhi on 19 February a large number of political leaders and public men assembled in a conference to consider the situation arising out of Gandhiji's fast and to initiate an effort to have him freed.

The conference, mooted first by K. M. Munshi, was summoned in the name of Rajaji, K. M. Munshi, N. M. Joshi, G. L. Mehta, A. B. Ghuznavi, K. Srinivasan, H. N. Kunzru, Dr. P. N. Banerjee, Abdul Rashid Chowdhary, Sardar Sant Singh and M. A. Kazmi. About 300 persons, representing practically every community — Hindus, Muslims, Parsis, Sikhs, Christians, Europeans — participated. Among them were businessmen, industrialists and members of the Legislature and political leaders including T. B. Sapru, M. R. Jayakar and M. S. Aney, the last having only two days previously resigned from the Viceroy's Council.

Welcoming the delegates Rajaji said the conference had been convened to give expression to the universal feeling in the country that Gandhiji should be



enabled to end the fast. Gandhiji had said it was a fast to capacity, but his capacity was not what he had estimated it to be.

Indian people, Rajaji said, loved Gandhiji so much that they were incapable of any logical argument in the matter. Foreigners, however, could be prejudiced by legalistic arguments and misled into imagining that Gandhiji had been convicted for an offence. But, Rajaji pointed out, he had been detained without trial. What Gandhiji asked for was that he should either be tried or set free to state his case. It was a falsehood to assert that Gandhiji would stand for violence, secrecy or sabotage if he was freed.

Scores of people, who could not come, sent messages to the conference. Among them were Madan Mohan Malaviya, Srinivasa Sastri and the Rev. Foss Westcott, Metropolitan Bishop of Calcutta. More than a hundred associations, institutions and public bodies sent telegrams expressing the wish for unconditional release of Gandhiji. Besides, a manifesto signed by 17,000 citizens of Delhi was presented to the conference urging unconditional release of Gandhiji.

Tej Bahadur Sapru, who presided, voiced his condemnation of the acts of sabotage going on in the country, but said he could not accept the verdict of the Government that Gandhiji had been responsible for it. The Executive was not a judicial body. To punish the rebels was one thing, to denounce the whole of the Congress as an organization of rebels was quite another.

Those who denounced Gandhiji as a rebel, Sapru went on, forgot English history. Smuts had been a rebel. De Valera had been a rebel. The British Government had always come to terms with rebels. Should Gandhiji, whose appeal to the imagination of the country was beyond doubt, die in prison, Sapru warned, the task of reconciliation between the British and the Indian nation would become next to impossible. Sapru ended the address by an appeal to the civilized conscience of Great Britain and to the United Nations for immediate release of Gandhiji.

The resolution, drafted by a committee earlier appointed by the conference, was then moved by M. R. Jayakar. It read:

This Conference representing different creeds, communities and interests in India gives expression to the universal desire of the people of



this country that, in the interest of the future of India and of international goodwill, Mahatma Gandhi should be released immediately and unconditionally. The Conference views with the gravest concern the serious situation that will arise if the Government fail to take timely action and prevent a catastrophe. This Conference therefore urges the Government to release Mahatma Gandhi forthwith.

Speaking on the resolution Jayakar said that contrary to what the Government said, Gandhiji had not imposed the fast on himself in order to secure his release. Fasting was the way Gandhiji had chosen to express his frustration over the situation in India as it had developed ever since the Cripps mission. The slogan of 'Quit India' that Gandhiji had raised had been the result of his conviction that the British Government had reached the end of its usefulness and was not capable of any further good in India. It was a cry for full freedom for India.

The resolution was spiritedly supported by Shyama Prasad Mookerjee, Allah Bux, former Premier of Sind, H. N. Kunzru, Master Tara Singh and a host of other speakers. It was unanimously passed. [*Leaders' Conference*, The Hindustan Times Press, New Delhi, 1943, pp. 5-43]

The resolution was sent to the Viceroy by Sapru for his consideration. Copies were also cabled to the British Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition and the Leader of the Liberal Party.

The reply, authorized by the Viceroy, said that the attitude of the Government in the matter of Gandhiji's fast had been set out in the statement of 10 February, that the responsibility for the fast rested solely on Gandhiji and that the decision to end the fast must rest with him. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. III, pp. 703, 706]

Churchill's answer, conveyed by Amery through the Viceroy, endorsed the "determination of the Government of India not to be deflected from their duty towards the peoples of India and of the United Nations, by Mr. Gandhi's attempt to secure his unconditional release by fasting". The responsibility for the fast, he said, rested entirely with Gandhiji himself. Churchill also directed that his reply be given full publicity in India and Britain. [*Ibid*, p. 720]



On 20 February Gandhiji's condition deteriorated alarmingly. In the morning when Gen. Candy came round on his visit, Gandhiji was asleep. He turned to Sarojini Naidu, saying: "If this man should survive for another two years what a great difference it would make to India. What a pity that a man such as he should be in detention simply because he has such tremendous influence among the people and the ability to use that influence."

There was mention of the desirability of glucose being given to Gandhiji intravenously. The Government doctors brought along a 50 cc syringe. They appeared to be in a frame of mind to administer glucose to Gandhiji even without his permission. After all, they thought, their duty as doctors lay in saving their patient. To this author this appeared to be a frightful thing. She turned to Dr. Gilder and told him to make the doctors understand that to do what they contemplated doing would be a most hazardous thing and might even result in Gandhiji's death. Dr. Gilder accordingly explained the matter to the doctors and dissuaded them from surreptitiously administering glucose to Gandhiji. Dr. B. C. Roy came in just then. He too expressed himself against forcible administration of glucose. It was decided that if the Government doctors nevertheless made any attempt again in this direction, the non-official team of doctors would register their protest in writing. This stopped the proposal being implemented. However, Kately was asked to keep the syringe with him.

After Gandhiji woke up he was examined by the doctors. Gen. Candy then expressed a wish to speak to him alone. When he emerged from Gandhiji's room he looked unhappy and distraught. Later Gandhiji related what had happened.

Candy, it appeared, had for some time paced the room in great agitation and then drawing a chair to sit near Gandhiji, had said to him: "Mr. Gandhi, it is my duty to tell you as a doctor that you have reached the limit of your capacity to fast." He had then burst into tears. Gandhiji had consoled him: "Why do you worry? I am in God's hands. If He wishes to take me away I shall go. If He wishes to take some more work from me I shall survive." [Sushila Nayar, *Bapuki Karavas Kahani*, pp. 306-8]

It is necessary to dwell on the incident here at some length because later the British rulers, in their frustration at the successful termination of the fast,



openly voiced their suspicion that this author might have administered glucose to Gandhiji. Linlithgow forwarded to Amery on 6 March Lumley's note on the subject, dwelling on the crisis in Gandhiji's condition on 20-21 February. Lumley told the Viceroy:

Candy does not think the non-official doctors faked it or exaggerated it [the fear that Gandhiji might die]. On the other hand, he tells me that he does suspect that glucose must have been administered at some time during the latter part of the fast. He can produce no definite evidence. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. III, p. 707]

Candy himself based his suspicion on the fact that Gandhiji, against expectations, had gained one pound in weight between 24 February and 2 March, even though his daily intake of fruit juice had been reduced. "It does not seem possible," he wrote in his secret report, "that a man could maintain his weight much less increase it on such diet." He then gratuitously added:

I am however convinced that if anything was added to his diet, he was ignorant of the fact. If anybody added anything; e.g. glucose, I think the culprit was Dr. Sushila Nayar.

Similarly, on the consultation between the doctors on 20 February over the desirability of injecting glucose, Candy less than truthfully reported:

I asked Dr. Roy and Dr. Gilder if they would inject glucose in the event of Mr. Gandhi becoming unconscious. They said they would not. I asked if they would offer any objection to this treatment being carried out by us. I gathered they would welcome it, and all preparations were made. The occasion did not come....

Closing his report with a comment on the improvement in Gandhiji's condition from 24 February onwards, Candy again gave vent to his unfounded suspicion of glucose having been given. He wrote:

The improvement followed the unexpressed but shared belief that death was near, it may have started with the administration of sweet lime juice, or something may have been added. I strongly suspect that Dr. Nayar took fright, and sacrificed her principles. This will never be known. [Ibid, pp. 770-71]



The gain in weight could well have been due to retention of water, which Candy obviously did not think of. Gandhiji's kidney function, as later tests showed, had become much weaker.

What Surgeon-General Candy, in his haste to please his masters by confirming the suspicions they had voiced, did not stop to consider was that the principles of this author did not matter one way or the other. What mattered was Gandhiji's principles, and no one among his immediate entourage, least of all the author, would have dared to do anything which might even remotely have amounted to an infringement of those principles. Beside, how could glucose in any quantity have been added to Gandhiji's water without his being aware of it? After all Gandhiji's taste buds had not been impaired by the fast. The record therefore must be put straight. At no time either before or on 20 February or in the subsequent days was there any attempt on anybody's part to administer glucose to Gandhiji by adding it to the lime-juice-laced water which he was given to drink, or to his enema water. None of us could dream of cheating him.

7

Notwithstanding the serious condition he was in on 20 February, Gandhiji nevertheless received visitors and spoke to them. Among them was S. A. Brelvi, editor of *The Bombay Chronicle*. Gandhiji told him what he had been telling everyone on the subject of violence by the people. He could never countenance it, but he would not want to criticize or condemn those resorting to it until he had studied all the facts. He had not started the movement. Had he been in a position to start a mass movement he would never have permitted violence of any kind. He would have raised the movement to the highest pitch of non-violence yet reached in history. [C.W.M.G., LXXVII, p. 65]

Talking to his youngest son Devadas Gandhi, Managing Editor of *The Hindustan Times*, who had called along with his family, Gandhiji made the same point. When told that even in carrying out acts of sabotage people had been taking care that no human lives were lost, Gandhiji said: "Even so, had I been free I would not have allowed such things to happen. Secrecy is inconsistent with truth and ahimsa. In my scheme of things secrecy could have no place."

On 21 February Gandhiji was so weak that he could not sit up even to drink water and tried to suck it through a tube as he lay with all energy gone out of



him. Every now and then water had to be poured into his mouth with a spoon. The intake of water was greatly reduced.

The medical bulletin, signed by his six attending doctors, fairly summed up the situation. It said:

Mr. Gandhi had a very bad day yesterday and only four and half hours' sleep at night. During the day he is apathetic and at times drowsy. Heart sounds are weak and volume of the pulse small. He is extremely weak so that even swallowing of water exhausts him. He drank forty ounces of water mixed with two ounce of sour lime juice as usual. He is too weak to be weighed, but had lost 14 pounds up to the 19th instant. The uremic condition deepens and if the fast is not ended without delay, it may be too late to save his life.

So precarious had become Gandhiji's condition that the doctors had all but given up hope. Dr. Shah later said he and Candy had waited up until 10 o'clock at night expecting a phone call from the Aga Khan Palace any time. Candy had been particularly nervy, saying: "I don't care what happens to the Congress. This man is much above the Congress. He cannot die. We must not let him die. He must live."

There were of course a number of visitors: Sophia Wadia, B. F. Barucha, Shankerlal Banker, Anasuyabehn and Rameshwardas Birla. But Dr. Gilder saw to it that no one spent more than three minutes with Gandhiji. Interviewers were also warned not to speak to Gandhiji on topics that might excite him.

Around 11 or 12 o'clock Gandhiji showed signs of a sudden collapse. He tried to suck water through a tube and was overcome by nausea. He began thrashing about his arms and legs. The present author was alone with him at the time. His pulse was so weak it could hardly be felt. She gathered up courage to ask him: "Bapuji, has not the time come for sweet lime juice to be added to your water?" He was silent and this author wondered if he had heard her. After some moments he gave a weak nod with his head. This author quickly called Dr. Gilder and went to squeeze two sweet limes. Then adding the juice to two ounces of water she slowly poured it into Gandhiji's mouth from an ounce measure. This seemed miraculously to revive him. Afterwards at intervals he was given more



juice diluted in water – altogether 15 or 16 ounces mixed with three times as much water. [Sushila Nayar, *Bapuki Karavas Kahani*, pp. 310-12; *Leaders' Conference*; pp. 21, 30-31]

So little at the time appeared the chances of Gandhiji surviving that the Government, not wishing to be caught on the wrong foot, set about making preparations for the funeral. Charles Bristow, Adviser to the Governor of Bombay, was despatched post haste to Poona "to supervise the preparation of arrangements for the funeral and to take responsibility for any immediate decisions which might have to be made". As Lumley was later to report to the Viceroy, although the eventuality did not arise, "plans, so far as they could be made before the event, were ready". The main line was to allow a public funeral, added Lumley. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. III, p. 760]

From London Attlee again intimated the Prime Ministers of Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa with the developments with regard to Gandhiji's fast. He wrote:

You will have already gathered from Press reports that Gandhi's condition becomes increasingly serious. Fast is not yet reported to have reached a stage from which recovery is impossible, but heart action is affected and death might result at any time from heart failure.

Attlee then referred to the great pressure by "Hindu elements" for unconditional release of Gandhiji and the resignation of three Executive Councillors, and conveyed the view of the Viceroy that if death occurred there would be considerable emotional reaction and a good deal of trouble.

He mentioned the concern shown by the President of the U.S.A. at the possibility of Gandhiji dying and said Ambassador Halifax anticipated that as anxiety about the fast grew so would the tendency to question the wisdom of letting Gandhiji die in detention. [Ibid, pp. 715-16]

Prime Minister Fraser of New Zealand received the message with a great deal of concern. Expressing his uneasiness in his reply to Attlee the following day, he stated that

viewed from this distance it still appears to me that less harm would be done at this critical time to the cause of Britain and the United Nations by



a gesture of clemency and generosity on the part of the Government of India than by the maintenance of an inflexible attitude, however just, which must inevitably lead to the charge of responsibility of Gandhi's death. I cannot help feeling that there is far more to be gained by Gandhi's release than there is by maintenance of a course which will bring about the most violent reaction and the deification of Gandhi by the whole of India as a martyr in what they hold is their struggle for freedom. [Ibid, p. 721]

Attlee answered that whether or not Gandhiji should be regarded as a martyr in the cause of India's freedom, "the immediate dangers attending his unconditional release in existing circumstances are such that the Viceroy is not prepared to face them and we accept his judgment". [Ibid, p. 731]

Field Marshal Smuts too was scared at the prospect of Gandhiji being allowed to die in prison. On 25 February he sent a terse personal message to Attlee, saying:

Gandhi's death should be avoided by all means possible, and it is worth considering whether forcible feeding by injections or otherwise should not be applied to him, as in previous cases in English practice. [Ibid, p. 730]

Churchill, who could not see the Indian situation except with glasses tinted by malevolence, answered on 26 February:

I do not think Gandhi has the slightest intention of dying, and I imagine he has been eating better meals than I have for the last week [here he was mouthing the canard about Gandhiji being given glucose in his water].... Before the fast began we were assured the crisis would be reached the fourth day. Then the eleventh day we were all told that if we did not let him out it would be too late and he would never recover. It is now the sixteenth day.... You will excuse me, I am sure, if I do not express plainly on paper all my thoughts upon this topic. [Ibid, p. 738]

On 22 February Gandhiji's condition was less serious. As the bulletin signed by his six doctors explained, with the administration of sweet lime juice with



water he rallied from the previous day's crisis and slept for about 5½ hours during the night. He appeared comfortable and cheerful, though his heart was weaker.

It was Gandhiji's day of silence. Still there were many visitors. They just came, silently bowed to him and withdrew. Among them were Mathuradas Tricumji, Amtussalaam, Ambalal Sarabhai and Swami Anand.

On 23 February, there appeared to be no appreciable change in Gandhiji's condition. But he looked comfortable.

Horace Alexander of the Friends Ambulance Unit came to have a talk with Gandhiji. Having been given to understand by Devadas Gandhi and Mirabehn earlier that if a clear assurance came from the Viceroy through an intermediary that Government's charges against the Congress would be placed before Gandhiji as early as possible and that if he considered it necessary he would be given an opportunity to see the members of the Working Committee, Gandhiji would call off the fast, Alexander had, on 22 February, met Governor Lumley and requested him to convey the message to the Viceroy.

Lumley, conveying the proposal to Linlithgow, said he would welcome such a move as providing a possible way out.

Linlithgow told Lumley that he had given the message careful thought but was quite clear that he could not take any action on the lines of the proposal. [Ibid, pp. 714-15]

Nevertheless Alexander raised the matter with Gandhiji on 23 February. Gandhiji, as Alexander wrote to the Governor on the following day, talked in terms not of calling off the fast but of possible developments later on. He appeared to Alexander confident of surviving the fast, but expressed acute distress that he, who had devoted his life to the promotion of non-violence, should have been suspected by the Government as the deliberate instigator of the violence which was admittedly rampant in some parts of the country.

About the proposal itself Gandhiji was lukewarm. Supposing, he asked, the evidence produced did not convince him, what then? A judicial enquiry into the whole case was needed. [Ibid, pp. 714-15, 733-34]

In Delhi, on the same day, 23 February, Rajaji sought an interview with the Viceroy's Private Secretary in an attempt to induce the Government to make a



move towards easing the situation along the lines of the proposal already rejected. Laithwaite repeated the Government line that Gandhiji could not be put into the position of investigating the evidence and saying whether he was satisfied or not, when it was he and the Congress who were on their defence. Rajaji pleaded with Laithwaite that Gandhiji had no alternative but to continue the fast. The Government had the alternative of releasing him and should take advantage of it. In the Working Committee, he said, the only person who mattered was Nehru, who was the future leader of the country and with whom the British would ultimately have to do business. And it was only Gandhiji who could keep Nehru's excessive vanity in order. That was a strong argument for Gandhiji's release, Rajaji argued.

Rajaji was told that there was nothing doing on that basis. [Ibid, pp. 723-24]

On 24 February, when Gandhiji entered the third week of his fast, there appeared to be a definite improvement in his condition. The medical bulletin signed by his doctors reported: "Mr. Gandhi's general condition shows a slight improvement. The uremic symptoms are less prominent. He is cheerful and his strength shows no further deterioration." Hopes thus brightened that Gandhiji might be able to survive the ordeal. Nevertheless the doctors had to be careful. As Gen. Candy said, the improvement might be temporary, like the last flicker of a dying lamp. [Sushila Nayar, *Bapuki Karavas Kahani*, pp. 314-15]

Linlithgow telegraphed to Amery: "My conviction grows that Gandhi will survive." He told him further that the Home Department had been asked to let him have the reactions so far apparent to the pamphlet that had been brought out on the Congress responsibility for the disturbances. The foreword to the pamphlet had been signed by Tottenham on 13 February and the pamphlet had been issued on 22 February. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. III, p. 724, *The Indian Annual Register*, 1943, Vol. I, p. 37]

Gandhiji felt the improvement and asked that the quantity of lime juice in his water be substantially reduced. This was done and as a consequence he felt weak in the morning on 25 February. Candy was disappointed. Gandhiji, by reducing the intake of lime juice, was tempting fate, he said. This author tried to explain that Gandhiji did not wish to court death, but he had declared that he



would add juice of sweet lime only to make water drinkable and that he had only agreed to take increased quantities of juice during the three days of crisis on the insistence of the doctors.

Candy said if another attack came it might prove fatal. He suggested that without the knowledge of Gandhiji he might be given sweet lime juice in increased quantities. Dr. Shah suggested stealthily changing the glass phial used to measure the juice. Cheating a patient to save his life was no sin. What would be the use of that, this author said, because the same glass phial would be used to measure the water too. Gandhiji had fixed the proportion of juice and water at one part of juice to seven parts of water. He did not want the juice to serve as nourishment, but only to enable him to drink enough water. [Sushila Nayar, *Bapuki Karavas Kahani*, pp. 315-17]

9

Rajagopalachari, Bhulabhai Desai and K. M. Munshi called on Gandhiji in the afternoon. They gave Gandhiji their assessment of the situation. Munshi explained that people of many sorts had been active outside. So far as he knew no Congressman had participated in acts of violence, but in many places others had gone beyond Gandhiji's instructions and perpetrated violence, for which the Government held Gandhiji responsible.

Rajaji pleaded with Gandhiji to denounce what had been going on in the country. Whoever might be responsible, the campaign of violence that had been raging could do no good to the country.

Then there was the communal question. Rajaji offered his ideas on the matter and said they had been approved by Sapru, Raja Maheshwar Dayal and others. Could not Gandhiji authorize any one of them to negotiate with the Muslims?

Gandhiji then spoke. His voice was feeble and barely audible. He said he had been mulling over his conception of ahimsa during the six months he had been in detention and had come to the conclusion that it had been faulty. The fault lay in his insisting that for ahimsa to show its effect there must be a non-violent atmosphere in the country, so that if there should be an eruption of violence anywhere in the country the movement should be stopped. But he saw



that all around him violence was raging. It had engulfed the entire world. Must then his non-violence meekly look on and do nothing?

No, he went on, non-violence had to make its way through the raging violence. Had he been outside there would have been no mass violence. He would have checked it or died in the attempt to check it. He therefore had not the slightest sympathy for those who had been responsible for perpetrating violent acts. But before denouncing them and their acts he would have to denounce the Government's actions in much stronger terms. The Government of the day was another name for organized violence. And yet people submitted to its sway. Gandhiji related an incident in Bihar many years earlier when women had been molested by the police. The menfolk, instead of endeavouring to stop the police, had fled from the scene and later justified their behaviour by saying that they were carrying out his instructions to eschew violence. But, said Gandhiji, he had not told them to behave as cowards. It was the duty of the men in that case to protect the women, by whatever means, even at the cost of their lives.

The laws, Gandhiji proceeded, must have a place for non-violent resistance. Only then could non-violence function in the midst of violence. It was not his contention that those responsible for violation of law should not be punished. But their wives, their families and their villages should not be made to suffer for their offence. That sort of thing had been happening and must be resisted. Rather than bow to that kind of violence and cruelty it would be better for a person to commit suicide.

He was being told, Gandhiji said, that the country was tired out, that the regime, with the help of the army and the police, had regained control of the situation. He would ask: When had it lost control of the situation? But, said Gandhiji, he did not despair. Whatever Government propaganda might say, he had not undertaken the fast to secure his release. Indeed he had no wish to be released. He had the conviction that even if he alone remained true to his faith, India would secure her freedom.

As for authorizing Rajaji to take steps towards a communal reconciliation, Gandhiji said he did not need any authorization from him. Whatever their differences, they trusted each other. [Ibid, pp. 318-23]



On 26 February Gandhiji's health bulletin issued from the Aga Khan Palace was a short one. It said: "Mr. Gandhi's condition shows no appreciable change. He is cheerful."

With the hope of Gandhiji surviving the fast now increasing, the exasperation in official circles at this unexpected turn of events began to show in the exchanges between New Delhi and London. Linlithgow in a personal message to Churchill said:

I have long known Gandhi as the world's most successful humbug and have not the least doubt that his physical condition and the bulletins reporting it from day to day have been deliberately cooked so as to produce the maximum effect upon public opinion. The bulletin describing his alleged heart crisis coincided exactly with the meeting of the leaders' conference.... So soon as it became evident that I was prepared to hold him dead or alive, and that there would be no wobbling, word of this was telephoned through from Delhi to Poona, and enough nourishment immediately given to him to check the uremia.... There would be no difficulty in his entourage administering glucose or any other food without the knowledge of the Government doctors.... The degree of nervous tension and hysteria engendered by all this hocus pocus is beyond belief....
[*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. III, p. 737]

10

On 27 February the doctors noted no significant change in Gandhiji's condition. But he was less cheerful than he had been the previous day. Candy showed some concern at the reduced output of urine, which was clearly the result of Gandhiji insisting on taking no more than two or three ounces of sweet lime juice in water.

However, it now looked pretty certain that Gandhiji would see the fast through, and the rulers started planning for the eventuality. The Home Department in a telegram marked "immediate" and addressed to the Secretary of State and the British missions in Washington and Chungking, announced that if Gandhiji survived the fast, as appeared likely, it was proposed after its termination to withdraw the concessions allowed during its continuance.



Bulletins would be discontinued as soon as possible and visits, except those of close relatives, would be stopped. [Ibid, p. 742]

Churchill suggested that the Government of India should ridicule the fast. In a personal message to Linlithgow on 28 February, he expressed high appreciation of the line it was proposed to take. "The weapon of ridicule, so far as compatible with the dignity of the Government of India", he said, "should certainly be employed." [Ibid, p. 744]

On 28 February Gandhiji's general condition was better. He also looked more alert.

In the evening there were a large number of visitors. Rajagopalachari came yet again and talked on the communal question. This exhausted Gandhiji. When report of this reached the Government the camp jailor was directed to send full reports of all the interviews of importance, since all the interviews had taken place in his presence. The difficulty here was that Gandhiji's voice generally had been so feeble that he was barely audible. So the jailor requested Pyarelal to prepare the required reports. [Sushila Nayar, *Bapuki Karavas Kahani*, p. 324]

M. N. Roy, one-time revolutionary who had transformed himself into an arch enemy of the Congress and an apologist of British rule, issued a venomous statement on the fast. The fast, he declared, was part of a well laid plan to help the Congress "to come out of the heavy defeat with the flying colours of a fraudulent victory". Appeasement of the Congress by Government, he said, had nearly ruined the country. He expressed satisfaction that for once the Government had not been terrified into submission by the non-violent pistol on which Gandhiji had fallen back. [Arun Chandra Bhuyan, *The Quit India Movement*, p. 157]

On 1 March Gandhiji was alert though exhausted. The number of visitors remained large, especially as everyone knew that the time was approaching for Gandhiji to end his fast and ban on all visits to be reimposed. Rajaji again saw Gandhiji to discuss with him the formula he had evolved for the solution of the communal deadlock and seek his approval for it. Gandhiji appeared to acquiesce. He told Pyarelal, who had voiced his misgivings: "Do not worry. I have faith in Rajaji. He will not take any step which may be repugnant to my conscience to



countenance. If he does, I have always the option of fasting to death to atone for my error." [Sushila Nayar, *Bapuki Karavas Kahani*, p. 325]

On 2 March the Aga Khan Palace gates opened for the visitors for the last time. Expectedly the number of callers therefore was much larger than on any other day so far. Not everyone could speak to, or be spoken to by, Gandhiji, and most had to content themselves with the *darshan* of the Mahatma.

Col. Bhandari had informed Gandhiji of the decision of the Government not to permit any outsiders to be present at the breaking of the fast, except for his two sons, Ramdas and Devadas. Gandhiji thanked the Government for the concession but wrote that he could not avail himself of it, for, as the Government knew; he made no distinction between sons born to him and numerous others who were as dear to him as his own sons. He reminded Bhandari that he had already informed the Government that if they intended to allow any outsiders to be present, they should allow all – nearly fifty – who were present in Poona and who had been allowed to visit him during the fast. [C.W.M.G., LXXVII, p. 70]

This meant that at the breaking of the fast the following day, with the exception of his companions in detention and the three temporary inmates – Kanu Gandhi, Durgabehn Desai and her son Narayan, who had been permitted to stay at the Aga Khan Palace for the duration of the fast – no one else would be present!

Linlithgow wrote to Amery with a feeling of relief that the burden under which he had been labouring "with the Mahatma and his affair" would soon be lifted. In the past fortnight or three weeks, he informed the Secretary of State, "Gandhi and his affairs have been much the most prominent item in the daily round here". He then proceeded to thump himself and his Government on the back for the way they had handled the fast. He wrote:

Looking back at the whole period of the fast, I feel all the more satisfaction at having been able to stand absolutely firm over this, whether I lost my colleagues or not ...there can be no question that he has suffered a major defeat and that the various efforts of his friends and himself to secure his unconditional release ...have been a complete failure. We have exposed the Light of Asia – Wardha version – for the fraud it undoubtedly is.



Linlithgow offered the conjecture that a contributing cause of the fast might also have been the physical advantage to his blood pressure, etc., "of a course of severe dieting which from experience he felt that he was likely to be able to manage".

Linlithgow then proceeded to pass strictures against Candy, the Surgeon-General, who, he declared, had not "come out of it all too well" and Lumley, who himself "had not been free from one or two qualms" and "a wobble", when he had given support to the proposal put forward by Horace Alexander for enabling Gandhiji to break his fast.

He wrote:

I am a little surprised that Lumley should have thought that possible for a moment. But one has of course to make allowance for the additional nervous tension and strain in the case of the people who are on the spot.

He then hinted that perhaps Lumley had served too long a term – 5½ years — and it was time he had some relaxation. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. III, pp. 745-46]

Amery on 5 March told Linlithgow that "in view of the line he has taken over Gandhi", he didn't think Churchill would even look at Lumley. [*Ibid*, p. 706]

On 24 March John Colville took over as the Governor of Bombay.

11

The morning of 3 March arrived, marking the completion of Gandhiji's 21 days fast. It had been a horrendous, nerve-racking time as much for the inmates of the detention camp as for the doctors attending on Gandhiji and anxiously monitoring from day to day and hour to hour the inexorable, steady decline of his physical frame, which they could do little to check. It had been equally for the country at large a time of mounting anxiety, fear and uncertainty. All that, thankfully, would soon be in the past.

Gandhiji got up at 4 in the morning. There was the usual prayer session, followed by recitation from the *Bhagavad Gita*, each inmate of the camp doing it by turns. After he had been given massage by Dr. Dinshaw Mehta, Gandhiji was carried into the room from the verandah.



It had been intended to start prayers preliminary to the formal breaking of the fast at 8.50 a.m., but then it was decided to await the arrival of Gen. Candy and other doctors. As soon as they arrived the singing of hymns was started. Kanu Gandhi sang a Gujarati hymn, and on the suggestion of Sarojini Naidu, sang also the song *Vaishnava Jana*. Dr. B. C. Roy read out from Tagore's *Gitanjali* the poem "When the mind is without fear, and the head is held high" and another which ran:

This is my prayer to Thee, My Lord.
Strike and strike, cut the root of penury in my heart,
Give me the strength lightly to bear my joys and sorrows,
Give me the strength to make my life fruitful in service,
Give me the strength never to disown the poor or bend my knee to
insolent might,
Give me the strength to raise my mind, high above daily trifles,
And give me the strength to surrender my strength to Thy will, My
Lord.

The singing concluded with "When I survey the Wondrous Cross, on which the Prince of Glory Died", which always moved Gandhiji beyond words.

This author then poured six ounces of sweet lime juice in a glass tumbler with an ounce of water and passed it to Kasturba to put it to Gandhiji's lips. The head of Gandhiji's bed was raised. Before taking the sip from the glass that would signify the breaking of the fast, Gandhiji expressed a wish to say a few words. He said: "I wish to thank the doctors...." He was overcome and could not proceed. After a pause, he continued, "who have surrounded me with so much care and affection...." He was again overcome for a while, then proceeded: "The triumph is theirs, but the will was God's that I could survive the ordeal. He will show me the next step. You must forgive me this breakdown."

Gandhiji then drank the juice from the glass. The time was 9.34 a.m. The fast was over. His pulse was weak and fast. In a note Dr. B. C. Roy wrote: "The miracle has happened. Gandhiji lives — in spite of the fast, the doctors and their fears, in spite of his age and the defective organs."



Leaving the Aga Khan Palace after the conclusion of the fast, he said to the doctors and others: "Science cannot take you into the realm of faith. You cannot explain everything about fasting by scientific theories." [Sushila Nayar, *Bapuki Karavas Kahani*, pp. 326-31, *Leaders' Conference*, pp. 23, 40-43]

Linlithgow promptly wired to Amery: "Gandhi has broken his fast. My best thanks for your firm support and encouragement.' And Amery replied: "Congratulations on your most successful deflation of Gandhi". [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. III, pp. 753, 754]

From the exchanges that followed the termination of the fast by Gandhiji between the Secretary of State and the Viceroy and between the Viceroy and the Provincial Governors it is difficult to escape the conclusion that the rulers, with perhaps the sole exception of Bombay Governor Lumley, were disappointed in the hope they had been building on, that they would be rid of Gandhiji once for all. But they all chose to hide the disappointment behind a brave demeanour, merely exulting in the victory they had secured over Gandhiji. The line they all took was to belittle the fast and to ridicule it. Thus on 4 March Madras Governor Hope wrote to Linlithgow, congratulating him on the firm stand he had taken with regard to Gandhiji's fast, which had been a failure. "Gandhi's bluff" had been called. The excitement over the fast, he added, had been confined to the intelligentsia and there had been no notice taken of it in the countryside, where the Congress had been rapidly losing ground. [Ibid, pp. 762-63]

Rutherford of Bihar in a communication of 5 March in his turn congratulated the Viceroy on the stand he had made against "Gandhi's blackmail and the concerted blitz of the Congress Press and sentimental politicians of India". There had been no interest shown in Bihar over the fast, he said, beyond a students' strike at Patna, some public meetings and prayers, strike of workers at Dalmianagar, and a few hartals and hunger-strikes in certain jails. The Congress, he said, had lost the round. [Ibid, pp. 764-65]

Cunningham of the NWFP expressed to the Viceroy the view that Gandhiji had miscalculated his position and that the Government had won a distinct victory against the Congress. If Gandhiji had died there would have been no repercussions in the NWFP, he said. [Ibid, p. 772]



U. P. Governor Maurice Hallett's assessment was that the fast had stirred only Hindus, in fact only educated Hindus. It had had no impact on the countryside where people were more concerned with the non-availability of salt and cloth. Of course, one reason for the lack of excitement, he admitted, had been the fact "that all Congress agitators have been removed from the scene of their activities." [Ibid, pp. 777-78]

The Central Provinces Governor Twynam also congratulated Linlithgow on the firm stand he had taken in the face of tremendous pressure from so many quarters for the release of Gandhiji. He had been, he said, "the first Viceroy to defeat Gandhi at his own game". Gandhiji would now think twice before undertaking another such fast. He counselled the Viceroy against an early settlement, from which the rulers had nothing to gain and the Congress had everything to gain. [Ibid, pp. 779-80]

12

Whatever the view of the British establishment, the successful termination of the fast brought to the country a sense of relief and joy that Gandhiji had come through safely from yet another self-inflicted ordeal. Fasting, to Gandhiji, had never been a means of coercion. It was to him a mode of self-suffering and prayer in his quest of truth and light in a situation when all other means failed. Smuts, one-time antagonist of Gandhiji in South Africa, understood this. He said of Gandhiji's fasts:

He makes himself a sufferer in order to make him move the sympathy and gain the support of the others for the cause he has at heart. Where ordinary political methods of reasoning and persuasion fail, he falls back upon this new technique based upon the ancient practices of India and the East. It is a procedure which deserves the attention of political thinkers. It is Gandhi's distinctive contribution to political method.

...His style of doing things is individual, is his own and, as in this case, does not conform to the usual standards. But however often we may differ from him, we are conscious all the time of his sincerity, his unselfishness and above all his fundamental and universal humanity. He always acts as a great human, with deep sympathy for men of all classes and all races and



especially for the underdog. His outlook has nothing sectional about it, but is distinguished by that universal and eternal human [*sic.*] which is the hallmark of true greatness. [Pattabhi Sitaramayya, *The History of the Indian National Congress*, Vol. II, pp. 486-87]

This was Gandhiji's third and last twenty-one day fast. The earlier two had been the one from 17 September to 7 October 1924 undertaken to bring about Hindu-Muslim unity and the one from 8 May to 28 May 1933 undertaken for self-purification and to awaken a sense of moral rectitude among workers engaged in the uplift of Harijans. There had been numerous other fasts: some intended to be of indefinite duration but brought to conclusion before they could do much harm to Gandhiji's constitution, and some undertaken for one week or less. Especially notable for the issue involved, were the Ahmedabad fast from 15 to 17 March 1918, undertaken to uphold the morale of Textile workers in their strike for increase in wages, the Yeravda fast from 20 to 25 September 1932 undertaken against the Communal Award of the British Prime Minister, and the Rajkot fast from 3 to 6 March 1939. Other fasts, which caused less public excitement but were nevertheless in Gandhiji's view impelled by important causes, were from 19 to 21 November 1921, following disturbances in Bombay during the visit of the Prince of Wales, from 12 to 16 February 1922, following mob violence at Chauri Chaura, from 24 to 30 November 1925 to atone for lapses of some Ashram inmates, from 22 to 24 June 1928 undertaken for the same cause, from 16 to 22 August 1933, undertaken to secure freedom to do Harijan work in jail, from 7 to 13 August 1934 to atone for the assault on Sanatanist worker Lalnath by anti-untouchability workers.

There would be more occasions for fasting later after independence and partition, when the flames of communal conflagration would be raging all over North India — at Calcutta in September 1947 and then again at Delhi in January 1948, a few days before his martyrdom. These are treated in the following Volume.



CHAPTER XIX: THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA'S DIVIDE AND RULE GAME

1

In the period that followed Gandhiji's fast Churchill, Amery and Linlithgow continued to congratulate one another on the "victory" they had won against Gandhiji. They had refused to bend before the pressure of Indian public opinion and refused to listen to American appeals, to the counsel of the Prime Ministers of the Dominions of South Africa, Canada and New Zealand and to the pleadings of many labour leaders in England itself. Not that they had been unaware of the likely perils of the policy that they pursued, but the attraction of the political prospects that Gandhiji's death held for them was so great that they were prepared to take any risks and go to any lengths. Linlithgow in particular interpreted his function as Viceroy, above all, as the upholding of British authority and maintenance of British hauteur. For instance, he wrote to Lumley on 11 March 1943:

Throughout I was fully conscious, and made it clear to the Cabinet, of the possible dangers: but my own view became clear ...that those dangers must be faced at any price, however great the damage to future relations between India and England, and however great the damage to any prospect of a settlement or of constitutional progress in this country, for it emerged perfectly clearly from my correspondence with Gandhi that it was a case of live or die. No compromise with him could, in my judgment, have been accepted on this issue save at the cost of a humiliating surrender....

By not surrendering, Linlithgow declared, not only had the weapon of fast been blunted and the Congress defeated, but "the Muslims, the Scheduled Castes and the Services have been encouraged".

No doubt, pressure for the release of Gandhiji could still be looked for from the Moderates, but, Linlithgow assured Lumley, he was going to take a firm line with them, for, he wrote: "None of them count for a row of pins. They stand for nothing in the country. I doubt very much many of them being able to win an election." He was therefore "not a bit concerned about their feelings". [*The*



Transfer of Power, Vol. III, pp. 787-89]

Defeating Gandhiji, however, was one thing and making any headway towards the solution of the problems of the country quite another. These problems were manifold and grave. The fear of Japanese bombings and imminent landings in coastal areas was compounded by the distress and suffering brought by the callous and insensate military measures of a regime completely alienated from the people it professed to defend. The economic life of the country had been thrown out of gear. This was brought into sharper focus by acute food shortage in the country at large, almost amounting to famine conditions in many areas. When Gandhiji in his letter to the Viceroy of 19 January 1943 mentioned "the privations of the poor millions owing to the universal scarcity stalking the land" which might have been mitigated by a Government responsible to a popularly elected assembly, as an added reason for his fast; it was no "red herring" as Linlithgow described it. It was an anguished cry of a soul which witnessed human suffering and could do nothing to alleviate it.

Signs of approaching calamity had appeared with the onset of the winter of 1942. Foodgrains had begun to disappear from the markets and prices were on the rise. The administration took no notice of the developing crisis till the Army began to feel the squeeze. Then in the beginning of December 1942 the Home Department, Government of India, approached the Secretary of State for the import of 6 lakh tons of wheat. Because of the loss of Burma rice, floods in Sind and cyclones in Bengal and Orissa, it said in a memo dated 9 December, the availability of foodgrains was expected to fall short by 5 lakh tons for internal requirements. This had been causing acute anxiety to the Government, several army mills had closed down because of the lack of wheat and there was great shortage in Calcutta, Bombay and Delhi. It asked for 6 lakh tons of wheat to be made available for India. [Ibid, pp. 357-58]

On 20 December the Governor of Bombay informed the Viceroy that the city of Bombay, which consumed 800 tons of cereals daily, had stocks of wheat sufficient for just 20 days and of rice and millet for 40 and 45 days. On 30 December he again wrote, saying that all the bakeries in Poona were likely to close down in a day or two. There was famine in Bijapur and Sholapur. "There is very real danger," he wrote, "that we shall not be able to feed the population of



Bombay City, and may have to advise large sections of the population to leave the city and distribute themselves over the country districts.... It is a contingency which may become unavoidable." [Ibid, pp. 402-3, 437]

In Madras, too, the situation was grave, Governor Hope reported, "what with hoarding, smuggling, black markets, distribution and genuine shortage". The prices had risen alarmingly and the exports of rice to Ceylon had become a source of great discontent among the great mass of people, who were far more interested in food than in politics. [Ibid, pp. 393-94]

In Bengal, according to the report of the Bihar Governor dated 23 December, the price of the rice had shot up by a hundred per cent within a matter of two weeks. He mentioned rumours of large purchases by the Army and private speculators, which had made the condition critical. He argued for 100 per cent control. [Ibid, pp. 415-16]

The rulers in India were of course primarily anxious to make sure that the supplies of food to the Army were maintained. So far as the civil population in the cities was concerned their chief worry was that the non-availability of food might compel labourers to leave towns and thus bring war production to a halt.

The rulers in England, however, were not inclined to spare the amount of shipping needed for any sizeable imports. It would, they said, seriously jeopardize the strategical situation. Production of defence material in England would be affected, and so also the food ration in the United Kingdom. They advised the Viceroy to make up the shortfall in foodgrains from internal purchases and food rationing. [Ibid, pp. 491, 514-15, 580-81]

Yet another dimension was thus added to the woes of India, that of hunger that stalked the length and breadth of the land, while the leaders of the country continued to be stifled in jails.

2

The cry for the release of Gandhiji, and for a way to be found to relieve the situation, continued to be raised, both in India and elsewhere even after the termination of Gandhiji's fast.

On 9 and 10 March some of the leaders who had attended the Delhi conference on 19 and 20 February, met at the residence of M. R. Jayakar in Bombay and issued a joint statement to the following effect:



We are of opinion that the deplorable events of the last few months require a reconsideration of their policy both by the Government and the Congress. 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.

It is our conviction that if Gandhiji is set at liberty, he will do his best to give guidance and assistance in the solution of the internal deadlock and that there need be no fear that there may be any danger to the successful prosecution of the war. The Viceroy may be approached on our behalf to permit a few representatives to meet Gandhiji to authoritatively ascertain his reaction to the recent events and to explore with him avenues of reconciliation.

Among those attending the meeting were Sapru, Jayakar, Rajagopalachari, G. D. Birla, Purushottamdas Thakurdas, Bhulabhai Desai, K. M. Munshi, Ardeshir Dalal, J. R. D. Tata, S. A. Brelvi, Walchand Hirachand, Chunilal Mehta, Homi Modi, Devadas Gandhi, Master Tara Singh, G. L. Mehta, Allah Bux, S. Ramanathan, Sir Jagdish Prasad, Kasturbhai Lalbhai and Dr. Mackenzie.

Some other leaders not present at the meeting also expressed their agreement with the statement. These were K. Srinivasan, C. R. Srinivasan, N. R. Sarker, Dr. Shyama Prasad Mookerjee, Thakkar Bapa, Raja Maheshwar Dayal, P. Subbarayan, H. N. Kunzru, A. H. Ghuznavi, N. M. Joshi, Sardar Sant Singh and M. S. Aney.

The name of V. D. Savarkar, President of the Hindu Mahasabha, was also mentioned, but he issued his own statement denying that he had either attended the meeting on behalf of the Hindu Mahasabha or was party to the joint statement issued. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1943, Vol. I, pp. 339-40]

The Viceroy reporting to Amery on 13 March on the deliberations of the meeting, pointed out that there had been no Muslims present except Allah Bux and Ghuznavi who were of no importance, nor any member of the Scheduled Castes. He was taking pains he said, to avoid disclosing his own attitude to the request for interview with Gandhiji, when it came, but he intended to give the leaders' deputation a written reply in which he would not be sparing them. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. III, pp. 799-800]



When the Viceroy was formally approached for the interview he had it conveyed to Sapru and Rajagopalachari that they should put down in writing what they intended to say to the Viceroy. Rajagopalachari, on behalf of the deputationists, accordingly sent to the Viceroy a memorandum reiterating a desire to see Gandhiji in order "to ascertain authoritatively his reactions to the events which have happened since his arrest and to explore with him avenues for reconciliation". Gandhiji, the memorandum asserted, had already condemned violence and sabotage, and there was no doubt that he would cast his influence on the side of internal harmony and reconciliation. Every day that passed without a solution of the Indian problem intensified the hostility between Britain and India, and Gandhiji's assistance was essential for the restoration of goodwill and for a solution of the problem even for the interim period, including adjustment of Hindu-Muslim claims. Refusal of permission to the deputationists to meet Gandhiji, the memorandum concluded, would be equivalent to a determination on the part of Great Britain that there should be no attempt at a settlement of the problem and no reconciliation between Nationalist India and Britain. [Ibid, pp. 857-58]

Rajagopalachari was informed that the deputation could wait upon the Viceroy on 1 April, but that there would be no talks of any kind. The leader of the deputation would read out the memorandum and the Viceroy would read out his written answer, after which the interview would terminate. Rajagopalachari felt disappointed. If there was to be no exchange of views with the Viceroy and the presence of the deputationists was not considered necessary, would His Excellency, he asked, be pleased to take the statement as officially presented? The memorandum and the Viceroy's reply thereto could then simultaneously be published.

To this the Viceroy readily agreed. Justifying the procedure, he wrote to Amery on 31 March:

I always suspected that they would try to turn the occasion into a talk across the table to which there are obvious objections, and I should be at great disadvantage when confronted by five highly intelligent and entirely irresponsible politicians whose one object would be to get as much propaganda across as they could....



So the deputation to the Viceroy could not materialize. Linlithgow refused even to let Rajaji have an advance copy of his reply before publication. Transmitted by Reuter on 1 April, the reply expressed the Viceroy's regret that the deputation's memorandum contained no fresh argument and no "unequivocal condemnation of the Congress campaign of violence". It mentioned the unrepresentative composition of the Leaders' Conference and said the Government of India paper "clearly indicates the full responsibility of Congress and Mr. Gandhi" for the "shocking campaign of organized violence and crime" which followed the arrest of the leaders. Neither Gandhiji nor the Congress Working Committee had condemned the campaign. The Government, Linlithgow's reply said, could not alter their attitude to Congress so long as the Congress policy remained unchanged, and the Leaders' deputation could not be provided facilities for contact with Gandhiji and the Congress leaders. The Government would not be deflected from doing its duty by the suggestion that by doing so it would add to bitterness and ill-feeling. [Ibid, pp. 860-61, 866 67, 868-69]

3

The United States Government, too, showed its concern, though not publicly, over the stiff-necked posture maintained by Linlithgow in his dealings with Gandhiji. Soon after the termination of Gandhiji's fast, Linlithgow learnt that Phillips, President's Personal Representative in India, might again seek permission to interview Gandhiji before flying home to report to the President. He told Amery that he was quite clear that Phillips could on no account be allowed to see Gandhiji. The only possible line to adopt with the Americans, who were out to curry favour with nationalist India in order to develop their own business connections with the country later on, was to tell them that India was British affair and they must not interfere.

Amery answered that if the information about Phillips wanting to see Gandhiji was accurate, it was disturbing. The Prime Minister, he added, was "entirely with us over telling Phillips to keep off the grass in the matter of Gandhi". [Ibid, pp. 768,783,792]

In the second week of March Phillips paid a visit to Bombay and in a meeting with Lumley told him that, however badly political parties might have



behaved, "something more must be done". He also expressed his wish to see Gandhiji, if the authorities would permit him to do so. He had an "off the record" conference with the editors of newspapers too, and saw a large number of political personalities, who were then in Bombay in connection with the Leaders' Conference. Lumley, reporting to the Viceroy on 12 March, took exception to Phillips doing all this "without consultation with me".

Linlithgow answered that he had quite categorically told Phillips that in no circumstances would he agree to his seeing Gandhiji and that in taking this line he had the Prime Minister's authority behind him. But Phillips meeting so many different people was a matter of concern, since it created an impression on the mind of the Indian public that the U.S. Government was closely interested in the Indian political situation and that "if cards are played in a certain way", American intervention on behalf of the nationalist cause might be secured. [Ibid, pp. 794-95, 805-6]

On 16 March Linlithgow forwarded to Amery a list of people Phillips had met since the beginning of Gandhiji's fast. "The number is fairly formidable," he wrote, and commented: "I can imagine what the reaction would be were the American Ambassador in London ...to make himself a centre for discontented politicians representing a sectional point of view in English political life."

In the last week of March Phillips went to Madras and Linlithgow immediately asked Hope to submit a report on his activities. Hope reported that Phillips when in Madras had received deputations from the Hindu Mahasabha, the Madras Presidency Muslim League, the Justice Party and the Liberals. He had also seen various individuals connected with the Press and trade unions.

Linlithgow, reporting to Amery, said even though Phillips was reported to have been discretion itself, the fact remained that he had been spending a large part of his time with opponents of the Government to which he was accredited and had received deputations from political bodies. [Ibid, pp. 818, 873-74]

Before leaving for the United States on 27 April Phillips was guest of the Viceroy for three days while the latter was camping at Dehra Dun. Phillips once again repeated his wish to see Gandhiji. Back in Washington, he said, newspaper men were sure to ask him questions on the subject and he must have an



explanation for them why he had not been able to see Gandhiji. Linlithgow again turned down the request and told Phillips that he was quite prepared to own the responsibility for preventing him from the course.

Phillips told Linlithgow, on the authority of Devadas Gandhi, that it was likely that Gandhiji might undertake another fast, this time to death. Linlithgow said he would regret it if Gandhiji should die as a result of a self-imposed fast, but added that "once the business was over", he thought "it would be a good thing that the old man should be dead", since, "while he remained alive he was a most definite obstacle to any form of progress". Phillips did not disagree with the view, but said Gandhiji's death would unquestionably produce great complications in the United States.

Linlithgow said whatever the reactions in the United States and however awkward it might be for the President, the British Government must follow their own judgment. Their "objects in this country were to help to keep the Indian war effort, and to maintain the availability of India as a platform for other war effort, at its highest point", and if this could be done by holding Gandhiji to death, he would be so held. [Ibid, pp. 908-9]

4

In the Aga Khan Palace Detention Camp in the meanwhile things had returned to the rut of the pre-fast days. Immediately after the termination of the fast the gates of the Palace were shut on visitors. Next in line to be ejected were Durgabehn, her son Narayan, Kanu Gandhi and Dinshaw Mehta. After about a week they were each informed by turns that they must leave the Aga Khan Palace. Durgabehn had been serving Kasturba. Kanu had been invaluable in providing personal nursing service to Gandhiji. The jail authorities knew this but said replacements would be found for them. The first to go were Durgabehn and Narayan. They left on 8 March. Then it was the turn of Kanu. Bhandari insisted he must leave. Gandhiji registered his protest in writing. In a letter addressed to Bhandari on 13 March he said he required Kanu's services for the period of his convalescence which, according to the doctors, would not extent beyond a month. But if the Government would not permit Kanu to stay that period he must go without his services. The offer of a substitute for Kanu, Gandhiji said, was a



humiliation which, even as a prisoner, he would not accept. [C.W.M.G., LXXVII, p. 74]

Kanu was finally permitted to stay on till 27 March.

Sarojini Naidu had long been in poor health. On 19 March she fell seriously ill. The symptoms were vertigo, diarrhoea, an increased pulse rate and weakness. The prison authorities suggested hospitalization, but she refused. She would rather go home than to hospital. On 22 March she was released from detention. [Sushila Nayar, *Bapuki Karavas Kahani*, pp. 342-43]

Gandhiji continued steadily though slowly to regain his lost strength. By the end of March he could sit up and a little later even undertake short walks. The health of Kasturba, on the other hand, registered a set-back and was beginning to cause some worry to her fellow detainees. On 23 March Lumley reported to the Viceroy:

In the Aga Khan Palace Gandhi is reported to be going on well, considering his age.... Mrs. Gandhi, however, has had two severe attacks of angina in the last two days, and it looks as if she is in a very precarious condition. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. III, p. 829]

On 14 April Gandhiji was favoured, on his request, with the copy of the Home Department case against the Congress and Gandhiji, brought out under the title *Congress Responsibility for the Disturbances, 1942-43*. In the ensuing months he spent a great deal of his time and energy studying document and preparing a rejoinder to it.

The Home Department indictment, as has been mentioned, had been long in preparation, and had been primarily intended for propaganda in Britain and the U.S.A. It read, as Gandhiji pointed out in his reply, like a presentation of his case by a prosecutor. Only it was one-sided and sought to have the accused convicted without hearing the defence. It sought to rest its case on evidence made up of isolated statements of Gandhiji torn out of context, inferences and innuendoes.

The charge sought to be substantiated by such "evidence" was that Gandhiji was pro-Japanese, had wanted to make terms with Japan, had to that end opposed the stationing of foreign soldiers in India for India's defence, that



the Quit India Movement, which had been envisaged by him as his "supreme act", had behind it the conviction held by him that the Axis would win the war, and had been planned as a "short" and "swift" action, which he knew could not be kept non-violent, to oust the British physically from India.

Foisting on Gandhiji and the Congress the responsibility for the violent events of August 1942 and the following months, the Government pamphlet said they had been the result of the planning that had been going on for the movement ever since the Allahabad meeting of the A.I.C.C. in April-May 1942.

Gandhiji, quoting extensively passages from his published writings from which the Government had picked up words, phrases and sentences to buttress its case, had no difficulty in demolishing the whole edifice of the Government's accusations and to nail the lie on the counter. He summarized his own beliefs, as expressed in his statements, speeches and writings over the years and as forming the basis of much of the Congress policy pursued since the outbreak of the war, in the following words:

1. I believe that non-violence alone is capable of defending India, not only against Japan but the whole world.
2. I do hold that Britain is incapable of defending India. She is not defending India today; she is defending herself and her interests in India and elsewhere. These are often contrary to India's.
3. "Quit India" move was intended to result in the withdrawal of British power, if possible, with simultaneous formation of a Provisional Government, consisting of members representing all the principal parties, if the withdrawal took place by the willing consent of the British Government. If, however, the withdrawal took place willy-nilly, there might be a period of anarchy.
4. The Indian army would naturally be disbanded, being British creation — unless it forms part of Allied troops, or it transfers its allegiance to the free India Government.
5. The Allied troops would remain under terms agreed to between the Allied powers and the free India Government.



6. If India became free, the free India Government would tender cooperation by rendering such military aid as it could. But in the largest part of India where no military effort was possible, non-violent action will be taken by the masses of the people with the utmost enthusiasm. [C.W.M.G., LXXVII, p. 137]

The Government pamphlet made much of Gandhiji's call that, in the event of the leaders being arrested, every man and woman must consider themselves free and act for themselves. As to this Gandhiji wrote:

There is nothing new or startling in this. It is practical wisdom. Men and women become their own leaders when trusted guides are removed from them, or their organization is declared illegal or otherwise ceases to function.... This time not prison but death was to be sought in the prosecution of the movement. Therefore everyone was to become his own leader to act within the four corners of the square foundation – non-violence.

The Government, in quoting Gandhiji, had omitted to mention the two conditions — the readiness to face death and strict adherence to non-violence — and thus been guilty of suppression of truth. [Ibid, p. 142]

Analyzing the causes of the violence for which the Government blamed the Congress, Gandhiji wrote:

The Government action in enforcing India-wide arrests was so violent that the populace which was in sympathy with the Congress lost self-control. The loss of self-control cannot imply Congress complicity but it does imply that the power of endurance of human nature has limitations. If Government action was in excess of the endurance of human nature, it and, therefore, its authors were responsible for the explosions that followed. But the Government may assert that the arrests were necessary. If so, why should the Government fight shy of taking the responsibility for the consequences of their action? [Ibid, pp. 156, 160-69]

Gandhiji's rejoinder was comprehensive and exhaustively argued. Along with it went no fewer than eight appendices, containing published accounts of all the relevant statements made by him on the subject of war, his attitude and



the attitude of the Congress towards it, the demand for British withdrawal and the kind of Provisional Government envisaged. The drafting of it took Gandhiji nearly three months and taxed the energies and resources of all his helpers – Pyarelal, Mirabehn, Dr. Gilder and the present author. It was despatched to the Home Department finally on 15 July.

The Government was not impressed. For months together they did not even care to acknowledge the receipt of the rejoinder. When the Home Secretary came round to answering it on 14 October, he wrote:

At the outset I am to remind you that the document in question was published for the information of the public and not for the purpose of convincing you or eliciting your defence ...in forwarding it Government neither invited nor desired your comments upon it.

It then proceeded to repeat the charge that the Congress and Gandhiji had been responsible for the disturbances and declared that "in the absence of any sign of any change of mind on your part and of any disclaimer of the policy" so far pursued the Government were unable to take any further action on the communication. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1943, Vol. II, pp. 241-43]

5

The single most important political force that showed itself totally impervious and indeed inimical to the idea of Gandhiji being shown any quarter was represented by the Muslim League and its leader Jinnah. With the Congress Working Committee and Gandhiji imprisoned, Jinnah made use of every conceivable opportunity to misrepresent the Congress position and present the Quit India demand as being directed towards the establishment of a Hindu raj. Speaking at a meeting of the Muslim Federation in Bombay on 24 January he rejected appeals for a reconciliation with the Congress, saying that until there was a change in the Congress attitude he could take no steps to end the deadlock. Even though many Congressmen were in jail, all of them were not in jail, he said, and "the Hindu Press was not in jail". [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1943, Vol. III, pp. 275-76]

Jinnah had for similar reasons refused to take part in the Leaders' Conference held in Delhi on 19 February to demand the release of Gandhiji.



Jinnah's setting his face against any mercy being shown to the Congress was in the circumstances only to be expected, for in the months and years that the Congress were in jail Jinnah had the field to himself. Aided and abetted in his designs by the British rulers he utilized the opportunity to further mobilize and consolidate the forces of separatism, make the Ministries in Sind, Punjab, Bengal and Assam fully subservient to the Muslim League and instruments for widening the communal divide and to project the Pakistan demand as the only basis for a constitutional settlement.

In Assam Saadulla had already been in saddle since 25 August 1942, his precarious position in the Assembly buttressed by the European group. In Sind the British Governor had obligingly dismissed the nationalist Premier Allah Bux for having voiced criticism of the policy of repression pursued by the British, and installed in his place Ghulam Hussain Hidayatulla of the Muslim League on 10 October 1942.

It was now the turn of the two larger Muslim majority Provinces, the Punjab and Bengal, in both of which the Muslim League had come out poorly in the elections. In the Punjab the Unionist Sikandar Hyat Khan had been able to keep the aggressive propensities of the League under control by coming to terms with Jinnah and allowing the Muslim Unionists to function as members of the Muslim League. Being by temper a secularist and doggedly opposed to the Pakistan demand of the League, he had been a thorn in Jinnah's flesh, especially because on 25 June 1942 he had signed a pact with Baldev Singh, effectively mending his fences with the Sikhs and securing from them enthusiastic support for his Ministry.

On 26 December 1942 Sikandar Hyat Khan suddenly died and the Punjab was immediately transformed into a happy hunting ground for the Muslim League. Khizar Hyat Khan, another Unionist installed as Premier in Sikandar's place, was, in the words of the Punjab Governor Glancy himself, a "spineless" character, and could not stop Jinnah from throwing his weight about. Khizar was without much difficulty browbeaten into toeing the line. On 17 April 1943 the Governor was writing to the Viceroy that "the main threat to our political tranquillity comes from Jinnah and the Muslim League" and that there was no



doubt that the "Pakistan" slogan was gaining in volume. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. III, pp. 898-99]

The Sikandar-Baldev Singh pact soon collapsed, and with it the communal balance so painstakingly built up by Sikandar. The Ministry, though in name still Unionist, was now a captive of the League. Cries of communal discord began to reverberate in the Punjab.

Similar goings-on were witnessed in Bengal, a province where distress arising from prolonged shortages was aggravated by the so-called policy of denial and the wilful and barbarous behaviour of the troops in areas where they were stationed. Fazlul Huq, by placating different groups at different times, had managed to stay as Premier throughout the years since 1937, but the going had not been easy. On the one hand, continuous attacks by the Muslim League made his life difficult, on the other, John Herbert, the Governor, and the permanent Services treated him with complete disdain, doing whatever they liked, often even without bothering to consult him. Whether it was the question of food, or that of release of political prisoners or that of enquiry into police excesses, the Governor carried on as if the Chief Minister did not exist.

As early as on 2 August 1942 Fazlul Huq was constrained to protest to the Governor against this state of affairs. In a letter he wrote:

You are the Governor of the Province and I am your Chief Minister and your principal adviser.... I must speak to you quite openly what I feel in order to avoid a constitutional crisis in Bengal.... I have tried to convince you that by listening to the advice of a few officials, you are acting as if your Ministers did not exist.... As the head of the Cabinet I cannot possibly allow this attitude on your part to go unchallenged.

Huq then asked the Governor to realize that momentous events were taking place in India and the world and that wishes of the people in matters of administration could no longer be ignored with impunity. Administrative measures had to be suited to the genius of the people and "not fashioned according to the whims and caprices of hardened bureaucrats".

Huq mentioned as instances of bureaucratic meddling the rice removal policy and the boat removal policy, which had led to distress in the countryside and damage to agriculture.



Huq concluded the letter by calling upon the Governor to act within the constitution and allow Provincial Autonomy to function honestly rather than as a cloak for autocratic powers. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1943, Vol. II, pp. 128-32]

The Governor ignored the letter.

Early in February 1943, during a debate in the Bengal Assembly, Fazlul Huq, bowing to a demand from all sides of the House except the European group, agreed to an enquiry being held into police excesses in Midnapur. This roused the ire of the Governor. On 15 February he wrote to Huq a curt note: "I shall expect an explanation from you at your interview tomorrow morning of your conduct in failing to consult me before announcing what purports to be the decision of the Government."

Huq even more curtly replied: "I owe you no explanation whatever in respect of my conduct; but I certainly owe you ...a mild warning that indecorous language ...should in future be avoided in any correspondence between the Governor and his Chief Minister." When the Governor wanted to phone him Huq "put himself out of reach of the telephone". [Ibid, p. 132; *The Transfer of Power*, Vol. III, p. 677]

On 27 February Huq was constrained to tell the Assembly:

I have to work under considerable limitations.... I do feel that the best course for me would be to walk out, and if that moment does arise, I shall not be slow to adopt that course, because I am fed up with the position which gives me very little opportunity of conceding to what I know to be public opinion. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1943, Vol. I. p. 214]

He did not have long to wait. On 28 March 1943 the Governor sent for Huq and, placing before him a duly typed letter of resignation, asked him to sign it. Huq asked for time to consult his colleagues. This was refused. The Governor insisted that he sign the letter then and there. This notwithstanding the fact that Huq enjoyed a clear majority in the Legislature and had demonstrated it twice during the preceding week, when two separate no-confidence motions brought against the Ministry had been defeated by 30 and 10 votes each. In his haste to get rid of a too autonomous Ministry and replace it by subservient nonentities



from the Muslim League the Governor did not even stop to consider that the Assembly was due to vote within the next couple of days on the demands for grants for the financial year 1943-44. [Ibid, pp. 226-28]

Even Linlithgow found this a little too much to stomach. He wrote to Amery on 2 April:

I am, I must say, dismayed at the light-hearted manner in which Herbert has handled this situation. I cannot imagine greater folly than to present someone of the type of Huq with a draft letter of resignation, head him off from consulting his colleagues and his party ...make him sign it ...and all this with the budget not yet through.... I am sure it is most dangerous for Governors to play politics, even if they are of outstanding capacity, and I fear that poor Herbert can hardly claim to be of the latter category.

On 8 April Linlithgow again wrote to Amery on the subject. Nazimuddin, he anticipated, might come to power, but the prospect was not, he said, without its complications. He proceeded:

The last thing we want, with Bengal more or less in the front line, is an active increase in communal tension with possible reversion to terrorism; and a Ministry which was essentially Muslim League, Scheduled Caste, and Europeans, and which for practical purposes left the caste Hindus in the cold, might well be a serious provocation to caste Hindu feeling. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. III. pp. 875, 881]

With the help of the Governor and the Europeans the Muslim League had its way. After a short spell of Governor's rule in the Province, Nazimuddin, "a nice little man but not outstandingly resolute or strong", as Linlithgow described him, assumed charge as Premier of Bengal on 24 April 1943.

Thus in the short period of eight months from August 1942 to April 1943, while the Congress remained engaged in ineffectual combat with foreign rulers, the Muslim League, blatantly supported and encouraged by those rulers, succeeded in establishing its authority in all but one of the Muslim-majority Provinces where it had been unceremoniously rejected in the elections held in 1937.



At the open session of the Muslim League, held in Delhi on 24 April 1943, the very day on which, in Bengal, Nazimuddin was being sworn in as Premier, Mohammed Ali Jinnah seemed to feel like the conquering general of an army. Sporting a button with the letter P, for Pakistan, inscribed on it, he struck a grandiloquent pose, with head held high. An intelligence report thus described his bearing:

He has become more aggressive, more challenging and more authoritative. The reason appears to be "consciousness of power lately acquired and of certain old injuries which can now be avenged therewith". It cannot be denied that he is today more powerful than he ever has been.

Enumerating the various circumstances that had augmented Jinnah's strength and striking power "to a degree never before attained", the report indicated that he was determined no longer to take things lying down. His attitude was: "none of the small mercies shown to us recently by the Provincial Governors in Sind or Bengal can lull us into a false sense of security". He wanted to prepare the League for a fight. His call to his followers was:

Collect funds. Consolidate the National Guards. Consider from what side we are going to launch our attack. Let us exploit these Ministries so that when we attack, the very fact that we are giving up our seats in the Governments in order to launch such an attack will add to our prestige.

As regards the timing of the attack, according to the report Jinnah said:

I think I should be ready with my plans by about next December. Meanwhile, our Provincial Ministries and Leagues will have completed the work of organization in the Provinces and prepared themselves for the fight. Personally I think ...we should begin our offensive immediately on the termination of the war. Then everybody will be in a state of exhaustion and unwilling to face a new ordeal.

These views of Jinnah, the report explained, were expressed at the meetings of the Working Committee and the Subjects Committee (held *in camera*), and that the official resolution passed by the open session "was meant to serve only as a smokescreen". [Ibid, pp. 918-22]



At the open session congratulating the Muslims of Bengal, Jinnah inveighed against the dismissed Fazlul Huq Government, condemning its "tyranny, persecution, manoeuvring and machinations". He roared: "Mr. Fazlul Huq is no more, and I hope for the rest of his life he will be no more." He continued:

Bengal has shown that there is no more room for duplicity. Bengal has set an example from which others may learn. The League is now the voice of the people, the authority of the Millat, and you have to bow before it even though you may be the tallest poppy in the Muslim world.

Returning again to the charge that Gandhiji and the Congress had started an internecine war against the Muslims in an attempt to establish a Hindu raj, he appealed to the Hindus to come forward and tell their leaders to stop such internecine war and come to a settlement with the Muslims "as two equals". Then, carried away by his own rhetoric, he declared:

Nobody will welcome it more than myself if Mr. Gandhi is now really willing to come to a settlement with the Muslim League.... If that is Mr. Gandhi's desire, what is there to prevent him from writing direct to me? Who is there that can prevent him from doing so? ...Strong as this Government may be in this country, I cannot believe that they will have the daring to stop such a letter if it is sent to me. It will be a very serious thing indeed if such a letter were stopped.... If there is any change of heart on his part, he has only to drop a few lines to me. Then the Muslim League will not fail whatever may have been the controversy before.

Jinnah spent a great deal of time denouncing any idea of any kind of federation, even a loose one, being acceptable to the Muslims as a substitute for Pakistan, and the official resolution passed by the session declared:

This session ...warns the British Government in all earnestness that the imposition of such a federal constitution will be resisted by Muslim India with all its might, which will inevitably result in strife, bloodshed and misery, the responsibility for which will rest on the British Government alone. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1943, Vol. I, pp. 279-87]



In his speech Jinnah had also inveighed against the British Government and talked of the freedom of India, which could be won only through a Hindu-Muslim settlement. But the British were not taken in. Linlithgow wrote to Amery on 4 May:

As you know I have never believed in the sincerity of Jinnah's public claims, and my own feeling continues to be that it suits the Muslims so well to have His Majesty's Government in charge ...that they have nothing to gain by any change. For any change must mean that they will have to face up themselves to an adjustment with the majority ...and that with a team in intellectual capacity much below that of the sort of team that the Hindu majority can at any time produce. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. III, p. 940]

Gandhiji, however, when he read the account of the proceedings of the Muslim League session in *Dawn*, a newspaper which he read regularly, saw in Jinnah's public invitation to him to write, a straw at which he could clutch. He decided to take Jinnah at his word and on 4 May penned a short letter addressed to him. Gandhiji wrote:

I welcome your invitation. I suggest our meeting face to face rather than talking through correspondence. But I am in your hands.

I hope this letter will be sent to you and, if you agree to my proposal, that the Government will let you visit me.

One thing I had better mention. There seems to be an "if" about your invitation. Do you say I should write only if I have changed my heart? God alone knows men's hearts. I would like you to take me as I am. [*C.W.M.G.*, LXXVII, pp. 75-76]

Linlithgow, forwarding the text of the letter to Amery on 8 May, expressed his view that the letter should be sent on and said he had instructed his Home Department accordingly. He further informed Amery that he would raise no objection if Jinnah wanted to see Gandhiji in jail, but either party might attach conditions to a meeting which might require consideration.

Amery expressed opposition to the course and on 9 May told the Viceroy that if the letter had not already been forwarded it should be held up while he



consulted his colleagues. He agreed that in view of the fact "that we regard communal settlement as a matter for Indians" it would be difficult to stop the letter. But it would be departure from the position that Gandhiji could not "discuss Indian problem" so long as he did not own the responsibility for the disturbances. So far as permission to Jinnah to see Gandhiji was concerned, Amery did not see why it should be given, since such permission had earlier been refused to Rajaji and Phillips.

In another letter dated 12 May Amery again opposed the delivery of the letter, citing the further reason that Jinnah was "evidently getting rather too big for his boots" and had dared the Government to stop his correspondence with Gandhiji.

Besides, he again wrote on 14 May, Jinnah and Gandhiji might want to meet, which might bring in the need for them to meet the Working Committee or members of Jinnah's Council, and so on. It would only advertise Gandhiji and Jinnah without the slightest chance of their coming to any agreement.

The Viceroy argued that there was no analogy between the cases of Rajaji and Phillips and that of Jinnah. "Our settled policy," he wrote, "has been not to stand in the way of anything that should reasonably facilitate advance towards a settlement" and it was important that they should not let themselves be manoeuvred into a "position in which responsibility for continuation of the deadlock" could be laid at British door.

In a long rigorously argued communication of 13 May to Amery running to over 2,500 words, the Viceroy forcefully stated the case for letting Jinnah have Gandhiji's letter.

Mentioning the three cases in which permission to interview Gandhiji had been refused, the Viceroy argued that they did not fall in the same category as Jinnah. Rajagopalachari had represented nobody but himself. Phillips had been turned down because he had been the representative of a foreign power. Persons who had approached him on behalf of the No Parties Conference had also lacked representative character.

Jinnah on the other hand was the leader of the second biggest political party in the country and it was settled British policy not to stand in the way of



anything reasonably facilitating advance towards a settlement. By stopping Gandhiji's letter the British would be placing themselves in a position where the responsibility for the continuation of the deadlock could be laid at their door. They would be playing not only in Gandhiji's hands but also Jinnah's, for Jinnah, in order to shield himself against the charge of being pro-British, would be anxious publicly to abuse the British, though of course it was in the Muslim interest that the existing state of things continued.

There was no chance, Linlithgow asserted, of Gandhiji and Jinnah coming to terms. Gandhiji could not offer any formula which would amount to conceding Pakistan, which was fundamental with Muslims, without precipitating a split in the Hindu camp and Jinnah would be nervous of accepting any provisional arrangement based on a 50: 50 division of seats, for it might prove fatal to his own ascendancy and to Pakistan.

The Congress was just then beaten and disheartened, but the British must play their cards with care and must not seem to offend the "progressive" opinion at home and the U.S.A.

He concluded that it would be best to let Jinnah have Gandhiji's letter and to let Jinnah see Gandhiji if he made the request. There were risks involved in that course but the risks in suppressing the letter were far greater.

But in London there were no takers for the line. On 14 May Churchill, who was then in Washington, sent a message addressed to Attlee and Amery that "a letter from an interned person seeking conference for the purpose of uniting and driving British out" should not be delivered.

The Viceroy still clung to his position, and asked for an early decision in the matter, especially since everyone at the Aga Khan Palace knew about the letter having been sent and the matter could not be kept a secret for long.

The War Cabinet met on 18 May to consider the matter and decided that the Viceroy should be advised to stop the letter. Amery accordingly cabled to Linlithgow, at the same time letting Churchill know and suggesting that he might meet the President and explain to him the reasons for the British step lest there be adverse reactions in the U.S.A.



The Viceroy agreed to abide by the decision of the Cabinet but registered a stiff protest. The decision was a mistake, he declared and was bound to have adverse repercussions in the United Kingdom and the U.S.A. The man on the spot was the best judge of such things.

On 26 May, 22 days after the letter to Jinnah had been despatched, Gandhiji was informed through a Home Department communication dated 24 May, that the letter could not be forwarded. Enclosed with the communication was a Press communique proposed to be issued giving reasons for the step. This stated that the Government were "not prepared to give facilities for political correspondence or contact to a person detained for promoting an illegal mass movement which he has not disavowed and thus gravely embarrassing India's war effort at a critical time". It was for Gandhiji, the note added, to satisfy the Government of India that he could safely be allowed once more to participate in the affairs of the country and until he did so, the disabilities from which he suffered were of his own choice. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. III, pp. 953-55, 964-68, 970-76, 978-83, 991-92, 994-1005]

Gandhiji, in a letter to the Home Department, posted the following day, expressed his regret at the Government's decision. The public, he pointed out, were anxious that he and Jinnah should meet, and there was just a chance that if they had met some solution to the communal tangle might have been found. Moreover he had written in answer to a public invitation from Jinnah. Gandhiji challenged the veracity of the statements made in the proposed communique and suggested emendation. The mass movement had not been started, he asserted, and so could not have embarrassed India's war effort. The mass movement, in fact, had been sanctioned "in order to promote India-wide effort on behalf of the Allied cause, including the cause of Russia and China". Any embarrassment that there might have been had resulted solely from popular resentment at the Government's action in arresting principal Congressmen.

The Government rejected the demand to modify the communique, which indeed had already been issued and published in the Press on 27 May. Gandhiji was "astonished and grieved" and again wrote on 28 May registering his protest at the procedure. He demanded publication of the relevant correspondence. This demand, too, was rejected. [*C.W.M.G.*, LXXVII, pp. 99-102]



Jinnah, who had thundered at the Muslim League conclave a month earlier that the Government would not dare to stop a letter from Gandhiji to him, now changed his tune. In a statement issued on 28 May he said that Gandhiji's letter to him could only be construed as a move to embroil the Muslim League with the British Government as a means of helping his release. He was, he said, always ready to meet Gandhiji "or any other Hindu leader", but merely expressing a desire to meet him was not the kind of "ephemeral" letter he had invited Gandhiji to write. He had gathered from Hindu leaders that Gandhiji was willing to settle with the League on the basis of Pakistan and if Gandhiji had written such a letter the British Government would not have dared to stop it. But there was no change in Gandhiji's views, as was made clear from his correspondence with the Viceroy. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. III, pp. 1022-23]

Linlithgow was greatly relieved by Jinnah's statement. Writing to Amery on 29 May, he said the statement did much credit to Jinnah's political capacity. Nazimuddin, he said, had been apprehensive that the Government's refusal might have the consequence of the Muslim League Ministries coming out. Jinnah's statement, the Viceroy added, had placed him on the side of the Government, requiring Gandhiji and the Congress to come off their policy of August 1942. In the result things had worked out better than if Gandhiji's letter had been sent on to him. [*Ibid*, p. 1022]

8

Provincial Governors, who had been informed by the Viceroy of the Government's action and asked to send their assessment of reactions in the Provinces sent reports generally critical of the step taken.

The Governor of Sind reported that the newspapers in the Province had joined "chorus of outside Hindu papers" in condemning the step. Colville, who had succeeded Lumley as Governor of Bombay on 24 March, reported that the Press had been "generally unfavourable" and that *Bombay Chronicle* had condemned the Government's decision, blaming it on the Executive Councillors. Glancy of the Punjab said the decision had caused no sensation, which was, in view of Jinnah's statement, only to be expected. From Madras Hope wrote that no newspaper in the Province had supported the Government's action, which, in their view, proved that the Government did not want to solve the deadlock or



promote communal harmony. The whole matter, he said, was developing into "abuse and defence of Jinnah". The Governor of the Central Provinces reported that the Government's refusal to forward Gandhiji's letter to Jinnah was strongly disapproved and Jinnah's statement had resulted in a chorus of vituperation switching from Government to Jinnah. [Ibid, pp. 1015-38]

In political circles other than the Muslim League the withholding of Gandhiji's letter was seen as an attempt on the part of the Government to prevent a communal settlement. C. Rajagopalachari, in a statement issued on 30 May, regretted that Jinnah had replied to a letter he never received. He would have been better advised, he said, if, instead, he had joined in calling a conference of all available Indian leaders to consider what should be done to overcome the muddle which the Government had set up in the road to a national pact. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1943, Vol. I, p. 58]

Even the outspokenly communal Allama Mashriqi, referring to Gandhiji's letter, sent a telegram to Jinnah, appealing to him to see Gandhiji for the sake of Pakistan as well as the independence of India. He told Jinnah that his attitude towards the matter was extremely disturbing. [Ibid, p. 61]

Among Government loyalists, too, critical voices were raised. Sir Jagdish Prasad in a statement deplored both the Government's action and Jinnah's *volte face*. Jinnah, he said, had tried to convey the impression that he had attained so much power that the British Government could not risk his displeasure. When the Government stopped the letter Gandhiji had sent him, he had with practised agility, turned round and attacked Gandhiji, knowing that being in jail Gandhiji could not answer him. [Ibid, p. 60]

Thus ended a tentative initiative on the part of Gandhiji to move towards a communal settlement. The British rulers and Jinnah, working together, vitiated the attempt.

In May, while he awaited the Government's decision about his letter to Jinnah, and busy as he was in finalizing his reply to the Home Department's pamphlet against the Congress, Gandhiji took time out to pen two more letters



— one to Lord Samuel, British Liberal leader and the other to Raginald Maxwell, Home Member in the Viceroy's Executive Council.

The letter to Lord Samuel was occasioned by the speech the British politician had made in the House of Lords during a debate on India on 6 April 1943. Lord Samuel in his intervention had come down heavily on the Congress, declaring that it had "to a great extent thrown over the democratic philosophy" which it purported to defend and was turning into a totalitarian organization. As evidence he had cited the case of the Congress Ministries which, though elected bodies, had been made to function – and resign – under instructions of the Working Committee. He had quoted Jawaharlal Nehru as saying that Ministers and Congress parties in legislatures were responsible to the Congress and only through it to the electorate, and said: "That is not democracy, that is totalitarianism. It is essentially the same political creed that animates Nazism, Fascism and communism."

The Congress, he had further said, represented at best barely more than half of the population of India, and yet Gandhiji claimed that it spoke for the whole country. Muslim demands, he said, were a formidable development in the Indian situation and the simple principle of majority rule could not be applied there.

He had then proceeded to denounce the Congress stand in the war, which amounted to abandoning the cause of mankind, the violence of the Quit India movement, and even Gandhiji's fast, which he described as levying blackmail on the best of human emotions — pity and sympathy. [Ibid, pp. 377-78]

In his letter dated 15 May, Gandhiji dealt with the various statements contained in Samuel's speech seriatim. He rejected the contention that the control of Congress Ministries by the Working Committee made the Congress into a totalitarian organization. "Does not the successful party in the House of Commons do likewise?" he asked. Even when democracy had come to full maturity, he wrote, parties would be running elections and their managing committees would be controlling the actions and policies of their members. The *de jure* responsibility of the Ministries to their electorates was not diminished by their *de facto* responsibility to the Working Committee, for the latter derived its authority from the very electorate to whom the Ministries were responsible.



Challenging the statement that the Congress represented only a little more than half of the population of the country, Gandhiji said it was true only as regards the numbers on the Congress register. A country under subjection could have only one political goal, namely, its freedom from subjection. Considering that the Congress had always stood for the attainment of that goal, its representative character could not be denied.

Gandhiji defended the Congress policy of non-participation in the war. India did not have the freedom enjoyed by other British Dominions, which, in the event of the victory of the Axis in the war, would be enslaved. India was a slave country and for her Axis victory would merely mean a change of masters. If India had to be made to fight for the cause of mankind, "she must have the glow of freedom now" and not the promise of freedom in the distant future. Gandhiji rebutted the charge that the Congress had abstained from participation in the war effort in the name of non-violence asserting that the Congress was committed to non-violence only so far as the attainment of freedom was concerned. It had never made any pretence of resisting aggression through non-violence.

Gandhiji was stung by the use of the word "blackmail" Samuel had used in connection with his fast, though he might have the excuse of ignorance. Fasting, he said, was an integral part of satyagraha. Why should it be called blackmail when a man under a sense of wrong crucified his flesh? [C.W.M.G., LXXVII, pp. 77-84]

Forwarding copy of the letter to Amery on 24 May, Linlithgow remarked that it was of interest as showing that "Gandhi has not budged one inch from his previous contentions". This letter too, like Jinnah's, was withheld. Indeed it was used as an additional argument for taking a firm line in regard to the letter to Jinnah. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. III, pp. 1007, 1015]

The Home Department in a letter dated 26 May informed Gandhiji that "for reasons which have been explained to you in another connection", the Government had decided not to forward his letter to Lord Samuel. [C.W.M.G., LXXVII, p. 85]



The letter to Maxwell, dated 21 May, had been provoked by Maxwell's tirade against Gandhiji and the Congress during the debate on the adjournment motion of L. K. Maitra in the Central Legislative Assembly on 15 February. During the fast, and during his long period of recovery that followed, Gandhiji had not been able to see the report of the speech, which he finally had the opportunity to go through only on 10 May. The speech was so full of "palpable inaccuracies" and distortions that Gandhiji felt he could not let it pass.

Maxwell had suggested that the Congress had passed the August resolution when Japanese attack on the country appeared imminent in the hope that by asking the British to quit they could derive some advantage from Japan, that the Congress movement had been defeated and the Congress was eager to rehabilitate itself and therefore disclaimed responsibility for the violence and that Gandhiji had undertaken the fast in order to secure his release.

All the above statements, Gandhiji wrote, were false. The Congress had never hoped for anything from Japan, which it dreaded, that the movement had not been defeated, for "freedom's battle once begun" was "bequeathed from bleeding sire to son". Though popular exuberance might have been suppressed and the immediate goal of the movement remained unachieved, that was no criterion of defeat. Hence there was no question of the Congress seeking to rehabilitate itself. It enjoyed greater prestige and popularity.

Quoting from his correspondence with the Government on the subject of the fast, Gandhiji rejected the imputation that he had undertaken the fast to secure his release. He said he had only clarified, on being offered release for the purpose and for the duration of the fast, that he had not conceived the fast as a free man and that, therefore, if freed he would not undertake the fast. As a free man he could and would have carried on an agitation for an impartial public enquiry into the charges brought against the Congress.

Gandhiji categorically refuted the charge that either his writings and speeches or the resolution passed by the A.I.C.C. had precipitated the violent incidents that followed. The responsibility was wholly that of the Government, which had arrested the leaders. It was a misfortune of the first magnitude for all concerned. Summing up his position, Gandhiji wrote:



I wish to repudiate nothing of what I have done or intended. I have no sense of repentance for I have no sense of having done any wrong to any person. I have stated times without number that I detest violence in any shape or form. But I can give no opinion about things of which I have no first-hand knowledge. I never asked for permission to consult the Congress Working Committee to enable me to dissociate myself from violence. I asked for permission to see them if I was expected to make any proposal on behalf of the Committee. I cannot cancel the Congress rebellion which is of a purely non-violent character. I am proud of it. I have no reparation to make, for I have no consciousness of guilt. And there can be no question of assurances for the future when I hold myself guiltless. The question of re-entering the public life of the country or being received by Government or society as a good citizen does not arise. I am quite content to remain a prisoner.

The Government's reply to the letter, sent to Gandhiji on 17 June, regretted that Gandhiji had not changed his position regarding the Congress resolution of 8 August and the disturbances that followed it. Under the circumstances there was no common ground for any profitable discussion of other points raised. [Ibid, pp. 85-98]

This brought to a close a major epistolary endeavour mounted by Gandhiji in the summer of 1943 to vindicate the position of the Congress as the authentic voice of the people of India and to bring home to the powers that be that the policy they had pursued and were continuing to pursue had resulted in plunging the country into violence, misery and insecurity. It was no use. The door to reconciliation – between British and Indian and between community and community – continued to remain effectively shut. India meanwhile suffered.



CHAPTER XX: THE BENGAL FAMINE

1

The second half of the year 1943 was an especially traumatic time for India. It was when the miseries and misfortunes to which the foreign rulers had subjected India reached their peak in a devastating famine in Bengal which left millions of men, women and children dead and millions more in the grip of malnutrition, distress and diseases which in most cases proved fatal. Jawaharlal Nehru, who watched the dance of death from his prison cell in the Ahmadnagar Fort, wrote shortly afterwards:

Famine came, ghastly, staggering, horrible beyond words. In Malabar, in Bijapur, in Orissa, and above all, in the rich and fertile province of Bengal, men and women and little children died in their thousands daily for lack of food. They dropped down dead before the palaces of Calcutta, their corpses lay in mud huts of Bengal's innumerable villages and covered the roads and fields of its rural areas.... Death was common enough everywhere. But here death had no purpose, no logic, no necessity; it was the result of man's incompetence and callousness, man-made, a slow creeping thing of horror with nothing to redeem it, life merging and fading into death, with death looking out of the shrunken eyes and withered frames while life still lingered for a while. [Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, p. 16]

To be sure, under British rule a famine was not an altogether novel experience for India. William Digby, Dadabhai Naoroji, Ranade, W. W Hunter and Romesh Chander Dutt, among others, have, with profuse documentation, testified to the steady and relentless erosion of India's economic prosperity that set in with the advent of British Raj and the ever-growing pauperization of ever larger numbers of the country's population with which it became identified. The British era in India's history was also thus, in a way, the era of famines and pestilence, which ravaged the land at steady intervals.

The very inauguration of British rule in India, signalled by the battles of Plassey (1757) and Buxar (1764) was followed in 1769-70 by a famine of such



cataclysmic dimensions in Bengal, the unfortunate Province where the East India Company's freebooters had entrenched themselves, that it took a toll of anything between a third and half of the population and turned into wasteland a third of the area under agriculture. A letter from the Calcutta Council of the Company to the Court of Directors in London, dated 3 November 1772, graphically described the conditions in the following words:

The husbandmen sold their cattle; they sold their implements of agriculture; they devoured their seed grain; they sold their sons and their daughters, till at length no buyers of children could be found; they ate the leaves of trees and grass of the field; and in June 1770 the Resident at the Durbar affirmed that the living were feeding on the dead.... Interment could not do its work quick enough; even the dogs and jackals, the public scavengers of the East, became unable to accomplish their revolting work, and the multitudes of mangled and festering corpses at length threatened the existence of the citizens.

The responsibility for the ghastly occurrence lay not in a small measure on the myrmidons of the East India Company, the so-called 'supervisors' and others, who freely indulged in private trade in rice, buying it cheap and selling it at exorbitantly high prices. And, notwithstanding the tragedy, there was no let up in the rapacity and savagery with which the revenue was collected, with only a remission of 5 per cent, which was more than made up for in the following year by an increase of ten per cent. [Percival Spear, *The Oxford History of Modern India, 1740-1975*, p. 57]

Other famines followed at steady intervals. In 1838 came the U.P. famine, which took a toll of 8 lakh lives. In 1866 the great Orissa famine, a direct result of the callousness of the Bengal officials, carried away a quarter of the population of the area. In 1869 in the Rajputana famine 15 lakhs died. In 1874 Bihar was ravaged by a severe famine. In the years 1876-78 Bombay, Madras and Mysore were struck by a famine of such sweeping proportions that it brought down the population by five million. This last finally led to the tardy realization on the part of the rulers that something needed to be done. A Commission was set up and on the basis of its recommendations a Famine Code came into existence in 1883. It did not however prove particularly effective in providing relief to the famine-



stricken, and in a series of famines between 1896 and 1900 nearly ten lakh people again perished. Altogether between 1769-70 and 1943-44 there were in India 22 major famines in which scores of millions of Indians perished. [*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1965]

Famines thus remained a cruel concomitant of British rule in India. What lent poignancy to the Bengal famine of 1943-44 was the fact that it could have been avoided, that it was entirely man-made.

2

As related in the preceding chapter, the signs of the impending calamity had become manifest as early as November-December 1942. Gandhiji's reference, in his letter to Linlithgow of 29 January 1943, to "the privations of the poor millions due to India-wide scarcity" had been an expression of the Mahatma's anguish at the grim accounts of starvation conditions in Bengal and to a lesser extent all over the country with which the newspapers had been filled, and not a "red herring" as Linlithgow described it.

Linlithgow himself had been fully aware of the gravity of the situation on the food front. In November 1942 a separate Food Department had been set up to deal with the production, supply and distribution of food grains. By the end of the month he was becoming "seriously disturbed" by the shortage of food grains reported from the Bombay Presidency, where resort to famine measures was being considered by the Governor, and from the Deccan' States and Bengal. The situation was not improved by the pressure that was being exerted on India by the British Government for export of food to Ceylon, Persia and various Arabian principalities. The situation, Linlithgow told the War Cabinet, was potentially serious.

The Viceroy mentioned cyclones in Bengal and Orissa and drought in the Bombay Presidency, which had resulted in a shortfall of two million tons in the food grains production. This, he said, was alarming enough, but several other factors had combined to make it even worse: such as hoarding by dealers for higher prices, building up of large reserves by middle-class consumers and the tendency on the part of small subsistence farmer to keep back more grain than would be sufficient for his consumption. The Government's agents were finding



it difficult to buy wheat in the Punjab at control price. The Viceroy told the India Office that under the circumstances India would have to stop all exports of food grains, whether to Ceylon or to the Arabian States, a step which had become necessary in view of public criticism in India. Even to ensure half the Army's total annual requirement of 5 lakh tons, wheat would need to be imported. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. III, pp. 326, 333-34]

On 9 December 1942 the Food Department addressed a memorandum to the Secretary of State, drawing the attention of the Cabinet to the sorry state of affairs. The memorandum said that there were grave shortages in Calcutta, Bombay and Delhi and serious difficulties were being experienced in finding food for employees on essential war works. The situation was so acute that there was danger of war work in India being seriously disorganized and law and order gravely menaced. It requested an additional 6 lakh tons of wheat being made available to India.

The Secretary of State said that any allocation of shipping for carrying wheat to India could only be made at the expense of the British import programme and would result in serious inroads into stocks both of food and war material. This clearly would not be acceptable to London. [*Ibid*, pp. 357-58, 375]

In the meanwhile Bengal had begun to experience the pangs of hunger. Hoarding and black-marketeering had taken complete hold of the food market, with the European firms in Calcutta being among the foremost culprits. They cornered as much rice as they could to build their own private stocks. In the Bengal Assembly members lamented that Calcutta, the city of palaces, was fast becoming a city of beggars, with hordes of villagers from the mofussil flooding the city in search of food. Looting, arson and other crimes had become commonplace. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1943, Vol. I, p. 223]

On 10 January 1943, the Food Department again wrote to London drawing the attention of the Cabinet to the gravity of the situation. The letter said:

All that remains forward with troops is approximately 30 days' supply. The Army needs 30,000 tons a month to meet its day-to-day requirements.... Supplies for the civil population are also extremely short



and we are seriously concerned about workers in essential services. Imminence of strikes among cranemen and port workers in Bombay is feared and food shortage at collieries is affecting supply of labour and local raisings.

The Food Department expressed the fear that unless the situation was remedied through imports, food riots might ensue. It urged immediate promise of not less than 2 lakh tons of wheat, which would represent two months' bare supply. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. III, pp. 480-81]

3

By the summer of 1943 the food situation in Bengal had deteriorated alarmingly. Migrations from the countryside into towns, especially Calcutta, which had started very early in the year, had now assumed the aspect of a flood. Villagers were drawn to Calcutta because no rice was to be had from village shops at any price whatever and they believed, or hoped, that they would be able to get rice in Calcutta at controlled price. Large numbers of them therefore just left their homes uncared for and wandered away. A substantial number sold off or mortgaged their holdings. In Calcutta they lay on foot-paths, day in and day out, waiting for shops to open and then making a scramble for such handfuls of the precious grain as the shops could dispense.

The Governor of Bengal in a letter to the Viceroy dated 21 July 1943 described the situation thus:

Starvation in the districts is on the increase. One trouble is that masses of beggars are boarding trains without tickets in the search for places where food may be available. They are a particular nuisance in areas where troops are concentrated, e.g. Chittagong; and, apart from being insanitary, constitute a danger to security. I understand that the Area Commander is asking the railways to be more severe on this type of "ticketless travel", but we all know how difficult it is for railways to cope with it. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. IV, p. 112]

The Bengal Muslim League Ministry, headed by Nazimuddin, for a long time refused to admit that things were as bad as they looked. For long the bureaucrats in Delhi and the Ministers in Bengal continued to foster the myth



that there was no shortage of foodstuffs in Bengal. On 8 May 1943, on the occasion of a Food Conference held in Delhi the Central Secretariat prepared a brief containing the following directives:

1. The fact that there was sufficiency of food for Bengal should be proved statistically and given the widest publicity by advertising and repeating *ad nauseam*.
2. No price control in Bengal until Government acquire physical control of supplies of rice. Meanwhile ...concentrate on ensuring free flow of rice into the market and exercise restraining influence on prices ...the quota allotted to each communal agent and the price at which he is permitted to buy from day to day being kept secret.

The Bengal Ministers – Nazimuddin, Suhrawardy and others – faithfully followed the propaganda line and refused to face up to the fact that the Province was in the grip of a famine.

In the Bengal Assembly, during its session from 5 July to 14 July 1943, the Ministry came under a severe attack for its inept handling of the food situation. Members gave graphic accounts of the miserable straits to which people in their constituencies had been reduced. People had lost their homes, lost everything and become beggars. There were scenes in the Calcutta streets of half-naked skeletons fighting with street dogs for the remnants of food in garbage cans. There were agonizing reports from all parts of the Province of deaths from starvation, suicides, sales of property, cattle and even children and starving people were deserting their families.

The Congress party in the Assembly moved a resolution demanding that (a) the handling of the food situation be taken out of the arena of party politics and entrusted to a Central Food Council comprising representatives of all major political parties and experts in production, transport, nutrition and distribution; (b) the Province be declared a famine area, so that the responsibility for the feeding of the entire population devolved on the Government; (c) all exports of food grains from the Province be stopped; (d) efforts should be made to procure food from other Provinces enough to last till the next harvest; (e) efforts should also be made to import food from other countries to meet the existing deficit and



to meet the additional demand on account of the war situation; (f) the "grow more food" campaign should be more vigorously pursued through provision of good seeds, increased irrigation, cultivation of wasteland, and through State guarantee of minimum prices of food grains to the agriculturist; and (g) steps be taken to prevent waste of food and over-consumption.

The Government opposed the motion. H. S. Suhrawardy, the Civil Supply Minister, told the members that the Government was doing all that needed to be done to deal with the crisis. He mentioned the anti-hoarding drive launched by the Government to unearth illegal stocks and the decision to permit free trade in food grains, which would stabilize prices and bring out hoarded stocks into the market. Further, relief work was being organized to provide food to the destitutes and plans were afoot to sell food at subsidized prices to the poorer sections. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1943, Vol. II, pp. 134-42]

In a subsequent debate on food in the Bengal Assembly in September, Suhrawardy again defended the doings of his Government on the food front. He admitted at last that there was scarcity, for which, he said, partly the propaganda by the opposition was to blame. However, rice, bajra and other food grains were being despatched from Calcutta to scarcity areas, although not in adequate quantities because of the lack of transport facilities. Besides, the Government was running 2,200 kitchens in the rural areas where eleven lakhs of people were being fed daily. [Ibid, pp. 142-44]

The attempt to whitewash the role of the Ministry did not convince either the Opposition or the people. Even the Central Government, whose own role in bringing about famine conditions in Bengal had been no whit less, was scathing in its criticism.

A Government of India Food Department note cited instances of the Ministry's failure. These were: (a) The much-publicized anti-hoarding drive had achieved nothing positive. It had been merely in the nature of a "food census" disclosing stocks amounting to more than 3 lakh tons. But these had not been stocks which could be classified as "hoards"; (b) No preparations had been made to introduce rationing in Calcutta; (c) The procurement of the annual rice production of the Bengal crop of between 8 and 9 million tons had been entrusted to one sole agent, viz. Ispahani ; (d) No transport officer had been



appointed to undertake operations connected with the reception and distribution of food grains in Calcutta; (e) Relief measures undertaken were inadequate; (f) The Bengal Government had not explained the method adopted for the distribution of supplies received from outside; it was an open scandal that part of the food grains received went straight from "controlled grain shops" into the blackmarket; (g) Arrangements for distribution of food grains, sugar and salt were far from satisfactory. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. IV, pp. 196-200]

4

While Linlithgow and his bureaucrats could legitimately berate the Bengal politicians for their many failures, their own hands were equally sullied. Linlithgow himself was bothered by the food shortage only to the extent it had the potential of adversely affecting the war effort. Indeed the policies that were followed and the measures that were undertaken in pursuit of British war aims were a direct cause of the disaster. Faced with the imminent possibility of the advancing Japanese hordes marching into Assam and Bengal in the autumn of 1942 the British top brass had, in panic, resorted to what it described as "the denial policy", a mild version of the scorched-earth policy pursued by retreating armies in Russia. In pursuance of this policy Defence of India Rules were invoked to remove rice from the coastal areas of Bengal.

Governor Herbert, who took upon himself to execute the policy, was by all accounts a character whose ways not even Linlithgow had been able to stomach. Without even caring to consult the Ministers he entrusted the task of mopping up rice from the coastal districts to permanent officials. They entrusted the job to Ispahani, whose sub-agents, armed with authority from the Government, forced the villagers to part with their rice at rates ranging Rs. 3 to Rs. 8 per maund and delivered it to the Government at Rs. 30 or more per maund.

The rice removal measures were carried out in the most arbitrary and callous way by the Governor and his officials. Fazlul Huq, when he was still Chief Minister, in letter dated 2 August 1942 to the Governor, protested against this. He cited an instance when the Governor had ordered rice to be removed from three districts within twenty-four hours.

The denial policy was also extended to the means of transport. Boats, which were the major means of conveying foodstuffs and other goods from one



place to another through the numerous channels criss-crossing the countryside in Eastern Bengal, were either taken away or prevented from plying. Agriculturists were not permitted to take their boats to the various islands lying at the mouth of the delta, so that fields remained uncultivated. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1943, Vol. II, pp. 130, 159-61]

The administrative measures adopted by Linlithgow and his advisors to deal with the "scarcity" – they would not use the word "famine" – showed that they were totally out of their depth in the face of the calamity.

They considered that their primary charge lay in making available to Bengal sufficient quantities of food grains to make up the deficit, leaving it to the Provincial administration to see how it was distributed. This they sought to do through imports and through internal mobilization. In the matters of imports they came up against the unwillingness of the Cabinet in London to spare the shipping necessary. As for internal mobilization they tried one method after another and bungled every time.

There was, first, what was described as "the basic food plan" drawn up early in 1943. This envisaged quotas of food grains being provided by surplus areas and allocated to deficit areas under the supervision of the Central Government. Nothing much came of the plan. In a communication to Linlithgow dated 2 July 1943, Governor Herbert wrote:

The Basic Plan contemplated sending an agreed total of nearly 370,000 tons of rice to Bengal over a year to be reckoned from December 1942. Actually in the seven months December 1942 to June 1943 only a little over 44,000 tons reached Bengal. I will not trouble you with details within these aggregate figures except to mention that the most glaring discrepancy is in the case of Bihar, whence 185,000 tons were promised and we have received only about 1,000 tons. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. III, p. 900; Vol. IV, pp. 19, 43]

Speaking in the Central Legislative Assembly on 19 August 1943 Azizul Haque, the Food Member, disclosed that of the 14,50,000 tons of various food grains that the Central Government was to have received under the Basic Food Plan during April, May and June from "surplus Provinces", only about 5,70,000 tons had been received.



As the situation deteriorated and hunger struck not only Bengal but various other areas in the South too and it looked as if the industrial war effort and civil life might be dislocated, the Basic Food Plan was given up and the so-called Free Trade was introduced in the Eastern Zone.

This policy, too, did not succeed. The Government itself did not permit it to succeed. Stocks purchased were requisitioned, seized and ordered to be surrendered, in some cases at prices lower than the purchase price; stockists were ordered to close godowns, traders were asked not to sell, station masters were asked not to provide wagons. In some cases trade agents were arrested and prosecuted and goods in transit seized. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1943, Vol. II, pp. 97-99]

As for imports, the Government of India continued to make representations to London, and London continued to reject them. In July 1943, when the famine was at its severest, the Food Department once again made an urgent request to H.M.G. for an import programme of 500,000 tons to be spread over six months – half of it to meet the requirements of the defence services alone. Referring to the failure of the internal procurement scheme, the Food Department memorandum mentioned among the causes the "deep-rooted conviction among cultivators ...which our propaganda cannot shake, that there is a drain on India's resources for the defence services so enormous as to lead to a certainty of serious shortage". It was anticipated that the shortages would become more acute in days to come, leading to "internal disorder" and strain necessitating the calling of defence services for assistance in quelling it.

When the matter came up before the War Cabinet it was argued that "if a shortage occurred" in India — starvation deaths, it may be mentioned, were already taking place in Bengal in very large numbers — Ceylon would feel the pinch first, and sufficient grain should therefore first be earmarked to meet Ceylon's requirement. At a pinch a total shipment of 50,000 tons of wheat from Australia could be sanctioned. Even this should not be earmarked for India, but kept at Colombo. The Cabinet, however, decided that against India's demand for 5 lakh tons of wheat, shipping might be provided, subject to feasibility, for one lakh tons of barley from Iraq. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. IV, pp. 75-77, 155-57]



Famine, meanwhile, raged in all its fury in Bengal. An Army Intelligence summary dated 20 August said:

A special report on conditions in East Bengal and Assam indicates that famine conditions are now rife.... In Chittagong A.R.P. personnel have had to take over the daily removal of corpses from streets and houses. In Dacca the poor are living on what rice water they can get, since even the rich are unable to obtain rice. Cholera, smallpox and starvation are causing hundreds of deaths daily in the surrounding villages.

The report mentioned similar conditions in Mysore and Travancore, where the workers engaged in munitions production had been starving, affecting war production.

Especially embarrassing in this connection, the report went on to say, was the Axis propaganda. An Azad Hind radio broadcast from Germany had reported the decision of the Indian Independence League at Bangkok to enlist the help of Japan, Thailand and Burma to export rice to India provided the British Government agreed and further gave an assurance that the rice thus made available would not be reserved for the Army or exported out of India. [Ibid, pp. 272-73]

In the Bengal Assembly during debates on the food situation, the condition in the Bengal villages was described as one of "unprecedented misery and destitution". Reports of dead bodies lying uncared for were pouring in from different parts of the Province. In certain parts jackals and dogs had been freely feeding on dead bodies. Such animals had been ordered to be shot. The sight in the streets of Calcutta was heart-rending enough. But it was nothing as compared to the conditions in the villages. While the poorest classes – the landless, the homeless and the penniless – had been the most hard hit, the middle class families with fixed incomes, too, were undergoing a process of slow and painful extinction. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1943, Vol. II, pp. 148-55]

The British Governor himself testified to this state of affairs. Giving his impressions of a visit to Midnapore towards the end of September, Herbert described the havoc caused by famine and cyclone – "corpses being torn to



pieces by dogs and vultures", and "ominous signs" of "large sales of metal, household vessels, ornaments and excessive sales of land", with the staff at Registration Offices doing brisk business. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. IV, p. 331]

On 2 October Rutherford, who had taken over from Herbert as Governor, again reportig to Linlithgow, put the number of those receiving relief at 118,000 in Calcutta and 840,000 in the mofussil. He mentioned "professional beggars plus an influx of old men and women, widows and deserted wives frequently with children" and also "a fair sprinkling of out-of-work agricultural labourers" thronging the streets of Calcutta looking for food. The districts most affected, he reported, were Midnapore, Howrah, 24-Paraganas, Bakarganj, Noakhali, Bankura and Dacca. The Famine Code had not been applied simply because there was not enough food to give the rations prescribed. [*Ibid*, p. 363]

The officialdom had no clear notion of how many were dying in which parts of the Province. They compiled their lists of casualties from the reports of bodies disposed of by the Police Corpse Disposal Squads and some non-official corpse disposal organizations. Initially they placed the death rate at 1,000 a week – the figure that Amery mentioned in the Parliament debate on India. Then the figure was revised to 2,000 a week, which again nobody believed as approaching the staggering numbers being consumed by the famine. A statement sent to the Secretary of State by the Governor of Bengal on 18 October 1943 put the number of deaths from starvation in the period between 1 August and 11 October of that year at 12,370 "as reported in newspapers". This statement was however qualified by the observation contained in a note that the figure was based on sporadic reports in newspapers and gave no systematic or accurate accounts of deaths. The note further observed:

Though in individual cases newspaper reports may have been exaggerated, it is certain that a very large number of deaths have occurred in out-of-the-way places which have not come to the notice of Government.... The actual number of deaths occurring every day would not perhaps be less than 9,000 even if it is assumed that one person in every ten of the 90,000 inhabited villages is dying daily due directly or indirectly to starvation. The actuals may very well be much above these figures.



The assumption of one person in ten villages dying of starvation nowhere approached the enormity of the death toll. According to the reports reaching the Chief Minister, there had been 26,000 deaths in one sub-division of Dacca alone. The Governor of course dismissed the report as "wild". [Ibid, pp. 398-99]

The Famine Enquiry Commission later set up by the Government, not being able to determine which of the deaths were from starvation and which from natural causes, chose to estimate the toll taken by the famine by comparing deaths during the period of the Famine – July 1943 to June 1944 – with the death rate in the preceding five years. It arrived at the figure of 15,00,000 "in excess of the average". Of these some had been the result of starvation and under-nutrition, some of epidemic diseases such as cholera and some of non-epidemic diseases, such as malaria and diarrhoea. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1944, Vol. I, p. 85]

Non-official studies however put the number of deaths much higher. Professor Chattopadhyaya of the Anthropology Department of the Calcutta University took a sample survey of ten of the famine-affected districts of Bengal some time in February 1944. The survey covered 816 family units with a total membership of 3,880. His investigation revealed that in these groups, during the last six months of 1943, the death toll had been 10 per cent. On the basis of the results of the survey he concluded that 35,00,000 men, women and children might have perished in the calamity. [Tara Chand, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Vol. IV, p. 412]

A very large proportion of deaths no doubt resulted from diseases that came in the wake of the famine – chiefly cholera, malaria and smallpox. According to a statement made on 6 June 1944 by Dr. B. C. Roy, President of the Bengal Medical Relief Coordination Committee,

the Government had declared 18 districts to be under the grip of smallpox and cholera in an epidemic form while the incidence of malaria was going up again.... The total population of the districts comes to 4 crores 47.7 lakhs. Granting that the epidemics had affected only 50 per cent of the population, though according to reports ...some districts had even 80 per cent to 90 per cent of the population affected with malaria, a conservative



estimate would be that more than 2 crores of Bengal's population were attacked with epidemics.

Yet the Government had no medical organization worth the name to tackle the outbreak of disease on such a massive scale. The Famine Enquiry Commission Report commented:

In view of the state of medical and public health organization in Bengal before the famine, it is scarcely surprising that they failed to rise to the occasion. On the health side no satisfactory attempt was made during the early months to deal with the situation; there was in fact almost a complete break-down of health services, affecting both the centre and the periphery. [*The Indian Annual Register*, Vol. I, pp. 86-89]

6

Nature was responsible only to a very small extent for the catastrophe. The overall deficit, resulting from the shortfall in production owing to floods and cyclones and the stoppage of rice imports from Burma, it was asserted again and again by the spokesmen of the Government, could not be more than 4 per cent of the annual production. The famine was the result of the lack of concern, callousness, cupidity and bungling at all levels of the ruling hierarchy – and the corruption that had permeated bureaucracy.

It is significant that while thousands were dying in the cities and villages of Bengal, Linlithgow, the Viceroy, never deigned to make a visit to the Province to see things for himself. All he and his Food Department did was to address to London periodical demands for imports. These the War Cabinet rejected on the ground that no shipping could be diverted for the purpose from war transport. What India needed, in the opinion of the Cabinet, was the import of gold and silver to curb inflation. All that India could have by way of food grains import during 1943 would be some barley from Iraq. It was more important to feed the underground in Greece. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. III, pp. 357, 372, 394, 479; Vol. IV, pp. 75, 133, 137, 466]

As for the Bengal Administration, which saw, during the period of the famine two Ministries (under Fazlul Huq till 28 March and under Nazimuddin from 24 April 1943) and three Governors (John Herbert till 6 September 1943,



Thomas Rutherford from 6 September 1943 to 21 January 1944 and R. G. Casey from 22 January 1944 onwards), its functioning during the famine was marked by such widespread and systematic corruption that an official committee appointed by Governor Casey was aghast. In its report it said:

So widespread has corruption become and so defeatist is the attitude taken towards it, that we think that the most drastic steps should be taken to stamp out the evil which has corrupted the public service and public morals. Anything less is a denial of justice to the poor people of the Province, who comprise the bulk of the population and who, in the end, have to pay for the bribes which go to enrich the unscrupulous and the dishonest.

The "bribes" referred to in the report were those paid by people "often of ill repute" to officials who had "the power to grant licences to deal in commodities in short supply". Subordinate and temporary officials, the committee said, had been given authority to issue licences and they made use of the authority to make easy money by issuing them to unscrupulous and dishonest persons, who had never before dealt in the commodities in question.

The role of superior Services was no better. Of them the Committee said:

The Services apprehend that amenability to Ministerial pressure and a "correct" attitude towards questions in which the Party for the time being in office is particularly interested are more likely to lead to promotion than administrative efficiency. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1944, Vol. I, pp. 93-94]

Such being the quality of the administrators was it any wonder that "a large part of the supplies of food grains received for distribution went straight into the black-market?"

On 10 August 1943, Linlithgow wrote to Amery in exasperation:

I am becoming seriously uneasy about the Bengal situation.... I am forming the strong impression that Herbert has no real control of what is going on, and that the administration is deteriorating very rapidly.



He mentioned the report of an important official functionary that no organization existed to feed or supply ration to Calcutta, the second largest city in the Empire. Part of the trouble, Linlithgow wrote, was that the I.C.S. in Bengal, though better than in the adjoining Province of Bihar, was not of the highest quality. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. IV, p. 152]

The role of the Muslim League Ministry in the whole business was the most shameful of all. Instead of directing its energies to ameliorating the misery in which the Province under its charge had been engulfed, it sought to make use of it to strengthen its political base by dispensing favours and setting up its followers in the great business of food distribution. The Ministry insisted that Bengal being a Muslim-majority Province, the majority of persons employed in the work of procurement, distribution and relief work should be Muslims. Huge sums were paid as advances to favourites appointed as agents and sub-agents without any security and the losses in trade underwritten by the Government.

In the debate on the food situation in the Bengal Assembly on 17 September 1943, Dr. Shyama Prasad Mookerji asserted that as much as four and a half crore rupees from the public revenue had been paid to Ispahani and asked if the colossal payment had been accounted for. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1943, Vol. II, pp. 148-49]

Dealing with the political causes of the famine, the Famine Enquiry Commission in its report said:

We understand that the main reasons for the failure were first the refusal of the Muslim League party in accordance with its all-India political policy to join a Government which included any Muslim who did not belong to the party, and secondly, the refusal of other principal parties either to join or support a Government from which Muslim leaders who did not belong to the Muslim League party were excluded. [*Ibid*, p. 84]

Even while men, women and children were dying *en masse* in the cities and villages of Bengal, and dogs and jackals were feeding on the decaying corpses in the streets, the defence services continued to be supplied with rations on a scale that was scandalous. A European member, speaking during a debate on food in



the Central Assembly, mentioned that in Bangalore certain classes of dependents of military officers were provided rations which were twelve times the amount allowed for the civilian population. Food on such a scale could not of course be legitimately consumed and vast amounts of it went to waste. The same European member mentioned a case in which a distinguished scientist had been approached by the authorities of a prisoners-of-war camp to tell them how to make compost from surplus bread!

There were public protests against such goings on. In the Bengal Assembly Nellie Sen Gupta, participating in a debate, while conceding that military had to be fed and the mules of the Army had to be fed, remarked that the military could not go on being fed all the time at the cost of civilian population when people had been reduced to eating mango leaves and red potatoes. [Ibid, pp. 117, 137]

In the Bengal Assembly the Congress and other opposition parties repeatedly raised the demand for the declaration of Bengal as a famine area and for the Famine Code to be brought into operation. The Muslim League Ministry under Nazimuddin doggedly resisted the demand. It argued that all that was required to be done under the Famine Code was already being done; the Government had been running 2,200 free kitchens, each of which had been feeding 500 destitutes. Rice was being despatched from Calcutta to deficit areas, such as Midnapore and 24-Parganas.

But, as brought out in the debates both in the Bengal Assembly and the Central Legislative Assembly, the relief measures, which the Government spokesmen made so much noise about, did not even touch the fringe of the problem. The kitchens, wholly inadequate as they were in number, considering the vast population of the Province, doled out gruel on the principle of absolute minimum relief. In the Central Assembly K. C. Neogy asked J. P. Srivastava, Member in charge of the Food Department, whether he was aware that the gruel given to destitutes by Government kitchens was not supposed to be sufficient to keep a fair-sized rat alive. On Srivastava answering that so far as he knew what was provided was quite sufficient and in some cases too much, Neogy suggested that the Food Member might consider trying it on himself and see how he flourished. [Ibid, pp. 110, 134-54]



How vast the sweep of the tragedy was and how wholly inadequate were the Government measures to tackle it was brought out in a Bengal Government publication *Famine and the Government*, which was intended to defend the Government's record. Giving its assessment of the extent of the famine it said:

Of the 91 sub-divisions in the Province, 29 sub-divisions with an area of 21,665 square miles and a population of 29.9 millions were most severely affected by the distress. Seven other sub-divisions with an area of 7,264 square miles and a population of 4.5 millions were badly affected, while 18 other sub-divisions with 13,193 square miles in area and a population of 12 millions were affected to some extent. The remaining 37 sub-divisions with an area of 35,701 square miles and a population of about 21 millions were hit by high prices only and not by real scarcity. [Ibid, p. 61]

Well over two-thirds of the Province's population of 6 crores was thus in the grip of starvation. The 2,200 free kitchens operated by the Government, which it said catered to 500 destitutes each, thus provided food dole – on a niggardly scale as it was – only to about 11 lakhs of the 4 crores of people "severely", "badly" or "to some extent" starving. The amount of money spent on relief in various ways in the years 1942-43 and 1943-44 came to about 10 crore rupees. This worked out at about two rupees eight annas spent on each needy person over the whole period.

Of course any number of voluntary organizations came forward to provide such help as they could on their own. Prominent among them were the Ramakrishna Mission, the Arya Samaj, the Servants of India Society, the Friends Ambulance Unit under Horace Alexander, the South Indian Evacuee Relief, the Navabidhan Relief Mission and the Muslim Chamber of Commerce, the last named catering only to the distressed among the Muslim community. Women, too, did their bit. The All-India Women's Conference, headed by Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit and the Women's Self-Protection League did very good relief work.

The contribution of these voluntary agencies to the relief work could, however, only be marginal, hampered as they were by paucity of financial resources. The total amount of money they could together spend did not exceed one crore rupees. [Ibid, pp. 59-62]



On 20 October 1943 Field Marshal Viscount Wavell took over from Linlithgow as Viceroy of India. The change in the Viceroyalty, it was realized, did not signal any change in the political line pursued towards India by the British establishment of which Churchill and Amery were the spokesmen. It was nevertheless welcome, if only because people were glad to see the last of Linlithgow, who had come to symbolize, ever since the outbreak of the war in Europe, everything that was evil in British rule. He had not only watched with indifference as India groaned under the many sufferings that the war brought, but further aggravated those sufferings by his high-handed and stiff-necked refusal to make any concessions to the feelings and aspirations of nationalist India and to end the political deadlock.

Taking office at a time when the famine in Bengal was in its most gruesome phase, Wavell soon showed that as a person he was not quite as impervious to human suffering as his predecessor had been. He made the control of famine his first priority. On 26 October, just six days after assuming office Wavell flew to Calcutta to see things for himself. He saw Governor Rutherford (who had replaced Herbert), Chief Minister Nazimuddin and Civil Supplies Minister Suhrawardy. He found them all lacking in the qualities of leadership. He toured through the town and witnessed the plight of the destitutes, 150,000 of them, on pavements and on railway premises – but always near the kitchens from which they received food. Sanitary conditions were shocking and death rate among the destitutes was high. A large majority of them were women and children.

On the following day, 27 October, Wavell was in the Contai sub-division of Midnapore district. The Viceroy reported having witnessed scenes on the way of groups of children sucking water out of a bucket in which an *old gur* bag had been placed. In the town people could be seen on the roadside selling their ornaments and utensils, another sign of general distress.

In the sub-division, which had a population of 8 lakhs, 312,000 people were being supplied cooked meals and another 38,000 doles of dry grain.

Wavell summoned a meeting of the Bengal Cabinet, along with the Governor and stressed the need for the destitutes in Calcutta to be moved into



camps with proper arrangements for rest, food and medical attention. He announced that the movement of food grains out of Calcutta, which was being mishandled by the Bengal administration, would be placed in charge of the military, which would also reinforce civil organization.

Controlling famine in Bengal, Wavell said in a statement, was as much a military as a civil problem. India was the base for large-scale operations against Japan, and no base for military operations could be satisfactory if its inhabitants were in grave distress. There had been a breakdown in the economy in at least seven districts: Midnapore, 24-Parganas, Dacca, Tippera, Chittagong, Faridpur and Mymensing. The breakdown had led to the influx into Calcutta and other large towns of destitutes in large numbers. The measures taken by the Bengal Government to remedy the situation had not been effective.

Wavell outlined a series of measures required to be taken in hand. These were removal of destitutes from towns into camps; control of movement of food grains to outside areas from Calcutta; improvement of transport, provision of temporary shelters, establishment of relief stores and distribution of relief, and so on. He further emphasized the urgency of a rationing scheme to be brought into operation in Calcutta.

In his report to Amery Wavell expressed the view that Ministers in the Bengal Cabinet were timid and vacillating and lacking in calibre, the Governor, Rutherford, "second-rate" and not interested in his job and that officials had no sense of urgency and did not seem to be conscious of the disgrace they had brought upon the administration. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. IV, pp. 414-15, 431-32, 438 42 and ff.]

The Army was soon afterwards moved into action. Staff officers were placed at the disposal of the Governor to assist in the movement of food grains to districts and to ensure their being handed over to the District Magistrates for distribution. Troops were located throughout the affected districts and military transport provided for taking allotted quotas to the villages and for assisting in collecting material for temporary shelters for the destitutes. Two field ambulances and additional medical officers and personnel were also provided by the Army for setting up small hospitals at various centres throughout the districts.



In addition to the forces stationed in the area, nine more battalions (8,000 men) were rushed in from outside Bengal. [Ibid, pp. 443, 457]

General Mayne, G.O.C.-in-C., Eastern Command, was placed in overall charge of the operation.

Local politicians and officials did not openly oppose Army action, but there was frustration among them. Mayne formed the impression that the whole of the Bengal administration was a mass of corruption and dishonesty from top to bottom, and that pilfering and misappropriation of food grains were on such a scale as to make relief measures largely ineffective. The Executive could not instruct the courts to impose adequate penalties and small fines failed to act as a deterrent.

Medical relief, Mayne reported to the Viceroy, was non-existent, and sickness following starvation was likely to be a more intractable problem than famine. The incidence of cholera was already much above normal and by December 1943 it might reach its peak, with the number of cases becoming unmanageable — around 50,000 a week. No attempt had been made to procure drugs locally and no approach made to the Central Government in that regard. [Ibid, pp. 456-58]

To consider the overall policy with regard to food, Wavell summoned a conference of Governors in the middle of November 1943. The conference was the first of its kind since 1930. In a memorandum circulated before the Conference Wavell reiterated that India could not be a satisfactory base for operations against Japan if her people, or any considerable section of them, were in acute distress, and unless the food situation in Bengal and other distressed areas could be restored, prices brought under control and supplies maintained, the war in the East was likely to be prolonged. The need, Wavell said, was for strengthening arrangements for obtaining and digesting intelligence and improving production, procurement, distribution and consumption. He recommended a series of measures to be adopted under each head. Stressing the importance of improving production, he pointed to the need for expanding



the area under irrigation, increased supply of fertilizers, iron and steel and distribution of improved seed. [Ibid, pp. 417-23, 480-85, 491-92]

Wavell insisted that the "second-rate" Rutherford, of whom he had formed a very poor opinion, should be replaced by a "first-rate" man as the Governor of Bengal, and on 22 January 1944, R. G. Casey, an Australian, took over from him.

Wavell further sought sanction from London for the suspension of the Bengal Ministry and proclamation of Section 93. He was firmly of the view that the control of the food situation must be taken out of the hands of the Bengal Ministers. This proposal the Cabinet turned down on the plea that the Ministry enjoyed a majority in the Legislature and that no ground existed for its dismissal unless it could be said that the situation was such that the government of the province could not be carried on in accordance with the provisions of the Government of India Act. [Ibid, pp. 561, 619-22, 629-33]

By the beginning of January 1944, with the help of the Army some semblance of relief organization appeared to be in place. The Food Department informed the Secretary of State early in January that by the beginning of December 6, 625 relief kitchens had been functioning, feeding two and a half million people daily, that 2,30,000 people had been receiving food grain doles and 21,000 cash doles. Cheap cooked food was also being sold from canteens to 50,000 people daily. Blankets had been distributed and 10 emergency hospitals had been opened in Calcutta and more than 200 in the districts. Doctors and medical relief personnel from the Army toured villages and provided quinine and inoculations against cholera. Over 70,000 lb. quinine had been sent to the dispensaries as also 2½ million cubic centimetres of anti-cholera vaccine. [Ibid, pp. 592, 596-99]

Though this was an improvement over the immediately preceding state of affairs, the overall situation continued to be far from satisfactory. In January 1944 Wavell informed Amery that the reports reaching were still very gloomy. The Director General, Indian Medical Service, and the Public Health Commissioner had reported that the state of medical relief in Bengal was far from encouraging and that the only solution was for the Governor to take direct charge of medical relief, for the civil officials remained slack and indifferent.



Wavell further informed Amery, quoting the report of the Delhi correspondent of the *News Chronicle*, that despite a record harvest Bengal was threatened with a second and worse famine, for which the responsibility must be shared between the Bengal Government, Bengal politicians, the Government of India and the India Office. Wavell quoted the view expressed by the correspondent that the Bengal Ministry must be dismissed forthwith. [Ibid, pp. 649-51]

10

The British War Cabinet throughout the period remained wholly impervious to the sufferings of Bengal. All requests for food imports made to the India Office by the Government of India were brusquely turned down under the pretext of war expediency. Linlithgow had obediently gone along. Wavell was however more insistent. In October-November 1943 the Government of India again approached London for import of 15 lakh tons of wheat — 10 lakh tons to make up normal deficit and 5 lakh tons reserve. The War Cabinet's attitude was again negative. Citing figures, it argued that the demand had been pitched too high, that India did not really require imports on such a scale.

Wavell sternly wrote to Amery to warn his colleagues that their "rigid statistical approach" based on "admittedly defective statistics" would be regarded in India as totally indefensible. He warned that there was a "practical certainty" of "large-scale disaster in India" if imports were refused. After four months of wrangling the Cabinet decided on 21 February that India should be allowed to have 50,000 tons of wheat in place of the same amount of barley from Iraq. [Ibid, pp. 706-7, 734-35]. The Cabinet also instructed that "skilful publicity" should be used "to magnify the effect of such supplies of food grains".

When other countries offered help, the War Cabinet intervened to prevent it reaching India. Early in November the Canadian Government informed London that it was putting 10,000 tons of wheat for India on to a ship at Vancouver. Churchill immediately telegraphed to Mackenzie King, Canadian Prime Minister, not to load the ship but to return it to the Australian service. [Ibid, pp. 470-71]

As the year 1944 progressed the situation in Bengal generally eased and the spectre of famine was lifted, thanks to a variety of factors, such as the



tightening up of the administration, Army help and above all to a bumper rice harvest. But a million and a half (according to official figures) or three and a half million (according to non-official figures) people had died — a very large number from sheer starvation and another very large number from disease. According to the report of the Director of Public Health of Bengal the mortality from various diseases in 1943 alone were: from cholera 214,175, from malaria 674,330, from smallpox 22,005.

This was how the British Government prosecuted its war effort in India — imprisonment for the leadership, starvation and disease for the people.



CHAPTER XXI: ILLNESS AND DEATH OF KASTURBA GANDHI

1

In the Aga Khan Palace Gandhiji and his co-detainees (with the exception of Sarojini Naidu, who had been released on 21 March, and with the addition of Manu Gandhi, who had been permitted to stay in the Detention Camp to provide nursing assistance to Kasturba), continued to pass their days in uneventful prison routine, effectively insulated from happenings outside. In addition to walking, talking, reading, writing, spinning and praying, Gandhiji had taken to putting together and meticulously indexing chronologically and subject-wise, cuttings from newspapers. He did this with a single-mindedness and passion that was astounding, each day completing the work of indexing the cuttings faster than they were supplied by the co-detainees put on the job.

A confidential note, submitted to the Inspector General of Prisons by the officer in charge of the Detention Camp on 15 December 1943, described Gandhiji's routine as follows:

He gets up at 6.30 a.m. and after finishing morning ablutions and breakfast, he reads books or newspapers.

From 8.15 to 9 a.m. morning walk in the garden with Pyarelal and Misses Slade [Mirabehn], Nayar and Manu. While walking they talk on political and other subjects.

Doctors Gilder and Nayar give him massage for about 45 minutes and then bath up to 11.15. From 11.15 to 12 Noon he takes his food, and Miss Slade talks or reads books to him. From 12 noon to 1 p.m. teaching Sanskrit to Miss Nayar.

1 to 2 p.m. rest.

From 2 to 3 p.m. Mr. Pyarelal reads newspapers to him and discusses on several points arising from the papers, while he is either spinning or filing cuttings from the papers.

From 3 to 4 p.m. teaching Miss Manu.



From 4 to 5.30 p.m. indexing of newspaper cuttings on various subjects. He is assisted in this work by Pyarelal, Dr. Gilder and Nayar. They remove the selected and marked portions from the papers, paste them on slips of paper and give them to Mr. Gandhi for indexing and filing.

From 5.30 to 6.30 p.m. Miss Slade reads papers to him and discusses on various political and other subjects.

From 6.30 to 7.15 p.m. evening walk with other inmates in garden.

From 7.30 p.m. to 8.15 p.m. spinning, while Pyarelal reads to him some books.

From 8.15 to 9 prayer.

From 9 to 10 p.m. reading and talking with Mr. Pyarelal and Miss Nayar.

He goes to bed at 10 p.m. [C.W.M.G., LXXVII, pp. 457-58]

In October 1943 Gandhiji again took up the issue of determining the responsibility for the disturbances of August 1942 and the following months with the Home Department. The occasion was provided by the letter from the Additional Secretary, Home Department, Government of India, dated the 14th October and received on the 18th, in which the Government had rejected Gandhiji's arguments challenging the veracity of the charges contained in the pamphlet *Congress Responsibility for the Disturbances, 1942-43*, and reiterated the charge that the disturbances were a consequence of the August resolution of the Congress and unless he disclaimed the policy contained in the resolution, the Government could not take any action on his communication.

In his letter to the Home Department dated 26 October 1943, Gandhiji regretted the position taken up by the Government. The resolution of 8 August, he argued, was not only harmless but good all round. Besides, he could not on his own alter a resolution passed by the A.I.C.C. He repeated that if he were allowed to see the members of the Working Committee it might have some value "from the Government standpoint". If, however, it was thought that it was only his "evil influence" that corrupted people, the Government should release the members of the Working Committee and other detenus. He wrote:



It is unthinkable that when India's millions are suffering from preventable starvation and thousands are dying of it, thousands of men and women should be kept in detention on mere suspicion, when their energy and the expense incurred in keeping them under duress could, at this critical time, be usefully employed in relieving distress.... The huge place in which I am being detained with a large guard around me, I hold to be waste of public funds. I should be quite content to pass my days in any prison.

As for the Government's charges against him, denied by him in *toto*, and his own counter-charges, Gandhiji demanded that both be referred to an impartial tribunal.

The Home Department again turned down Gandhiji's offer to meet the members of the Working Committee. In its letter dated 18 November it said that since there had been no change in Gandhiji's attitude towards the Congress resolution of 8 August, and since Government had received no indication that the views of any of the members of the Working Committee differed from his own, his meeting with the members would serve no useful purpose. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. IV, pp. 408-10, 430; *C.W.M.G.*, LXXVII, pp. 202-4, 453-56]

The door to any sort of accommodation with the Congress thus remained firmly shut, notwithstanding the fact that there had been a change in the Viceroyalty in Delhi and that the overall war situation, which the British had been trumpeting as the chief reason for the suppression of liberty in India, had, by the time taken a decisive turn in favour of the Allies.

2

And yet, but for Churchill and the coterie of diehard politicians who shaped the policy on India, it might not have been so.

Wavell, as soon as his appointment as the next Viceroy was decided upon, asked the Cabinet to lay down the parameters within which he was to function and the general line of policy he was to pursue. Wavell had considerable experience of India and knew the situation in the country first-hand, having served as Commander-in-Chief of the Indian armed forces for almost two years from July 1941 to June 1943. He had been involved in the ill-fated Cripps



negotiations in April 1942 and in the action taken against the Congress in August 1942.

On 10 September Wavell sought a meeting with Amery and expressed to the Secretary of State his misgivings as regards the Indian policy then being pursued. The position taken by the British Government, he said, was that nothing could be done in the way of political advance in India until there was some radical change in the situation, for example the end of the war or death of Gandhiji. In concrete terms, he elaborated in a memorandum submitted to the Cabinet a few days later, the British stance was, first, that until the Congress leaders abandoned their policy of August 1942, the British would not negotiate with them or permit them to communicate with others; and secondly, that nothing could be done until the Indian leaders themselves got together to make constructive proposals.

Wavell expressed the view that, apart from the difficulty that the Indian leaders could not get together when most of them were in forcible segregation, the policy pursued was not calculated to lead to any real progress towards "our ultimate goal". With the Executive Council of the Viceroy as it existed, Wavell argued, there was no hope of any early progress, not even if the Indian element in the Council was increased, for the Executive Council had no representative character. What was needed was a Government predominantly of political leadership. He therefore recommended:

- (i) that His Majesty's Government adopt as the immediate aim of our policy in India the establishment of a coalition Government of party leaders at the Centre;
- (ii) that the scheme for the establishment of such a Government be as outlined in my draft invitation. [This was annexed.]
- (iii) that the time at which an appeal on these lines is made be left to my judgment....

The draft invitation annexed was in the form of a letter addressed to individual party leaders inviting them to cooperate in the formation of a Government of "real party leaders" — including the leaders of the Congress who were in detention. Those of the Congress leaders to whom invitation would be sent, would be unconditionally released from prison if they agreed to take part in



the discussions. The discussions would cover the formation of the new Government, the selection of its members and the distribution of portfolios. The Viceroy would not take part in the discussions, but would be available for help.

Wavell made it clear that there would be no constitutional change at the Centre. The Viceroy would retain his powers. But he saw no reason why, in practice, the Government should not work as a Cabinet. It would be foolish to form a Government of political leaders with the intention of reducing it to ridicule at the first opportunity.

For the Provinces Wavell's plan envisaged revival of Provincial autonomy, where it had lapsed with the resignation of Congress Ministries, by formation of coalition Governments. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. IV, pp. 227-30, 256-67, 309-12]

The India Committee of the Cabinet, having considered the memorandum of the Viceroy Designate at a series of meetings, generally approved the line proposed. The only dissenting voice was that of James Grigg, Secretary of State for War. Grigg in a note of dissent expressed his "complete disagreement with the recommendations of the India Committee". Discussions with the leaders would become public and "at a stroke". Gandhiji would be reinstated to the position where he could negotiate on equal terms with the Viceroy. The possibility might arise that he would direct his nominees to take office and hinder the war effort. Gandhiji had no intention of collaborating, or ceasing from hindering. Grigg concluded by expressing the view, arrived at after a study of the history of the preceding twenty-five years, "that a settlement in India is impossible so long as Gandhi is alive". When he was dead things would be very different. In the meantime the British should "quite deliberately work to diminish Gandhi's importance and let the responsibility for breaking the present deadlock rest squarely upon him". [ibid, pp. 367-69]

Lord Croft, an underling in the War Department, lent support to Grigg's views. In a letter to Churchill he gave his opinion that any attempt to "appease" Gandhiji would be misunderstood in England and would "cause the utmost confusion in the minds of the two million volunteers in India" who were preparing to fight the Japanese. To bring Gandhiji back into the picture, after Providence had aided the British in discrediting him, would weaken the British Government,



harden the Muslim feelings and bring the British into contempt in the eyes of the Princes. [Ibid, pp. 374-75]

The last word in the debate came from Churchill. In a memorandum dated 6 October he wrote:

We are now preparing very important offensive operations from India against Japan for the campaign of 1944.... There could hardly be a less suitable time for raising again the political agitation on its old and well-known lines, and for trying to form a responsible Government based in the main on Gandhi. If such a course is adopted, we must expect a grave renewal of agitation throughout India....

The fact that a new Viceroy is going out to India affords no reason for running such risks.

The War Cabinet meekly acquiesced. After taking note of the various arguments, for and against, advanced in regard to the proposals of Wavell, it concluded that it was too early to lay down any definite course of action for the new Viceroy to follow. Besides, it said:

It would be a mistake at this juncture to remove from the Congress leaders the onus of making a disavowal of their present attitude; moreover as at present advised the War Cabinet were not prepared to embark on a policy of negotiations with Gandhi, which in their view would be attended by grave inconvenience.

In its directive to the Viceroy Designate dated 8 October, the War Cabinet said his first duty was the defence of India from Japanese menace. Then there were scarcities brought by the war, "verging in some localities into actual famine", which had to be attended to. There was Hindu-Muslim strife to be assuaged. While establishment of a self-governing India "as an integral member of the British Empire" remained the inflexible policy of the British Government, the Viceroy must

beware above all things lest the achievement of victory and the ending of the miseries of war should be retarded by undue concentration on political issues while the enemy is at the gate. [Ibid, pp. 383-84, 387-88]



Thus neither the change in the war situation nor the change in the Viceroyalty was to augur any change for India. The policy jointly worked out by Amery and Linlithgow, the policy of sidelining the Congress and, above all, Gandhiji, and waiting and hoping for the latter to die, was to be continued. Accordingly throughout the period of his confinement in the Aga Khan Palace in Poona, especial pains were taken to bring home to Gandhiji the realization that he was a political pariah and would remain one until he repented and cried: "I withdraw the August resolution." All attempts made by him to defuse the crisis and clear the political air in the country, as well as attempts made by others to seek his assistance for ending the impasse, were frustrated by the regime, not on merits, but on the sole ground that Gandhiji could not be permitted any say in the country's affairs so long as he refused to bow to the will of the rulers.

He and his companions, as prisoners, were constantly subjected to irritations and pinpricks that appeared to have no purpose other than to humiliate and hurt them. To what lengths the regime could go to cause unnecessary pain to the detainees was demonstrated by the way even their urgent domestic mail pertaining to matters of life and death was delayed in transit until it was too late. There was the case of the death of this author's sister-in-law in a hospital in Delhi. Shakuntala, wife of the author's brother Mohanlal Nayar, had been taken to hospital for childbirth on 3 November. It was a difficult delivery, necessitating a Caesarean section. In the course of the operation the patient lost a great deal of blood and her condition became critical. On 4 November the husband, in desperation, sent a telegram to the author, followed by a letter, informing her of her sister-in-law's condition and asking her to seek parole in order to be with the patient.

The letter reached the author on 10 November; the telegram took even longer, being delivered on the 12th. The post-mark showed that the telegram had been received at Yeravda on 5 November. Instead of being delivered to the addressee it had been sent on to Bombay for clearance, and there delayed for a week before being delivered.

The news of her close friend and relative's grave illness threw the author into great emotional turmoil. She could not sleep. She dashed off telegrams to



her brother and to the attending doctor, seeking information on the latest condition of the patient. The telegram to her brother was allowed to go, but not the one to the doctor. It had to go through the Bombay Government. Later it was discovered that it had been stopped.

Finally on 15 November a telegram from Mohanlal came. It had been despatched on the 9th and informed the author that Shakuntala had passed away. This telegram, too, had been received at Yeravda on the 9th and had been sent on to Bombay for clearance, even though it contained nothing beyond the information of a death in the family, where it was kept for six days before being delivered.

On the following day another wire came from Mohanlal, suggesting that if the author could take the infant daughter of Shakuntala in her care the authorities might be approached for permission. The author knew it would be no good approaching the Government. The Government would never agree. Gandhiji suggested her going out on parole. The author told him this, too, would be no use. The parole could only be for a short period, not enough for bringing up an infant. [Sushila Nayar, *Bapuki Karavas Kahani*, pp. 443-47]

Gandhiji protested against the callousness shown by the authorities in handling urgent domestic messages to the detainees. In a letter dated 16 November to the Home Department, Government of India he wrote:

Dr. Nayar ...received on the 12th instant a wire addressed to her by her brother ...to the effect that his wife had a Caesarean operation and had lost so much blood that he had applied for Dr. Nayar's temporary discharge. This wire was received at Yeravda ...on the morning of the 5th. The second wire, which was sent from New Delhi on the 9th instant and received at Yeravda on the same afternoon, was delivered to her on the 15th instant. The wire reports the patient's death.... I do not know that if she were a condemned criminal, the news of the death of a dear one would be withheld from her as this has been, without any cause that I can guess. It seems to me that those who are lodged with me have to suffer extra hardship by reason of their being so lodged.

Gandhiji mentioned other cases of such extra hardship. Dr. Gilder could not receive visits from his ailing wife or his daughter. Manu Gandhi (she was not



even a detainee) could not receive either her father or her sisters. Even Kasturba Gandhi could not receive visits from her sons or grandchildren. Only once had Ramdas Gandhi been allowed to visit her when she had been ill. Why could not the jail authorities deal with the wires of the nature referred to?

The Bombay Government answered on 23 November, regretting the delay in the transmission of the two telegrams and saying arrangements had been made for more expeditious handling of telegrams. The case of Dr. Gilder for interviews, Gandhiji was informed, had been referred to the Government of India.

The Government of India, in a communication dated 30 November, informed Gandhiji that Dr. Gilder would be allowed "an interview with his wife and daughter under certain conditions". [C.W.M.G., LXXVII, pp. 205-6]

Gandhiji again wrote to the Bombay Home Department on 1 December, pleading that the author be permitted to take her orphaned infant niece in her care at the Aga Khan Palace, there being no other suitable arrangement for bringing up the baby, or, alternatively, to grant the author a brief parole to enable her to look after the baby in the initial period and make arrangements for her future care. The latter course, Gandhiji said, would be a deprivation to him and Kasturba, but he would put up with the inconvenience.

He concluded:

As the suspense is great, and as the life of the baby hangs in the balance, may I request an early decision? If the Bombay Government have not the power of decision in their hands, this letter may kindly be treated as addressed to the Government of India and the decision obtained through the phone.

Both pleas were rejected. [Ibid, pp. 209-10]

The poignant, and to Gandhiji also the most painful, demonstration of the pettiness of the rulers' behaviour towards him was, however, seen during Kasturba Gandhi's protracted and tortuous illness and demise in the Detention Camp.



As related earlier, Kasturba had been in frail health even at the time she was arrested and taken first to the Arthur Road Prison and thence to the Aga Khan Palace. Undoubtedly the conditions of detention in the latter place were less harsh and, further, Kasturba had the solace of being near Gandhiji. Even so, she did not at any time in the Detention Camp, fully regain her verve and vitality. The very thought of being segregated from sons, nephews, nieces and grandchildren, none of whom was permitted to visit her, oppressed her mother's heart and allowed her no peace of mind. The result was that throughout her incarceration she continued to suffer from a variety of aches and pains. Persistent cough and bronchitis, erratic bowel movement marked alternatively by constipation and diarrhoea and cardiac dysfunction manifested periodically in sudden rise in pulse rate (paroxysmal tachycardia). All these corroded her ageing frame.

As the year 1943 wore on, she had lost much of her strength to fight disease. By the last week of November she was bedridden, too weak even to visit the toilet unaided. Attacks of breathlessness became more frequent, so that oxygen had to be kept handy to meet any emergency. She was most of the time in low spirits, thinking of her near and dear ones from whom she was kept away.

Dr. Gilder and this author thought of writing to the authorities to permit Kasturba visits from her relatives. In the condition she was in, they felt, such visits would have considerable therapeutic value. Gandhiji, when consulted, said the doctors must exercise their own discretion. In the end it was decided that rather than make a written request it would be preferable to take up the matter with Dr. Shah, the visiting jail doctor. Dr. Shah, when he came, said that he had recommended that Kasturba be released. It was pointed out to him that it was not release that Kasturba sought but interviews.

By the beginning of December the deterioration in Ba's condition was more noticeable. She was no longer fit enough even to be given a bath and sponging took the place of a bath.

A limited number of visits from relatives were at last permitted and from 6 December onwards Devadas Gandhi (son), Nirmala Gandhi (daughter-in-law), Rami Gandhi (granddaughter) and Manu Mashruwala (Rami's sister) were allowed in on different days to be with Ba for short periods. This seemed to help.



On being requested, the authorities also made a wheel-chair available, so that Ba could be taken to the bathroom and on to the verandah where she took the sun and from where she could have a view of the flowers in the garden.

Bouts of tachycardia, which became more frequent and were relieved by the administration of quinine, and fits of coughing left her exhausted and interfered with her sleep. This author and Manu Gandhi had to watch over her by turns every night. As days went by, the symptoms became more pronounced. The fits of coughing became so severe and so persistent that they looked like asthmatic attacks. In order to relieve the congestion in her bowels enema had to be resorted to.

A new development was the pain in the chest. This symptom had no earlier history, even though she had had cough for many years past. Another complaint that became more persistent with the progress of the disease was lack of sleep. At night till very late, sometimes till the small hours of the morning, Ba lay awake in bed, restlessly tossing about, a prey to gloomy thoughts. To relieve this condition she had to be given a sedative every now and then.

In the third week of December this author requested Dr. Shah to arrange for a nurse to be posted to look after Ba. He said the Government were agreeable to a woman relative being sent for to serve her as a nurse. Ba wanted Kanu Gandhi, or, failing him, Prabhavati. But if she could have Kanu, she said, she would not need anyone else.

The Government refused the request. Neither of the two could be considered, the authorities said. Would Gandhiji propose someone else? Gandhiji said he had no wish to place the Government in a position to say no again. He could understand the Government's attitude. They considered him pro-Japanese and viewed with distrust everything he said or did. During his fast they had permitted Kanu to come because they had calculated that he would not survive the fast. [Sushila Nayar, *Bapuki Karavas Kahani*, pp. 451-66]

Ba's illness weighed heavily on Gandhiji and filled him with great anxiety. On 29 December, answering a long letter from Agatha Harrison of 2 December, Gandhiji, referring to Ba's illness wrote:



She is oscillating between life and death. The complications are many and great. She is receiving all the attention possible in a detention camp. [C.W.M.G., LXXVII, p. 214]

Though Agatha Harrison's letter, after consultations between Delhi and London, and after the consequent delay of over three weeks, had been delivered to Gandhiji on 28 December, the Government felt under no "obligation" to communicate Gandhiji's answer. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. IV, p. 513]

Notwithstanding the great physical, mental and emotional strain, which Ba's illness meant for him, Gandhiji continued relentlessly to pursue the routine he had imposed on himself. He had his daily morning and evening walks and talked with the co-detainees who eagerly sought instructions from him.

During the morning walk on 24 December, talking to Mirabehn, Gandhiji expressed the view that the "fundamental essential" in non-violence was "right thinking". By this expression he did not mean, he added, "right contemplation or right planning", but right conception of fundamentals. Elaborating, he said:

When the mind is habituated to right thinking, right action follows spontaneously, but when the mind turns to wrong thinking, wrong action will follow....

Non-violence without right thinking will never carry within itself the vital power of faith — or, if you prefer, conviction. Nor will the man who is not a habitual right thinker be able to depend on himself to act rightly (even if he wants to) at a given moment.

An instance of wrong thinking, Gandhiji said, was "I may be dishonest." Of course one could not say: "I must be dishonest." [C.W.M.G., LXXVII, pp. 212-13]

This enunciation of "right thinking" by Gandhiji brings to mind the principle of *samyak vichara* of the eightfold path preached by the Buddha. There is, however, a vital difference. Whereas the Buddha emphasized withdrawal from action and *samyak vichara* as one of the steps leading to it, Gandhiji treated thought and action as a single continuum. Thought was only a preliminary to action and had value only to the extent it determined action. Right thought, leading to right action, could be stated in terms of a categorical imperative, to



use a phrase of Kant; wrong thought, leading to wrong action could not be so stated – one could not say, "I must be dishonest." It could be stated only as a conditional imperative: "I may sometimes be dishonest."

To Gandhiji right and wrong meant moral and immoral — not effective and ineffective or practicable and impracticable. Purity of thought and action was to him a fundamental essential of non-violence.

6

While in the Aga Khan Palace Kasturba battled for life and Gandhiji further pondered the meaning of non-violence in action, in the country outside the winds of communal hate were blowing full blast. The open session of the Muslim League, held at Karachi from 24 to 27 December 1943, lent them added force. G. M. Sayed, Chairman of the Reception Committee, described the session as "the beginning of a new phase in the political history of the millat".

Jinnah in his presidential address to the session expressed his satisfaction with the progress that the League had made during the preceding seven years. It had fully established to India and the world that the Muslims were a nation. Raising his voice he declared: "We shall never rest content until we seize the territories that belong to us and rule over them." The Muslim League, he said, had survived all attempts to destroy it: from the Congress, Jamiat, Ulemas, Ahrars, Azad Conference, Momins. It now had its flag, and its definite goal of Pakistan.

Jinnah referred to the "civil disobedience movement" launched by the Congress, and mentioned with satisfaction the action taken by the Government against it. But why had the Government not accepted the hand of cooperation offered by the League? – he asked. The Muslim League was prepared to cooperate in the war effort, "provided our hand is accepted as that of a confident friend with a real share in the authority of Government and with a definite promise that we shall have our share in the fruit of victory when we win it."

He described the August resolution as a deliberate attempt to bypass the Muslim League and force the British Government "to surrender to the Hindus". [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1943, Vol. II, pp. 289-92]



Jinnah's outbursts against the Congress brought cheer to the hearts of the rulers. C.P. Governor Twynam shortly afterwards writing to Wavell expressed the view that Jinnah's profession of willingness to come to terms appeared to be sincere and observed:

I am not at all sure that negotiations with Jinnah instead of with Gandhi would not be the most profitable avenue of approach to solve the "deadlock", when the time comes. Such a move would probably bring the Congress High Command to their senses more quickly than anything else, and in view of the League's good record as opposed to the black record of the Congress, would be quite understandable. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. IV, p. 585]

On the morning of 25 December, during the walk, this author broached with Gandhiji the subject of Jinnah's speech and suggested that perhaps Jinnah desired that by whatever means Gandhiji should be prevented from coming out of jail, so that the League could make use of the opportunity provided by his absence from the scene for consolidating its position. Gandhiji said:

Jinnah of course wants that so long as the Congress is in jail he should make use of the opportunity to consolidate his influence. But I do not think his influence is increasing. Among Hindus he has no influence. As for the Muslims, in my estimate his influence among them is not so great, because he is not treading the path of truth. [Sushila Nayar, *Bapuki Karavas Kahani*, p. 466]

7

The Government, having refused permission for Kanu Gandhi and Prabhavati to be brought in to provide nursing services to Ba, deputed an *ayah*, employed in the local mental hospital, for the job. She arrived on 27 December. However, she proved to be totally unfit to carry out nursing duties and had to be withdrawn within less than a week.

More visitors than before were certainly permitted to come in. During the first week of January 1944, Devadas came with his family, so did Ramdas, and Gandhiji's nephew Jamnadas and grand-nephew Kanu. They were followed by Dhiru Gandhi and Manu's father Jaisukhlal. Radhabehn, Santokbehn, Kunwarji Parekh and his daughter also came. But the visits were by no means unrestricted.



The number of visitors and the timings of visits were strictly regulated, which Kasturba found irksome.

On 6 January, Gandhiji made a formal request to the jail authorities that if Kanu Gandhi could not be allowed to stay in the Detention Camp, he should at least be permitted to visit Kasturba for an hour every day, so that he could sing *bhajans* to her and also do some nursing. Gandhiji further said that the descendants of his father's brothers (including his father they were six) would be regarded as near relatives and such of them whose names might be sent up by Devadas, Shamaldas or Jamnadas Gandhi, should be permitted to come and see Kasturba. He wrote:

I must confess that the patient has got into very low spirits. She despairs of life, and is looking forward to death to deliver her. If she rallies on one day, more often than not she is worse on the next. Her state is pitiful. The aim behind seeking permission for visits from relations is that they may give her some peace.

Gandhiji also repeated the request that Prabhavati, who had nursed Kasturba before and who was like a daughter to her, should be sent over. [C.W.M.G., LXXVII, pp. 215-16]

A few days later, on 11 January to be precise, Prabhavati did arrive in the Detention Camp, but Kanu was still allowed in only on alternate days for short visits.

Meanwhile, with each passing day Ba's condition got worse. She appeared to have no more fight left in her. On her repeated proddings the jail authorities were approached for permission for Dinshaw Mehta, eminent nature-cure physician of Poona, to be brought in to assist in her treatment. She herself also spoke about it to the Inspector General of Prisons and Col. Shah, when they came to see her. There was, however, no response from the authorities.

On 27 January Gandhiji was obliged to take up the matter with the Home Department, Government of India. In his letter addressed to the Additional Secretary he wrote that Kasturba had become insistent that Dr. Mehta be immediately brought in and also some Ayurvedic physician. Gandhiji asked that the I.G. Prisons be authorized to permit such assistance when requested.



He also pressed for Kanu Gandhi to be permitted to remain in the Detention Camp as a whole-time nurse, as night nursing was becoming more and more exacting and Kanu Gandhi was an ideal nurse for Ba. What was more, he could soothe the patient by singing *bhajans* to her.

Voicing his irritation at the way the authorities were handling Kasturba's illness, Gandhiji wrote:

It would be wrong on my part if I suppressed the fact that in the facilities being allowed to the patient grace has been sadly lacking. The order about the attendants is the most glaring instance of pinpricks, besides being in defeat of the purpose for which attendance during visits of relatives is allowed.... Harilal, who is almost lost to us, was not allowed yesterday, the reason being that the I.G.P. had no instructions to allow him to come again. And yet the patient was naturally anxious to meet him. To cite one more pinprick, every time visitors who are on the permitted list come, they have to apply to Government Office, Bombay, for permission. The consequence is that there is unnecessary delay and heart-burning. [Ibid, pp. 219-20]

For four days there was no reply from the Government and on 31 January Gandhiji, in a reminder addressed to the Bombay Government, wrote:

The patient is no better. The attendants are about to break down. Four only can work — two at a time on alternate nights. All four have to work during the day. The patient herself is getting restive and enquires: "When will Dr. Dinshaw come?" May I know as early as may be — even tomorrow if possible:

1. Whether Shri Kanu Gandhi can come as a full-time nurse.
2. Whether Dr. Dinshaw's services may be enlisted for the present, and
3. Whether the restriction on the number of attendants during visits can be removed.

The Government grudgingly permitted Kanu Gandhi to stay in the Detention Camp to nurse Kasturba on condition that he submitted himself to the regulations of the Camp, and accordingly he moved in on 1 February. As for permitting Dr. Dinshaw to come or calling upon the services of an Ayurvedic physician, Gandhiji was informed that no outside doctors would be allowed



unless the Government medical officer considered that it was absolutely necessary for medical reasons. The Government also refused to relax the restrictions on the number of attendants being present when Kasturba was receiving visitors. Gandhiji could himself be present but other inmates would not be allowed except to the extent demanded by the condition of the patient's health. [Ibid, p. 222]

8

By this time — about the beginning of February 1944 — Ba's slide downhill was already showing signs of being irreversible. A fall in the level of blood pressure, which generally kept at 80 plus systolic and 50 plus diastolic, was an additional cause of worry. She might sink at any moment. An attendant or two therefore had to be around all the time. She was restless most of the time. She would suddenly wake up with a start from a fitful somnolent state at night and ask for recitation from the *Gita* and singing of *bhajans*.

Dr. Shah, when told of Ba's condition and her desire to have alternate medical help, gave his consent for Dinshaw Mehta to be brought in and for an Ayurvedic physician to be called, though he said he would have to seek clearance from the Government.

From 5 February Dinshaw Mehta started coming daily for giving massage to Ba. But this did nothing to check the deterioration in her condition. Her restlessness increased and there was now noticeable oedema round her ankles. Enema was tried to relieve the condition, but it appeared to have no effect. Gandhiji was having to spend more and more time staying by her side and was consequently exhausted, with a marked rise in his blood pressure.

Gandhiji again spoke to Dr. Shah about calling in a *vaidya*. Shah spoke to Bhandari who, in turn, sought approval from the Government, with no result. On 11 February, in a talk with Bhandari, Gandhiji repeated the request. Bhandari said the Government would have no objection provided Gandhiji was prepared to take the responsibility for any untoward result following a non-allopathic treatment. Gandhiji assured Bhandari, in writing, that he would take full responsibility for bringing in any *vaidyas* or *hakims*, even though he might not accept the advice given by them. [Ibid, p. 227]



Both Dr. Gilder and this author considered that the low level of the patient's blood pressure was a cause for anxiety, for it affected the functioning of the kidneys, leading to reduced output of urine with resultant oedema and accumulation of toxins in the body. A drug was therefore administered to raise the level of her blood pressure, which for a while relieved the symptoms.

From 12 February Pandit Shiv Sharma, an eminent *vaidya*, took over Ba's treatment. He prescribed some herbal powders and decoctions, laying down the schedule for their administration. But at night Ba was in torment. She had no sleep. Gandhiji came thrice to be by her side. This author, in attendance during the night, was scared and consulted Dr. Gilder. But as Ba was now under Ayurvedic treatment, nothing could be done. Only Pandit Shiv Sharma could prescribe anything.

The absurdity of the situation, however, was that while the patient was an inmate of the Detention Camp, the physician was allowed to visit her only during the day. In order to be on call at night he slept outside the Palace gates in a car, so that in the event of an emergency arising he should be within reach.

The jail authorities had therefore to be woken up and a phone call made to Pandit Shiv Sharma outside. He attributed Ba's condition to anuria and expressed his helplessness. He suggested massaging of the head. This was tried, but with no beneficial result.

As the night progressed, Ba's condition got worse. She asked to be taken to Gandhiji's bed, or to Pyarelal's bed. She became disoriented and expectorated on the mosquito-net.

Ba passed the night in agony. And for those around her it was an irritant that the physician treating her was not there to minister to her. Gandhiji took up the matter with the I.G. Prisons. In a letter dated 14 February and marked "immediate" he requested permission for Shiv Sharma to stay in the Camp at night, a request which the Government had earlier rejected.

Gandhiji wrote:

The crisis has not passed yet. I, therefore, repeat my request and ask for immediate relief.... I do wish that the vexations caused by the delay in granting my requests about the patient's treatment came to an end. Both



Dr. Mehta and the Vaidyaraj were permitted to come in after protracted delay.... The patient needs constant and continuous attention. [Ibid, pp. 227-28]

The night of 15 February was again very bad for the patient. She was in a state of heightened restlessness and had to be given oxygen. Pandit Shiv Sharma was again called in and gave some specific to induce sleep. It had no effect. Ba was running a temperature of 99 degrees and there were signs of accumulation of fluid in the abdomen and possibly in the lungs. Oedema was markedly increased. Shiv Sharma suggested giving an injection to induce micturation. Gandhiji said the injection should be given only if considered absolutely necessary. What was so terrible was that even in such a situation the *vaidya* was not allowed to stay in for the night.

Gandhiji's letter of 14 February having cut no ice with the Government, he again wrote on 16 February. Referring to the fact that for the preceding three nights running the *vaidya* had been obliged to sleep in his car outside the Palace gates, while the patient was in need of his services, Gandhiji wrote:

This is an unnatural state of things and ...I may not take advantage of his generous nature. Besides, it means disturbing the Superintendent and his staff ...once or more often during the night. For instance, last night she suddenly developed fever with *rigor*.

Gandhiji placed before the Government three alternatives:

1. Vaidyaraj should be permitted to remain in the Camp day and night so long as he considers it necessary in the interests of the patient.
2. If the Government cannot agree to this, they may release the patient on parole to enable her to receive the full benefit of the physician's treatment.
3. If neither of these proposals is acceptable to the Government, I request that I be relieved of the responsibility of looking after the patient. If I as her husband cannot procure for her the help she wants or that I think necessary, I ask for my removal to any other place of detention that the Government may choose. I must not be made a helpless witness of the agonies the patient is passing through.

Gandhiji concluded:



I am writing this by the patient's bedside at 2 a.m. She is oscillating between life and death. Needless to say she knows nothing of this letter. She is now hardly able to judge for herself. [Ibid, pp. 229-30]

9

Distraught as Gandhiji was by the physical, no less than emotional, strain brought by the unabating suffering of Kasturba, he nevertheless continued to keep a close watch on the developments taking place in the country outside. When he read the account of the debate in the Central Legislative Assembly on 14 February on the Bill introduced by the Government to consolidate and amend the laws relating to excise, the fears expressed by members that the Bill might go beyond just consolidation and introduce principles that might mean further harassment and restrictions for the people and might adversely affect the rights of the people in respect of salt manufactured for domestic purposes in terms of the Gandhi-Irwin Pact of 1931, and the Government's assurance that this was not intended, Gandhiji sent on 16 February a telegram to the Finance Member that any amendment relating to the salt clause should be in terms of the notice issued by Sir George Schuster, who had been Finance Member earlier. The Finance Member, answering Gandhiji on 25 February, assured him that matters in regard to salt would be left to be regulated by the notification issued in 1931. [Ibid, p. 231]

On 22 January notices had been received from the Home Department by Gandhiji, Mirabehn and this author, showing causes of their detention. The notice served on Gandhiji, under Section 7 of the Restriction and Detention Ordinance, 1944, informed him that the grounds for his detention were that he had taken a leading part in the passing of the Congress resolution of 8 August 1942, "sanctioning a mass movement which was calculated to impede the successful prosecution of the war". Gandhiji was told that he had a right to make a representation in writing against the order of detention.

The notices served on Mirabehn and this author gave as the cause for their detention their close association with Gandhiji.

Gandhiji, in his representation dated 24 January, while admitting his role in the passing of the resolution, again emphatically denied that the August



resolution was "calculated to impede the successful prosecution of the war". He repeated the charge that the Government, by their ill-conceived action in arresting him and leading Congressmen, had goaded the populace into acts which they would otherwise not have committed, and thus done a disservice to the Allied cause. Gandhiji repeated his demand for an independent tribunal to investigate the Government's charges against him and the Congress and his counter-charges against the Government. [Ibid, pp. 216-17]

The notices and the representations against them were of course merely legal formalities. Gandhiji however made use of the occasion to make his first approach to Lord Wavell, when the latter had already been in office for four months. On 17 February, when Kasturba Gandhi was vainly struggling for her life, and Gandhiji himself was in a state of utter exhaustion from having to keep awake at night, he wrote his first letter to the new Viceroy. Referring to the notices, received by some and not by some others of the detainees, Gandhiji expressed his suspicion that the notices were only a formality and did not show any intention to do justice.

Gandhiji chose for comment two events that had been featured in the newspapers. These were Home Member Maxwell's speech in the Central Legislative Assembly on 8 February, rejecting the demand for the release of political prisoners unless there were assurances of good behaviour, and the "gagging order" on Sarojini Naidu.

Sarojini Naidu's offence had been that on 25 January she had given interviews to two foreign correspondents in which she had defended the August resolution and blamed the Government for the disturbances. The Government banned the publication of the statement she made and stopped all outgoing messages referring to the statement. When two newspapers – *The Hindustan Times* and the *National Call*, nevertheless published the statement, precensorship orders were promptly passed against these newspapers. Mrs. Naidu herself was served with an order at Lahore on 26 January prohibiting her from addressing meetings or making communications to the Press. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. IV, p. 689]

The matter came up in the Assembly on 7 February. The Home Member defended the action against Mrs. Naidu, saying it would be unfair to give Mrs.



Naidu freedom of speech which was denied to other leaders of the Congress. The Assembly rejected the adjournment motion censuring the Government for the action taken against Sarojini Naidu. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1944, Vol. I, p. 131]

Gandhiji, referring to the two events, told Wavell that the Government were "playing with fire". Gandhiji then wrote:

Promises for the future are valueless in the face of the world struggle in which the fortune of all nations and therefore of the whole of humanity is involved. Present performance is the peremptory need of the moment, if the war is to end in world peace and not be a preparation for another war bloodier than the present.... Therefore real war effort must mean satisfaction of India's demand. "Quit India" only gives vivid expression to that demand....

Wavell answered on 25 February by sending to Gandhiji a copy of the speech he had made to the Central Legislature on 17 February, the very day Gandhiji was writing to him. The speech, he wrote, stated his point of view. [*C.W.M.G.*, LXXVII, pp. 232-33]

In his speech to the Central Legislative Assembly referred to, Wavell, while recognizing the ability and high-mindedness of the leadership of the Congress, had deplored its existing policy as "barren and unpractical", and declared that he saw no reason "to release those responsible for the declaration of August 8, 1942" until he was convinced that the policy of non-cooperation and even of obstruction had been withdrawn.

The offer of cooperation in the Government on the basis of the Cripps offer, he had further declared, was still open before the leaders of Indian opinion, but the demand for the release of those who were in detention was "an utterly barren one" until those leaders withdrew from the Quit India resolution. It needed no consultation with anyone or anything, he had said, for anyone under detention to do so. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1944, Vol. I, pp. 137-43]

Ba, meanwhile, was steadily sinking. During the night of 17 February, when Gandhiji wrote his letter to Wavell, oxygen had to be administered to her no less



than three times. The treatment of Shiv Sharma did not appear to be doing any good. He could prescribe nothing to relieve her anuria. Gandhiji was wondering whether all medication should not be stopped.

On 18 February Shiv Sharma confessed to Gandhiji that he could prescribe nothing which would cure Kasturba. He had tried the most potent specifics in Ayurveda with no perceptible effect. It would be futile for him to continue. The *vaidya* having given up, Gandhiji asked Dr. Gilder and this author to take over the treatment.

He informed the jail authorities accordingly. However, he wrote, while Shiv Sharma would not be responsible for the treatment of Ba, his assistance would still be required in the matter of sedatives, purgatives and the like. He therefore hoped that the Vaidyaraj would continue to be allowed to come for the purpose, although he would not be required for night duty. Dinshaw Mehta's assistance, Gandhiji informed the authorities, would however be continued "till recovery or the end". [C.W.M.G., LXXVII, p. 234]

The authorities agreed to the arrangement.

When night approached on 18 February, Ba's suffering became acute. Examination showed pneumonia developing in the right lung. The symptoms became more marked as the night progressed. She also had fever. With some trepidation the attending doctors tried sulpha, for there was the risk of the drug adversely affecting the kidneys. Salygran was tried to induce urination. Some glucose was also given intravenously.

During the night of the 19th she was kept on oxygen. Towards the morning she threw away the oxygen tube. Her condition was now pretty hopeless and every now and then she cried "Hei Ram, Hei Ram". On 20 February Gandhiji told the doctors to stop all medication. *Ramnam*, he said, was the only recourse left. In any case he considered *Ramnam* the supreme remedy when all else failed. When his children had been ill, he said, he had not given them any medicine. He had not followed that rule in the case of Kasturba, but now he must fall back on that panacea.

On the night of 21 February, after a brief and fitful sleep induced by a sedative, Ba was terribly restless. Gandhiji visited her twice and sat close to her



on the bed. There was apprehension that she might go to sleep in his arms, making it difficult for him to get up. There was also a risk of his catching infection. But nobody had the courage to say this to him.

Devadas came. Ba embraced him and wept. She told him: "Bapu is a saint. He is burdened with many responsibilities. You must look after him and the family."

On the morning of 22 February Ba was disoriented. She asked to be taken to Bapu's room. Bapu was summoned. He was starting out for his morning walk. He asked Ba: "Shall I go for my walk?" "No," she said. Bapu then sat down on her bed and put her head on his lap. Thus the two of them remained for long hours, showing no movement. What a picture they made!

Devadas had sought permission from powers that be for taking a photograph of Ba and Bapu together. Bhandari came to enquire about Gandhiji's wishes in the matter. Gandhiji said he did not care either way, but if the relatives desired it, the Government should give the necessary permission.

Devadas also brought gangajal — water from the Ganga, the last sacrament that among the Hindus the dying receive. Kasturba, though she had lately developed an aversion to water, opened her mouth and Gandhiji gave her a spoonful. "Is that all?" — she asked.

Devadas had managed to procure penicillin from the Army Headquarters at Poona. Bapu was understood to have agreed to its being tried. On learning of the clearance from Bapu, this author went to boil the syringe for the injection. Bapu became worried.

"Is it to be given by injection?" — he asked.

"Yes," this author replied.

"How often?" — he wanted to know.

He was told that it would have to be given every four hours. It was a new drug and was considered most effective in the treatment of pneumonia at the time. Bapu did not like the idea of giving pricks to Ba every four hours. He had a talk with Devadas and Dr. Gilder. Finally he asked this author: "Are you certain it will help her?" How could anyone give that assurance in the face of the critical



condition Ba was in? This author told him so, at the same time expressing the view that doctors must go on trying so long as there was life in the patient. Gandhiji became stern. "No," he said, "I will not let you give her injections. Let her go in peace." He then went to the bathroom to have a wash before going for his walk. He was already late. Just then Ba called him. Prabhavati was with her then. Bapu came and sat on her bed. She leaned against his chest. In less than ten minutes she was no more. She had passed into eternal sleep. The time was 7.35 p.m.

Bapu closed his eyes and for some time remained motionless with one arm cradling Ba's lifeless head. Devadas wept like a child.

Moments later I.G.P. Bhandari came to ask about Gandhiji's wishes in the matter of funeral arrangements. In answer Gandhiji dictated to him a note giving three alternatives.

1. Body should be handed over to my sons and relatives, which would mean a public funeral without interference from the Government. My sons will ensure peaceful funeral and lay down their lives for it if necessary.

2. If that is not possible, funeral should take place as in the case of Mahadev Desai; and if the Government will allow relatives only to be present at the funeral, I shall not be able to accept the privilege unless all friends who are as good as relatives to me are also allowed to be present.

3. If this is not acceptable to the Government, then those who have been allowed to visit her will be sent away by me and only those who are in the Camp (detainees) will attend the funeral.

Gandhiji then continued:

It has been ...my great anxiety not to make any political capital out of this most trying illness of my life companion. But I have always wanted whatever the Government did to be done with good grace which, I am afraid, has been hitherto lacking. It is not too much to expect that now that the patient is no more whatever the Government decide about the funeral will be done with good grace. [Ibid, p. 236]



The Government refused permission for a public funeral. The funeral would have to be within the premises of the Aga Khan Palace, Gandhiji was informed. However, friends and relatives, up to a hundred in number, would be allowed to attend. Devadas, standing at the gate, would decide who should be let in.

The number to be permitted was so small that it would not be easy to decide who should be let in for the funeral and who should be kept out. There would be hundreds wanting to attend. There had even been talk about the desirability of postponing the funeral by a few hours the following day to enable mourners from Bombay to attend. Gandhiji put his foot down. He said he had been thinking only of friends already in Poona when he wrote to the Government.

Ba was bathed and then draped in a red-bordered sari made of yarn spun by Bapu. Bapu did not lie down to rest until 1 a.m. Others kept vigil over the body by turns. Recitation from the *Gita* was continuous.

On 23 February from 7.30 a.m. mourners started arriving. Relatives made a pyre of sandalwood supplied by the jail authorities, and the body of Kasturba was placed on it. At 10.30 a.m. Devadas ignited it. Gandhiji stood and watched, refusing the offer of a chair to sit down. The body, which had been too full of fluids from prolonged illness with poor kidney function, took a long time to burn, and it was not until 4.30 in the afternoon that it was reduced to ashes. Bapu stood there, supporting himself on his walking-stick for some hours. Then he sat down in the chair, but watched till the very end.

Ba's passing away had been ideal in some ways. Every Hindu woman desires to die before her husband. Ba had died in the arms of Gandhiji. But it was pathetic too. She had longed to go out of prison once and be among her children and grandchildren. This longing had not been fulfilled.

The news of Kasturba's death in the Detention Camp spread like wildfire and plunged the country in grief. Condolence meetings were held everywhere and condolence messages poured in.

In the various Muslim League Provinces, where representative Governments still functioned, resolutions were passed in the Legislative



Assemblies mourning Kasturba's death. The Sind Assembly passed such a resolution on 23 February. The Bengal Assembly, in a resolution moved on 24 February by the Deputy Speaker, described Kasturba as having represented "the best and noblest in Indian womanhood", in whose death the country had sustained an irreparable loss. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1944, Vol. I, pp. 36, 178]

In the Council of State business was adjourned for half an hour as a mark of respect to the departed soul. In the Central Legislative Assembly, however, a statement on Kasturba's death was disallowed by the Chair. [*Ibid*, pp. 116, 144]

Jinnah, who, in spite of political differences, had known the Gandhis since 1915, when Gandhiji had arrived in India from South Africa, did not show the courtesy of sending a condolence message. [Pattabhi Sitaramayya, *The History of the Indian National Congress*, Vol. II, p. 777]

The rulers who had not only been callous and unsympathetic in responding to Gandhiji's various requests pertaining to medical and nursing help for Ba during her protracted illness, after her death attempted to save face by resorting to lies and half-truths about the role they had played. R. A. Butler in the House of Commons, Olaf Caroe in the Central Legislative Assembly and Girija Shankar Bajpayi in the U.S.A. made statements defending the Government's handling of Kasturba's treatment. It was said that she had received all possible medical care and attention not only from her regular medical attendants but also from outside physicians desired by her family. Also that trained nurses had been made available when required.

This was far from the truth. The only medical attendants Kasturba had had were her two co-detainees. The Government had refused request for the services of doctors from outside being made available. Even permission for the services of a *vaidya* was given after a great deal of dilly-dallying and under severe restrictions.

Gandhiji, through several letters addressed to the Home Department, Government of India, protested against the misrepresentation of facts resorted to by Government spokesmen. He emphatically asserted that facilities, when not refused, had been granted grudgingly and when it was almost too late. Thus,



instead of the services of Prabhavati having been made available, at first only an *ayah* had been sent. Only after much delay had Prabhavati and Kanu Gandhi been allowed to come. As for outside medical help, Kasturba Gandhi herself had expressed the wish for Dinshaw Mehta to be brought in as early as December 1943 and a formal written request in that regard had been sent to the Government by Gandhiji on 27 January 1944, followed by a reminder on 31 January and another on 3 February. Only then had Dinshaw Mehta been permitted to come from 5 February. Similarly the patient had made her wish known for a non-allopathic physician in the closing days of December and a written request was sent to the Government on 27 January. It was only on 12 February that *Vaidya* Shiv Sharma had been allowed to take over the treatment. The condition of the patient by that time had deteriorated too far for any hope of recovery.

Gandhiji said he found it painful to have to write to the Government on a personal matter involving the memory of one who had been his faithful partner for sixty-two years, but felt it had to be done. The Home Department stuck by the white-washing it had done in regard to the role of the Government and rejected Gandhiji's complaints, which, it said, emanated from his inability, in his bereavement, to recognize the Government's endeavours to do all that was reasonably possible for them to do. [C.W.M.G., LXXVII, pp. 242-43, 251-55, 256-57, 260-61]

The question which still bothered the public mind was why Kasturba Gandhi, even when she was terminally ill, had not been set free on health grounds. Butler told the members of the House of Commons that it was because no request for her release had been received by the Government. Also that the Government had thought it would be no act of kindness to her or her family to remove her from the Aga Khan Palace.

Bajpayi made similar statements for the consumption of the American Press and public. He said she had not been released because she had wished to remain with her husband, and her wishes had been respected.

Gandhiji in his letter to the Home Department dated 4 March gave the lie to such misrepresentation. He said that as a satyagrahi prisoner Kasturba could not have made a request for her release. It would have been unbecoming. But



the Government had never offered to release her. Had it been made, the mere offer would have had a favourable psychological effect on her. [Ibid, p. 243]

Wavell himself, writing to Amery on 16 March, referred to Gandhiji's complaints about the handling of Kasturba's illness, and observed:

I have given instructions for a brief and courteous reply to be sent. We may have been wrong in not offering to release Mrs. Gandhi – I have never been quite satisfied about this.... [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. IV, p. 812]

12

Kasturba's death, as has been mentioned, had been an ideal one in many ways. She had died in her husband's arms, in the half-year period when the sun was in *Uttarayana* (the six-month period from 21/22 December to 21/22 June each year) and on the auspicious day of Mahashivaratri. Yet some elements were missing. Only one of her four sons, Devadas, had been present, and had performed the funeral rites.

Ramdass arrived at around 6.30 in the evening after the mourners were already back from the funeral and were sitting down to a meal. He cried. Devadas took him to the cremation ground, after which the two brothers sat down to their meal.

Without Ba the Detention Camp seemed empty; her room was empty; and the hearts of the detainees were empty.

Gandhiji himself could not afford to let his grief show too much. The business of the country, and of humanity, would not permit him the respite needed to nurse a personal grief, however deep. Immediately after the funeral, in the evening, someone asked his opinion on the Bengal famine. He said:

I feel that if the Congress had been freed, the famine would not have occurred; or, the Congress would have soon brought it under control and there would not have been so many deaths.

If that was the case, Gandhiji was asked, did it not follow that Congressmen must try, in the interest of the people, to get themselves released from jail? Was it right, from considerations of personal prestige, or the country's prestige, to remain in jail?



Gandhiji said only a fool would refuse to risk his life to uphold the prestige of the country. But in the prevailing situation even the Congress could do nothing – not unless it had the reins of Government in its hands, which it did not have.

Some people from a museum requested Gandhiji that personal articles of Kasturba should be transferred to the museum for preservation.

Gandhiji said no. That would amount to idolatry. Those who knew Ba and revered her might well keep some article or other of Ba for themselves. It would ennoble them and deter them from doing anything that would be unworthy. Accordingly the various items of Ba's clothing were distributed among the families of Ramdas Gandhi and Devadas Gandhi and the women detainees, including the present author.

Although Gandhiji did not let all his pain show, Ba's death had devastated him. On 26 February he said: "Ba fills my mind entirely. I can think of nothing else. Reading an article in *Dawn* today, I saw Wavell mentioned, and I wondered 'Who is this Wavell? Is he the Viceroy?' "Mahadev's death had also been a cruel blow to Gandhiji. But, as he said, while Mahadev passed away instantaneously, without suffering, Ba underwent prolonged suffering.

There was a little table on which Ba had the habit of leaning or resting her head, as she sat or slept. Gandhiji asked the table to be brought to him. It had become precious to him. He said his breakfast should be served to him on that little table.

Ba's death had been a wonderful thing, Gandhiji said. It was so noble the way she had called him to her in her last moments and placed her head in his lap. Now he was tired, very tired.



CHAPTER XXII: GANDHIJI'S ILLNESS AND RELEASE

1

Kasturba's passing away left Gandhiji a shattered man. In the course of a long married life of sixty-two years the two had never been separated from each other except for short intervals, adding up to about ten and a half years in all – three years from 1888 to 1891 when Gandhiji stayed in England for his studies, then about three years and three months from April 1893 to July 1896 when he first went to South Africa unaccompanied by Ba, and a little over four years that Gandhiji spent in the various jails in South Africa and India between 1908 and 1933. The rest of their married life had been spent together. What is more, even before marriage, they had played together as children.

And now Ba was no more. The cruel hand of death had broken the companionship and Gandhiji had to come to terms with the fact. He did not find it easy. He wrote to Wavell on 9 March:

Though for her sake I have welcomed her death as bringing freedom from living agony, I feel the loss more than I had thought I would. We were a couple outside the ordinary. It was in 1906 that after mutual consent and after unconscious trials we definitely adopted self-restraint as a rule of life. To my great joy this knit us together as never before. We ceased to be two different entities. Without my wishing it, she chose to lose herself in me. The result was she became truly my *better* half. She was a woman always of very strong will which, in our early days, I used to mistake for obstinacy.

But that strong will enabled her to become quite unwittingly my teacher in the art and practice of non-violent non-cooperation. [C.W.M.G., LXXVII, p. 244]

Gandhiji drove himself to keep the daily routine of activities, but, as he confessed, he could think of nothing but Ba. She appeared to fill his entire being.

On this author remarking that Ba's death appeared to have given him a greater shock than Mahadevbhai's death had, he said: "It is possible. Mahadev's death was instantaneous, while Ba went through many weeks of agony. I cannot



forget the pain of those days. When her last hour was come it was wonderful the way she called me to her and passed into eternity with her head on my lap." [Sushila Nayar, *Bapuki Karavas Kahani*, pp. 512-13]

With Ba's passing away it became apparent that Manu, who had been allowed to stay in the Camp for nursing Ba, would be asked to leave the Camp. Prabhawati, too, it appeared probable, would be transferred to some other prison, leaving in the Aga Khan Palace only Pyarelal, Dr. M.D.D. Gilder, Mirabehn and the present author to keep Gandhiji company and to provide him secretarial assistance and personal service. Manu was scared of the prospect and looked forlorn and unhappy. On Manu's account Gandhiji, too, was worried. It went against his grain to approach the authorities in the matter. Still, he spoke to Bhandari, who suggested Gandhiji writing to the Government.

On 27 February Gandhiji drafted a long letter to the Bombay Government, asking that Manu Gandhi and Prabhawati be kept in the Camp for some more time. But he fretted all night. Was it right for him to seek such a favour from the Government? In the end he decided not to send the letter and tore up the draft. In a note he scribbled to Manu Gandhi, he wrote:

Yesterday I drafted a long letter about keeping you and Prabhawati here, but I kept thinking over the matter the whole of last night and could get no sleep. In the end, I saw light. We cannot make such a request. Aren't we prisoners, after all? We must endure our separation.

He would certainly miss her, he wrote in another note, but his trying to keep her near him would be weakness and ignorant attachment. He suggested her going to Rajkot and profiting from the company of Narandas. [*C.W.M.G.*, LXXVII, pp. 239-40]

The Bombay Government, it now appears, were aware that the case existed for Manu Gandhi and Prabhawati being sent away and that this would make the atmosphere in the Aga Khan Palace even more depressing for Gandhiji. In a private and personal letter, Governor Colville wrote to Wavell on 13 March 1944:



It is clear that some of the women now in the Aga Khan Palace should go away, as they were only brought to keep Mrs. Gandhi company. The case of Dr. Gilder's further detention will shortly come up for review, and I think it is likely that ...he might be released. The entourage will, therefore, be much reduced, and we should consider whether it is desirable to leave Gandhi in this large and rather depressing place or to move him elsewhere.

Colville mentioned the suggestion that Gandhiji might be moved, purely on humanitarian grounds and without suggesting any change of policy, to the Ahmadnagar Fort, where he would be with the members of the Congress Working Committee. This might, though it was doubtful, result in an early move to modify the August resolution and an attempt to come to terms with the Government.

A settlement with the Congress, Colville said, might present risks and was sure to dishearten all those who had supported the war effort, which the Congress had obstructed. But to wait till the end of the war before allowing the leaders to consider their position might mean India being lost to the Empire. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. IV, pp. 807-8]

2

Gandhiji himself had never reconciled himself to the idea of being detained in the Aga Khan Palace and had even earlier, in his letter of 26 October 1943 to the Home Department, Government of India, drawn the attention of the Government to the huge expenditure involved in keeping him at the Aga Khan Palace and said he would be quite content to pass his days in any prison.

On 2 March, answering a question in the Central Assembly, the Home Member stated that the expenses on Gandhiji and those detained with him at the Aga Khan Palace amounted to about Rs. 550 a month.

Gandhiji challenged the accuracy of this statement. In a letter to the Additional Secretary, Home Department, dated 4 March 1944, he referred to his letter of 26 October 1943, requesting transfer to "any prison" and regretted not having followed up the request. He further wrote:



The expenses on behalf of my companions and me are not merely Rs. 550 per month. The rent of this huge place (of which only a portion is open to us) and the expense of maintaining the big outer guard and an inner staff consisting of Superintendent, *Jamadar* and sepoys have got to be added. Add to this a large squad of convicts from Yeravda to serve the inmates and to look after the garden. Virtually the whole of this expense is, from my point of view, wholly unnecessary; and when people are dying of starvation, it is almost a crime against Indian humanity. I ask that my companions and I be removed to any regular prison Government may choose ...the whole of this expense comes from the taxes collected from the dumb millions of India. [C.W.M.G., LXXVII, pp. 241-42]

On 18 April the Government of India Home Department referred the question of Gandhiji's transfer to the Secretary of State for consideration. It mentioned the suggestion made by the Bombay Government that Gandhiji might be transferred to Ahmadnagar, mainly because the party in the Aga Khan Palace would be reduced to a very small number, and Gandhiji's demand for transfer "ostensively" because he was horrified at the expense of keeping him at the Aga Khan Palace, and pointed out further that the lease of the Palace would expire at the end of April.

The original reasons for separating Gandhiji from the Working Committee, the Home Department said, were to prevent consultation and attempts from jail to promote the movement and to facilitate handling of the fast by Gandhiji. These reasons did not any more apply with any force, and if Gandhiji again fasted at Ahmadnagar, he could be segregated there. Besides, keeping Gandhiji with members of the Working Committee would remove the excuse on the part of the Congress leaders that they could not reconsider their position because Gandhiji did not have access to the members of the Working Committee. If there should be further demand for meeting with the members of the A.I.C.C., it would of course be rejected.

If the proposal was accepted, certain members of the Working Committee might be released, for instance, Syed Mahmud, whose health had not been satisfactory and whose views were not extreme. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. IV, pp. 893-94]



The reasons advanced by the Home Department for Gandhiji's transfer to Ahmadnagar reflected the questioning that had started in the British ruling circles on the tactics to be employed in dealing with the Congress, with the general easing of the war situation in Europe and the Far East and the brightening prospect of an Allied victory.

The view generally held was that the stiffness shown towards the Congress and Gandhiji had paid dividends – the Congress had been weakened and the Government's hold on the country had become stronger — and that there was no justification for the Government to soften its attitude now that the Muslim League, which had gained enormous strength during the two years of the Congress eclipse, was staunchly opposed to any quarter being given to the Congress.

Twynam, the Central Provinces Governor, in a note prepared in February 1944, argued that the British had not used the Muslim League "as a counterpoise to Congress" earlier because the Muslims had been too weak and ill-organized. This was no longer so, as the elections held since 1938 clearly showed. The Government therefore should, he argued, strive to arrive at a *modus vivendi* with the Muslim League, on the basis of the Cripps offer, which stipulated the right of any Province not to accept the new constitution that might be devised for India. He suggested amendment of the Act of 1935 along the lines desired by the Legislatures of the Provinces governed by the Muslim League.

He endorsed the view expressed by Rajagopalachari in his pamphlet *The Way Out*, published on 30 November 1943. In the pamphlet Rajagopalachari had given full support to the Cripps proposals as regards the framing of a constitution for free India. On the question of non-accession of Provinces, Rajagopalachari said:

In the face of the demand made on behalf of the Muslim areas it is difficult to see how the principle of self-determination for such areas can be avoided in any plan for a free and independent constitution. Ruling out coercion, we cannot but consent to some plan by which the ascertained wish of the people in those areas must ultimately prevail.... The plan for



expressing the self-determination of the inhabitants of any area can be modified or improved, but the principle has to be conceded. A fresh demarcation of the Provinces is not ruled out if objection be taken to the present delimitation. Contiguous districts in the North-West and East of India, where the Muslim population is an absolute majority, can easily be marked out.

Twynam suggested ignoring the Congress altogether and bringing together Jinnah and Rajagopalachari to evolve a formula for an interim settlement with the Muslim League. Rajagopalachari and Jinnah, or a nominee of Jinnah, might also be asked to join the Executive Council.

No further appeasement of the Congress should be attempted, Twynam concluded, and a firm stand should be taken on the principles of the Cripps offer with the support of the Muslim League and Rajagopalachari. [Ibid, pp. 884-93]

Jinnah appeared to be fully aware of the line of thinking in British circles represented by Twynam, and he did not lose the opportunity to take the fullest advantage of the situation presented. In an interview to a representative of *News Chronicle*, given on 29 February 1944, he declared in effect that the Pakistan issue was not a triangular issue, to be settled between the British Government, the Congress and the Muslim League, but an issue between the British Government and the Muslim League. If the British Government was sincere in its desire for peace in India, he said, it should immediately frame a new constitution dividing India into two sovereign nations – Pakistan and Hindustan. When the interviewer suggested that such a division would surely weaken India and lay her open to future aggression, Jinnah replied: "I don't agree that India would be any safer under a forced unity. In fact she might be more vulnerable because Hindus and Muslims will never be reconciled with each other. Any agreement between Muslims and Hindus to work together as a single unit or even in a federation is an impossibility."

But the Congress and the Hindus would not accept the position, the correspondent objected. If the Government tried to implement such a plan, they would launch a civil disobedience movement, which might lead to violence and even to civil war.



Jinnah expressed his firm belief that nothing of the sort would happen. If the British expressed their intention to set up two separate states of Pakistan and Hindustan, the Congress and the Hindus would accept it within three months.

And what if Britain should then refuse to leave India on the ground that the relations between the two new nations were not good? Even so, Jinnah said, they would enjoy a larger degree of autonomy than they were then enjoying. [Pattabhi Sitaramayya, *The History of the Indian National Congress*, Vol. II. pp. 589-90]

Jinnah had become so drunk with his lately enhanced power that he decided to renew his attempt to destabilize the communal harmony in the Punjab, so assiduously fostered by Sikandar Hyat Khan, with whom Jinnah had entered into a pact not to disturb it. Under the pact Sikandar had agreed that all Muslim members of the Punjab Legislature elected on the Unionist ticket would declare their allegiance to the Muslim League, while Jinnah had agreed that the Legislature Party would continue to function as the Unionist Party and the Ministry as the Unionist Ministry. This had been a great victory for Jinnah, whose Muslim League had been able to return only two members to the Legislature.

But death having removed Sikandar Hyat Khan from the scene and Khizr Hyat Khan having assumed Chief Ministership in the Province, Jinnah felt that he could browbeat Khizr and take over control of the Punjab Ministry. He accordingly demanded that (1) Muslim members of the Unionist Party should declare their allegiance only to the Muslim League Party and not to the Unionist Party and (2) that the name of the coalition should be changed to the Muslim League Coalition Party.

In April he went to Lahore and had a series of meetings with Khizr between the 20th and 26th of the month, at which he tried to hector and bully Khizr into toeing the line. Khizr, with some encouragement from the Governor, whose authority too was under challenge, remained firm. Had he agreed, the three non-Muslim Ministers would have withdrawn themselves from the Ministry, plunging the Punjab into political uncertainty and communal turmoil. For the three Ministers — Sir Chhotu Ram, Sardar Baldev Singh and Manoharlal — in a statement clearly stated that they could consider joining a Muslim League led



Ministry only as an emergency measure and as a part of an all-India settlement, with the Muslim League giving up its claim of Pakistan.

Khizr not only rejected Jinnah's arbitrary demands but secured the dismissal of Shaukat Hyat Khan, Jinnah's chief henchman in the Ministry, on grounds of corruption.

For the time being at least Jinnah's attempts were frustrated. His bluster did not work. The incident also showed very clearly that Jinnah could have his diktats enforced only where he was actively aided by British officialdom, as he had been earlier in Bengal and Sind. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. IV, pp. 898, 906-7, 922-25, 927, 941; *The Indian Annual Register*, 1944, Vol. I, pp. 217-29]

4

As was only to be expected, the Viceroy, Lord Wavell, was not quite as sold on the idea of appeasing Jinnah and conceding his demand for a division of the country "in principle" as a way of teaching the Congress a lesson, which was the line advocated by Twynam. In April 1944 he prepared his own paper on the political situation in India for consideration of the India Office. About Jinnah he wrote:

Jinnah has seized the opportunity of the Congress eclipse to strengthen the position of the League, with great success. While his party is in the ascendant and growing in power, he has no intention of coming to terms with Congress and is anxious to prevent the Government doing so.... Beyond Pakistan, I do not think he has any constructive ideas, and I doubt whether he has any clear constructive ideas about Pakistan itself. He is an ambitious politician, and does not really represent the solid conservative Muslim spirit. He has probably, however, the power to stir up a lot of trouble and the will to do so in pursuit of his ambition.... Jinnah might also challenge Government by development of his "private army".

The need, as Wavell saw, was for forming a "Centre Government Party" which would command popular support and a majority in the Legislature. Such a party might enlist the support of the Muslim League, but it would not be easy to negotiate with Jinnah except on the basis of Pakistan.



However, outside of the Congress there were no elements which would command popular support. The old Liberals – Sapru, Jayakar, Maharaj Singh - had no constructive ideas and no following. Rajagopalachari though "the ablest", had no following. Ambedkar had some following but it was not influential. M. N. Roy had the elements of a party and with Government support might gain more followers. Still the Congress and the League were the only parties which commanded popular following and could influence elections.

The Congress prestige had suffered due to the Quit India movement. As a result of the war the people on the whole were more prosperous than before and the prestige of the Government had gone up.

For the present therefore, Wavell concluded, nothing remained to be done but to carry on the administrative work, which the Council were doing reasonably well. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. IV, pp. 961-64]

In short the Congress leaders were not to be released, and the political deadlock would continue.

5

Voices continued to be raised for the release of Gandhiji and the Congress leadership and for the ending of political deadlock.

On 15/16 April, Congressmen released from jail met at Lucknow under the presidentship of Sampurnanand. The meeting unanimously passed a resolution reiterating the faith of Congressmen in the leadership of Gandhiji and the members of the Congress Working Committee.

Expressing concern at the inroads made by the Japanese troops into Assam, the meeting, in another resolution, expressed its confidence that "despite all difficulties and impediments the people of Assam will resist the Japanese attack with all the strength at their command."

Sampurnanand, K. N. Katju and others, speaking on the resolution pointed out that Gandhiji and the Congress had throughout expressed their determination to resist Fascist aggression – even at the time when the British Government had been actively aiding the Fascist powers. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1944, Vol. I, pp. 245-46]



The "inroads" into Assam mentioned in the resolution concerned the operations the Japanese 15th Army had launched against Assam on 20 March 1944, with an attack on Imphal. It was in this operation that they had, for the first time, used elements of the 2nd guerilla brigade of the 1st I.N.A. division, largely for subversion. The I.N.A. men were not provided any heavy weapons and suffered from lack of transport. In a couple of months the offensive petered out, with heavy I.N.A. casualties. In the months that followed the Japanese were in full retreat from Burma, pursued by the British and Chinese armies. [Tara Chand, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Vol. IV, p. 419; also Major General (Retd.) Pratap Narain, in a letter to the editor, *The Times of India* (Delhi edition), 6-2-1995]

A conference of Non-Party leaders was held at Lucknow on 7 and 8 April 1944, at which speakers —Tej Bahadur Sapru, Raja Maheshwar Dayal Seth, H. N. Kunzru, P. N. Sapru and others – expressed grave concern at the continued political deadlock, with the concomitant denial of the most elementary civic rights to the people, continued autocratic rule in the largest Provinces of the country and the stubbornness of the Government in not releasing Gandhiji and the Congress leaders.

Giving the lie to the British claim that the Executive Council of the Viceroy worked as an autonomous body, Sir T. B. Sapru pointed out that its strings were pulled by the Secretary of State, who was constitutionally responsible to the British electorate and had no direct or adequate knowledge of India. The whole system was an unnatural one and could not any longer be supported.

Emphasizing the need for the solution of the communal question Sapru said he could not see how this could be done so long as leaders of the Congress were denied the freedom to approach other parties for purposes of settlement. He called for the release of Gandhiji and other leaders and for a national conference to be convened. The only ground being put forward by the Government for the continued detention of Congress leaders was that they had not repudiated the August resolution. That was not the spirit in which solution of big political issue was brought about. He mentioned as examples South Africa, Ireland and Egypt. The demand that the leaders who had not even been tried by an independent tribunal should from their places of confinement admit their



error and repudiate the conduct attributed to them amounted to coercion and was not likely to yield results.

The conference passed a series of resolutions. The first one condoled the death of Kasturba Gandhi and offered deep sympathy to Mahatma Gandhi. Other resolutions demanded that

the Legislatures should be restored in the five Provinces of Madras, Bombay, the United Provinces, Bihar and the Central Provinces in which they have been suspended for four and a half years;

the Governor General's Executive Council should be reconstructed without delay as a truly National Government with a Prime Minister at its head, consisting entirely of non-officials enjoying public confidence ... subject to responsibility to the Crown during the period of the war and in regard to Defence With a view to create a proper atmosphere in the country Mahatma Gandhi and other leaders should be released forthwith. Their detention is justified neither on the ground of justice nor for reasons of State. An opportunity should be given to them as free men to review the whole situation and thus help in bringing about a settlement of outstanding issues between Hindus and Muslims and England and India.

In a memorandum sent to the Viceroy along with the resolutions, Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru deplored the suspension of autonomy in the Provinces mentioned in the resolution. Ever since 1909, he said, Provincial Legislatures had been functioning with an elected element, and from 1921 onwards majority of members of the Government in the Provinces had been Indians. With the suspension of the constitution in 1939 the Governor had become an autocrat. Twenty years of association with Indians as colleagues had been abandoned. In place of Indians the Governors had appointed Advisors from the Indian Civil Service. It was not only the Congress which had been penalized by the suspension of the constitution; the representatives of millions of non-Congress Hindus, Muslims, Indian Christians, Scheduled Castes and special interests such as the Universities, Commerce and landed aristocracy had been rendered dumb and deprived of all power and influence.

Sapru referred to the growing feeling of frustration, disillusionment, suppressed discontent and resentment in the country and declared that nearly



two hundred million people were being governed by drastic laws in the name of smooth administration.

Sapru demanded the formation in the Section 93 Provinces of coalition Ministries, even if the majority party, viz., the Congress, was unwilling to assume office. [Ibid, pp. 929-33]

Wavell turned down the demand, saying that the initiative for the formation of Ministries in the Provinces must come from the political parties, and not from the British Government. [Ibid, p. 990]

There were other attempts in the same direction. In March Radhakant Malaviya, son of Madan Mohan Malaviy, made a request to the Viceroy for permission to see Gandhiji, along with Srinivasa Sastri, M. R. Jayakar and Dr. S. Radhakrishnan. He said he would persuade Gandhiji to withdraw the August resolution, and even if he did not permit the Congress to take office in the Provinces, at least to permit others to do so.

Governor Hallett gave his view that the interview should not be allowed. He said if Gandhiji wished to withdraw the August resolution he could do so without discussion. He also expressed his opposition to the idea of a Government being formed in the U.P. by non-Congress Hindus. Any coalition Government in the Province, unless it was controlled by the Muslims, he said, would slow down the war work. He expressed concern at the mounting "stream of destructive criticism" against the Government and the effect it was having on students and others. The need, as he saw it, was for the creation of a party which could fight the criticism. Perhaps the zemindars and the taluqdars of the Province could be induced to form an agriculturists party, but he did not have much hope, since the zemindars as a class were an effete lot. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. IV, pp. 795-96]

As Radhakant's object was "evidently" not to break with Gandhiji if he refused to withdraw the resolution, the Viceroy turned down his request to see Gandhiji. [Ibid, p. 812]

That the British had not softened one bit on their resolve to isolate the Congress and Gandhiji was confirmed officially by Amery during a debate on India in the British Parliament on 18 April. The debate was occasioned by five



resolutions moved by the Government approving continuance of Section 93 for another twelve months in the five Congress-majority Provinces placed under the Governor's rule in 1939 following the resignation by Congress Ministries.

Secretary of State Amery, in a speech described as "most provocative" by Pethick Lawrence, repeated the British charge against the Congress that it was "almost certainly" responsible for the disturbances of August 1942.

When Sorenson of the Labour Party asked if Amery was suggesting that the disturbances were instigated by the Congress, Amery replied: "Oh yes, most certainly."

Sorenson said he "entirely disagreed" that the disturbances had been instigated by the Congress. He deplored the shocking state of affairs that for the third time in five out of eleven Provinces, including the most important Provinces of Madras and Bombay, the House had been asked to accept what was virtually despotic government.

But the Tories had a majority in the House and the resolutions were approved without difficulty. In the Lords they were passed without any debate. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1944, Vol. I, pp. 339-41]

Pattabhi Sitaramayya comments:

It can now be realized how fruitless were the labours of the Leagues and Conferences in London — the India League, the Labour Conference, the Trade Union Conference, the Independent Labour Conference, all representing high ideas ... but all equally impotent against the conservatism of Britain, entrenched behind a few families of influence as representing the real power behind the throne, namely the capital, commerce and industry of the British Empire. [Pattabhi Sitaramayya, *The History of the Indian National Congress*, Vol. II, p. 594]

Gandhiji on his part continued his efforts to make the new Viceroy see reason and adopt a less barren attitude towards solution of the deadlock. His letter of 17 February having elicited the response from Wavell that his speech to the Central Legislative Assembly on 17 February represented his views on the



questions raised by Gandhiji, Gandhiji in his letter to Wavell of 9 March proceeded to deal with the points made by the Viceroy in his speech.

Wavell, having given assurances of the genuine desire of Britain that India should attain self-government, had qualified it by laying down several conditions: that it should not stand in the way of the defeat of Germany and Japan, that in the solution of the constitutional problem full account would have to be taken of the interests of "those who have loyally supported us in this war" – the soldiers, the rulers of States, the minorities; also for the solution of the problem the Congress and the League would have to come to terms.

Gandhiji, paraphrasing Wavell's statement, pointed out that the elements mentioned were all props of British rule in India; the army had been created to fight Britain's war; the rulers, too, were British creations and owed their position to the British; the minorities had been encouraged and used against the majority when it tried to resist British rule. But that was precisely why, Gandhiji said, the slogan of "Quit India" had been raised.

Wavell had categorically stated that Congress leaders should not be released until they repudiated the August resolution, for which no consultation with anyone was required. Each could consult his own conscience and decide whether he would withdraw from the resolution. The Congress contained "much ability and high-mindedness" but its policy was "barren and unpractical", "mistaken and unprofitable".

How could a resolution, Gandhiji asked, which had been jointly arrived at, be a matter of individual conscience? It could only be withdrawn after joint deliberation and discussion. Why was the Government afraid of releasing unarmed men and women who had the backing of men and women equally unarmed and even pledged to non-violence?

Gandhiji closed the argument by inviting Wavell to visit Ahmadnagar and the Aga Khan Palace to meet his captives and probe their hearts. He would find, he said, that however critical they might be of the British Government they were friends of the British and "the greatest helpers in the fight against Nazism, Fascism, Japanism and the like".



In his answer dated 28 March, Wavell, while refusing to be drawn into "lengthy argument" on the points of detail raised by Gandhiji, reiterated his "entire accord" with the Cripps proposals for giving India "self-government under a constitution of her own devising, arrived at by agreement between the principal elements". The immediate problem before India, however, he asserted, was not political but economic, which could not await a political settlement. This work required services of experienced administrators and cooperation of leaders of all parties, but it could not be accomplished without the help of Britain.

The policy of the Congress, he regretted, was one of non-cooperation. During the war when success of the United Nations against the Axis powers was vital, the Congress ordered its Ministries to resign and decided not to take part in the administration of the country or in the war. Then at a time when Japanese invasion was possible, it passed a resolution calling on the British to leave India, which was bound to have the most serious effect on the defence of India. Wavell said he was quite clear that India's problems could not be solved by an immediate and complete withdrawal of the British.

While he would not accuse the Congress or Gandhiji of any wish deliberately to aid the Japanese, it was clear, he said, that the Quit India resolution could not but hamper the war effort. It had been passed because the Congress had lost confidence in the ability of the British to defend India, and it showed a desire to take political advantage of the "supposed military straits" of Britain. During the disturbances, vital lines of communications of the Army to the Burma frontier had been cut by Congress supporters in the name of the Congress, often using Congress flags.

The greatest contribution that the Congress could make to India's welfare, Wavell concluded, was to abandon the policy of non-cooperation and the greatest service Gandhiji could do to India would be to advise such a course.

Gandhiji wrote to Wavell again on 9 April. Referring to Wavell's plea for cooperation, he said cooperation required equality between parties and mutual trust, both of which were lacking. Equality was absent and the Government's distrust of the Congress could be seen at every turn. The Congress in turn had no faith in the competence of the British Government to ensure India's future good.



It was high time the British cooperated with the people of India through their elected representatives instead of expecting cooperation from them.

Gandhiji defended the August resolution, which had behind it the sanction not of violence but of self-suffering. The effect of the resolution could not have been to hamper prosecution of the war. If it had been hampered it was because of the hasty arrest of Congressmen, for which the Government were responsible. Had the Government stayed their hand, much bloodshed would have been avoided.

Gandhiji denied the charge that the Congress had lost confidence in the ability of the British to defend India and was prepared to take advantage of the supposed military straits the British were in to gain political advantage. He asked the Viceroy to submit the evidence in his possession to an impartial tribunal. He knew it was a futile request. In dealing with Congressmen the Government had been acting as "combined prosecutor, judge and jailor". No man's freedom was safe. The country was being ruled under a series of Ordinances. There was virtual martial law. Concluding, Gandhiji wrote:

As I visualize India today, it is one vast prison containing four hundred million souls. You are its sole custodian. The Government prisons are prisons within this prison. I agree with you that whilst you hold the views expressed in your letter under reply, the proper place for one like me is a Government prison.

Gandhiji, however, expressed the hope that he and his fellow prisoners would be removed to some other prison where the cost of their detention would not be even one-tenth of what it was. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1943, Vol. II, pp. 200-207; .C.W.M.G., LXXVII, pp. 244-50, 257-60, 462-64]

The idea had been floated for collection of a fund in the memory of Ba. Kanu Gandhi, who had been permitted to stay on in the Aga Khan Palace for about ten days after the demise of Ba, spoke to Gandhiji about it. Gandhiji advised that since it had already been decided to collect a sum of seventy-five lakhs to be presented to him at his seventy-fifth birthday on the following 2 October, the fund to be collected in Ba's memory should be combined with it. He said:



Ba had made herself one with me. How many women die the way Ba died, in the arms of their husbands? In her last moment she called me to her. I did not know then that she was about to go. It was also God's will that I had stayed back and had not gone for my walk. I do not think much of the idea of starting a university in her name. She would have no interest in a university. Her interest was in the charkha. If the two funds could be combined, the burden on the donors would be less. The fund could be used for the promotion of the charkha and the village industries. Narandas will have to shoulder the main responsibility. [Sushila Nayar, *Bapuki Karavas Kahani*, p. 518]

On 5 March 1944 Kanu went back from the Detention Camp. On 12 April Prabhawati, too, was taken away from the Camp. She was transferred to the Bhagalpur prison in Bihar. She was devastated by the thought of being separated from Bapu. Bapu tried to comfort her. Her going away, he said, was of course hurtful, but in a way it was all to the good. He added that life in the Aga Khan Palace was one of ease. One courted imprisonment to undergo hardships, to perform *tapascharya*. In another prison she would have her share of these.

It was possible, Bapu said, that the Bihar Government might release her after a little while. What then should she do? He was not, being in detention, in a position to advise her as regards the course she must pursue. In the light of the atmosphere outside and the inclination of friends and colleagues, she must decide her course. He would only say that she must not think of courting imprisonment simply for the sake of it. She must seek imprisonment only if she found that she could not do any constructive work outside, even khadi work. [Ibid, pp. 548-49]

Contrary to the apprehensions of the inmates of the Aga Khan Palace, Manu Gandhi was not asked to leave and she stayed on right up to the end, leaving the Detention Camp only with Gandhiji and the party when they were released in May.

During a walk this author broached the subject of Russia. Most people, she remarked, compared the happenings in Russia with those in India in the preceding twenty years and were impressed by the difference. Russia had made such great progress.



That was so, Gandhiji admitted. But then, the change in Russia had been brought about through violence. Who could say how long a thing gained through violence would endure. The important thing was the means employed. Freedom secured by recourse to violence could not be true freedom and could not last. The non-violent experiment of India was something novel. Only future would show how efficacious or otherwise it was. [Ibid, pp. 522-23]

Political matters inevitably figured in the conversations Gandhiji had with the co-detainees during the walks or at meal times. In his address to the Central Legislature on 17 February Wavell had used the expression "peoples of India" instead of "people of India". Were Indians a people or were they peoples? Gandhiji said Wavell would have been quite justified in referring to India as a people on the ground of the geographical unity of the country. But if he had made up his mind that India had more than one people it would be no use talking about the geographical unity of the land. Geographically Europe was one land, but it was comprised of many nations. It could not therefore be called one country and the people inhabiting it one people. Similarly if Indians were not one people the wall of the mountains in the north and the sea that surrounding it in the south could not make it one nation. It was the boast of the British, Gandhiji said, that they had consolidated India into one single political entity. In a way this was true. In the past attempts had been made by certain Indian rulers – Ashoka, for instance, and some kings of South India – to forge India into a single nation. They had succeeded partially and temporarily. This task had been accomplished most successfully by the British. But now they wanted to undo what they had done. It was shameful that they were ready to divide India if they could not go on ruling it.

Britain had sucked India dry. The British claimed that British soldiers were in India to defend India and to serve it. Was that really so? Were they not in India for the sake of the salaries they were getting? Not a single Briton in India from the Viceroy downward could call himself a volunteer.

Indian soldiers in the Indian Army were similarly described as "volunteers". It was a joke. It was hunger that drove Indians to seek recruitment to the Army, Gandhiji said. Foreign soldiers in the country aggravated the hardships of the masses. Their number might not be large as compared to the population of the



country, but they consumed resources sufficient to assuage the hunger of millions of people.

All this had intensified the bitterness against the British, and something had to be done to lessen it. It was no good their saying: 'We will give you independence, have patience.' Our answer must be: 'No, the time to make India free is now. Only then can the bitterness be transformed into friendship.'

The British might say, Gandhiji said on another occasion, that they were getting all they required from India for the prosecution of the war in money and men. If they propitiated the Congress, what more could they get? His answer was: nothing in material terms. But through the Congress they would gain the soul of the people, their goodwill. To the soldier only his salary mattered, to the trader only his profit. But the peasantry, comprising ninety per cent of the country's population, was tied to the soil. If the peasant could feel the elation of freedom, he would fight to his last breath to guard that freedom.

Every Indian soldier could then be sent to the Eastern front. Indian soldiers would be much better suited to the campaign in Burma and would be cheaper than the British or American soldiers. In the existing situation the British were not using Indian soldiers on the Eastern front, because they were frightened that Indian soldiers might join up with the forces fighting for India's freedom.

Mirabehn asked Gandhiji to clarify his statement, made in his interview to Fischer, that the Allies could keep their armies in India at their own expense. At whose expense would the Indian Army then be maintained?

Gandhiji said the existing arrangement would continue. If, however, the Allies raised auxiliaries in India they would have to meet the expenditure involved unless those auxiliaries were needed for the defence of India, for the campaign in Burma, for instance. If the British were to reject these proposals, they would have to pay a heavy price for their victory in the war against Japan. They would have to confront an India seething with anger. [Ibid, pp. 528-30]

During an evening walk the question of Pakistan came up. Bapu said: "I cannot be a party to what I consider a sin. Of course if they are bent upon it, they can take it. Who can prevent them? I consider cow-slaughter a sin, but I do not fight with the Muslims over the issue. I tell them what I feel and they are not



offended. During the Khilafat I told them: 'Khilafat is your cow. I consider it as my cow. Similarly you should treat my cow as your cow. But I have no desire to bargain with you. You must do as you deem right.' For a year this worked. The Muslims saved a large number of cows." [Ibid, p. 541]

8

During April, indeed right up to the time of Gandhiji's release in May, the issue of Gandhiji's transfer to Ahmadnagar remained under serious consideration of the authorities. Gandhiji insisted on being transferred to any jail outside the Aga Khan Palace on the grounds purely of economy. The Government had their own reasons: one, that with the death of Mahadev Desai and Kasturba Gandhi during incarceration, the place had become too depressive for Gandhiji and the small party of companions left with him, and secondly — though this was not considered very important — the lease of the Aga Khan Palace would be expiring on 30 April. The authorities, especially Bombay Governor Colville and Viceroy Wavell, in the various communications exchanged on the subject, also showed themselves in a frame of mind to take what they considered a political risk — putting Gandhiji among the members of the Working Committee, thus enabling him to have consultations with them and removing one of the grounds advanced by him for not repudiating the August resolution of the Congress, on which the British stubbornly insisted.

Amery, in answer to the Home Department proposal of 17 April, told Wavell on 22 April that he would have to put the matter up to the Cabinet and that objections might be raised. It might help favourable consideration if the Viceroy would make clear that he "not only could but would reject demand for meeting with A.I.C.C."

On 27 April the Home Department sent to London the proposal with its language amended as desired. It said it was possible that a demand might be made for release on parole to hold meeting of the A.I.C.C., but that any such request would be rejected "unless intention to withdraw resolution of 1942 was evident and appropriate assurances for future were given".

Amery continued to remain doubtful of the wisdom of transferring Gandhiji to Ahmadnagar. On 2 May he wrote to Wavell that he was uneasy about



putting Gandhiji among members of the Working Committee. Of course any approach by him that fell short of a declared change of heart could be resisted, but the Indian public generally might regard the move as a first step towards appeasement of the Congress. In this matter, Amery said, he was impressed by the arguments advanced by Twynam in his paper. Indeed if Wavell had no objection, Amery wrote, he would like to circulate Twynam's paper among his colleagues.

Amery had before him a telegram from the Chief Secretary, Bombay Government, informing him of the tentative opinion of Dr. B.C. Roy, who had examined Gandhiji on 1 May. Dr. Roy had felt: "Gandhi has been very severely affected by malaria and it is imperative that he must be protected against further malaria infection. As Aga Khan Palace is now infested with malaria mosquitoes Gandhi must be transferred to a place free from them. A second attack is likely to have even more serious consequences."

In view of this, Amery said, he agreed that Gandhiji should be transferred. But on political grounds, was Wavell satisfied that it was desirable to do so?

On the same day, 2 May, Amery circulated the Government of India's proposal to the members of the Cabinet. He said the transfer was intended to be from a malarial place to a non-malarial place, and that it would be made plain that it carried no suggestion of any change of policy. There was no doubt some risk that after being put with the members of the Working Committee Gandhiji might make some move to embarrass the Government of India and the British Government, but it was the view of the Government of India that the advantages outweighed disadvantages. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. IV, pp. 913, 928, 943, 944-45]

The plans for the transfer of Gandhiji to Ahmadnagar, however, could not be implemented. A sudden and quite unexpected deterioration in Gandhiji's health, impelled the Viceroy precipitately to think along the lines of releasing him.

It was on 14 April that Bapu had his first attack of malarial fever. In the morning he had been all right. He had had his breakfast, gone for his walk and read the *Ramayana* with this author. In the afternoon, about 2.30 p.m., as he



reclined with a mud-pack on his stomach, reading some letters, Pyarelal observed that his hands were shaking.

At 3 p.m. he called this author and asked her to fetch the urine bottle. He said he was feeling feverish. He was shivering. Shivering subsided after a while as his temperature rose. From 98.6 it went up first to 102.6 and then to 103.6. At about 4 p.m. blood smears were taken. Some time later Col. Bhandari came. He and Dr. Gilder both advised Bapu to take quinine. Bapu said he would do so if he again had fever the following day. The doctors pointed out that he might get the fever on the third day, not on the following day. Then, he said, he would take quinine on the third day. He would first like to try the fasting cure. If he had abstained from lunch, Gandhiji said, probably he would not have had fever.

But after Bhandari left, Bapu showed signs of delirium. Every five or ten minutes he would ask what time it was. Once he insisted on walking to the toilet and later forgot that he had been to the toilet. Around 6 p.m. the fever began to come down. At 9 p.m. it was 99.6. There was profuse perspiration. He had some lime juice with honey and slept well during the night.

On 15 April, until noon, he appeared not to have any fever, but shortly afterwards, when the temperature was taken it was 99.6. By 4.30 in the afternoon the fever had shot up to 101 and at 5 to 102.1. Col. Bhandari came and advised him to take quinine. But he wouldn't be persuaded. He took only water laced with fruit juice. He hoped there would be no fever on the following day. In the evening the fever began to subside. At 9 the temperature had come down to 99.4. On the whole he looked slightly better than on the previous day.

On 16 April around noon, Bapu complained of uneasiness. At 1 p.m. when the temperature was taken it was 101.7. This author again advised him to take quinine. After some persuasion he agreed. About three grains of quinine was powdered and mixed with a little lime juice and about six ounces of water with a dash of soda bicarb, which Bapu slowly sipped. At every sip of the bitter draught he would say: '*Khoob! Bahut Khoob*'. Then he related tales of opium addicts. He was clearly feeling a little light in the head, which could well have been the effect of the fever.

Some time after finishing his draught of quinine he had violent shivers. At a quarter to two he vomited and again for a second time an hour later. He also



passed some urine. The vomit was yellow. The fever was 104.8. He was also delirious. From 5 p.m. the fever began to subside. Dinshaw Mehta, who was summoned, suggested nature cure treatment without quinine. This was a risk that could not be taken. In the late evening he sweated profusely and his clothing had to be changed. He was then given a second dose of quinine in two ounces of water, followed by juice of sweet lime.

On 17 April Bapu was given three doses of quinine of three grains each. For nourishment he only took sweet lime juice, lemon, honey and water. He refused to take milk. He had four loose motions. The fever remained below 99 the whole day, but went up a little during the night.

For the first time on 17 April the Government gave out to the Press a short bulletin on Gandhiji's health. This announced that Gandhiji had been having malarial fever for the past three days and he had become weak, but that his general condition was as good as might be expected at his age.

On 18 April Gandhiji did not have fever.

On 19 April he did not take quinine. He was having spells of giddiness and his hearing had been affected, which he thought was a side-effect of quinine.

On 20 April again he had no fever. In the afternoon he began fretting about the continued stay of Manu Gandhi at the Detention Camp. He told Pyarelal that the best course would be to send her away, now that Ba, for whose nursing she had been brought, was no more. He himself did not need any service from her. As for her staying on for the sake of the lessons he gave her, Bapu said he did not any more have the confidence in himself that he would be able to give much to Manu. He was now a broken man. He had imagined that he would never get malaria, even if everyone else got it. It had been his belief that a man fell ill as a consequence of his sins and that one who was mentally healthy and in control of his mind could never fall ill. He now recognized that he had not attained to that stage of spiritual development that he had thought.

This author suggested to Bapu that the mood he was in was the result of malaria and the intake of quinine, and that in a few days when he regained his strength it would pass. Bapu said he might well regain physical strength, but he would never regain the self-confidence that he had lost.



But surely malaria was not a stranger to him? - he had had it in Champaran, at Sabarmati and at Sevagram. He had not been disheartened then. Notwithstanding the attacks of the disease he had been able to accomplish great things.

Bapu said the point was that in the twenty-five years since Champaran he had imagined he had reached a certain degree of spiritual achievement. Now he was beginning to have doubts.

Pyarelal pointed out to him that even though he had advanced spiritually, his body had aged. Gandhiji said it was his belief that however weak the body might become one who had advanced spiritually would never fall ill. He could not produce any conclusive evidence in support of his belief, he said, but he had always had a firm conviction that one whose mind was in perfect health would have his body in perfect health too. [Sushila Nayar, *Bapuki Karavas Kahani*, pp. 551-58]

For about a week Bapu had no fever and his general condition appeared to be improving. It was noticed however that his blood pressure generally kept well below the desired level. Mostly it kept at around 140 systolic and between 80 and 90 diastolic. This author therefore thought it might be desirable to have his ECG taken and his blood urea tested.

Col. Bhandari wondered if the fall in blood pressure might not have been caused by quinine. Dr. Gilder said this was unlikely, as quinine generally had the effect of constricting the blood vessels, which was why in some cases it led to blindness. On 27 April, after the prayer in the morning Bapu's blood pressure gave the reading 126/78-80, which was too low.

On 28 April Bapu's blood sample was taken for examination and in the evening of the same day his ECG was taken by Dr. Koyaji, who had come from Bombay for the purpose. The ECG was normal.

On 29 April his blood and urine were given for urea clearance test and a routine blood test was done, which showed haemoglobin 85 per cent, RBC count 3.7 lakh. The picture was that of macrocytic anaemia. His blood sample was also sent for chemical analysis.



At lunch time Bapu showed signs of fatigue. In the afternoon General Candy, Surgeon-General of Bombay, came and this author described to him Gandhiji's condition. Candy examined Gandhiji and prescribed quinine and an iron tonic. He also emphasized the need for Bapu to be given increased nourishment. He said: "Superficially he looks all right, but this has no importance. Still, if the blood pressure does not fall below 140 there should be no cause for worry." He thought the disease looked more like influenza, but he was assured that malaria parasites were present in the blood.

The newspapers of the day showed that the Government was quite worried by Gandhiji's illness. On 28 April Wavell had informed Amery that the condition of Gandhiji gave cause for anxiety and had forwarded to him the medical opinion as conveyed by the Bombay Government that Gandhiji stood "risk of getting an attack of coronary thrombosis", that his general condition was weak and he looked very depressed. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. IV, p. 936]

It was as a result of this "anxiety" on the part of the Government that Surgeon-General Candy had been sent the following day to see Gandhiji.

Amery, replying to Wavell's communication on 29 April, said he presumed that if there was "serious risk of his having an attack which might be fatal and result in immediate loss of power of speech" the Viceroy would consider allowing relatives to see him. [ibid, p. 939]

Candy's report of 29 April suggested an improvement in Gandhiji's condition during the preceding twenty-four hours in respect both of anaemia and blood pressure. Blood pressure might well have shown an "improvement", but it was difficult to see how anaemia could have shown any noticeable change in twenty-four hours!

Dr. B. C. Roy, too, was summoned by the Government to examine Gandhiji and he did so on the morning of 1 May. His report, which has been quoted a few pages earlier, was gloomy, and lent support to the Government's proposal for transferring Gandhiji to a non-malarial prison.

Talking to the inmates generally, Dr. Roy reported tremendous pressure being brought on the Government in Britain for the release of Gandhiji. [Sushila Nayar, *Bapuki Karavas Kahani*, p. 564]



In the official exchanges dealing with Gandhiji's illness at the time, there is seen a concern that was unusual for the Secretary of State and the Viceroy. Could they have been looking for a politically less harmful excuse for the release of Gandhiji towards which course they were being led by a variety of reasons all acting together ? Evidence certainly exists that reinforces the suspicion. A communication from Wavell to Amery dated 30 May 1944 has the following curious passage:

The Home Department were informed a few days ago from a reliable source that B.C. Roy had stated that before he saw Gandhi he was urged by the Bombay Secretariat to give a certificate justifying Gandhi's release, and was told that the Government of India were under pressure from London to release Gandhi. According to the source Roy implied that he had "cooked" his opinion. The fact that Roy has been making statements of this kind is confirmed by an intercepted letter sent by him to a private correspondent.

Characteristically Wavell treated this as a comment on the integrity of professional opinion in India "where political sympathies are involved", but not as a comment on the integrity of the rulers seeking excuse of professional opinion in order to do what under the force of circumstances they were being driven to do. [*The Transfer of Power*, Vol. IV, p. 993]

10

From 3 May onwards things moved at a lightning pace. Amery in a communication to Wavell of that date gave him a hint of the British Government's view on the question of Gandhiji's illness. He wrote:

His health of course raises the wider question whether, if he is really in danger of dying, he should be released unconditionally. The worst of it is that he would then probably stage a vigorous recovery and make as much mischief as he can. On the other hand, if he is really past that stage there might be considerable advantage in letting him gradually fade out at liberty. [*Ibid*, p. 948]

Wavell on his part, before starting out from Delhi on a tour on 2 May, when the reports on Gandhiji's condition, according to him, were "more assuring", had



sent telegrams to Governors asking them what course they would recommend should Gandhiji's condition worsen. Thorne, who had been acting as Home Member since April, held strongly that Gandhiji must not be allowed to die "from natural causes" while in custody. This opinion was reinforced by the almost unanimous opinion of Governors, even though Hallett (UP), Twynam (C.P.) and Dow (Sind) were sceptical of the medical reports. [Ibid, pp. 949, 956]

On 3 May the Bombay Government conveyed to the Home Department, Government of India, the opinion of Dr. B.C. Roy, shared by Surgeon-General Candy that Gandhiji's condition showed progressive deterioration in anaemia, blood pressure and kidney functions, all of which had "tendency to produce coronary or cerebral thrombosis". Candy's words were "I think he is on the slippery slope".

When the message was received in Delhi two members of the Viceroy's Executive Council, Sultan Ahmed and Mohammed Usman, in addition to Auchinleck, the Commander-in-Chief, were in town. Thorne consulted the C.-in-C. but not the two Indians, and recommended to the Viceroy that Gandhiji should be unconditionally released. Wavell, who was then at Sikkim, had to wake up at 3 a.m. to take the decision — "quite like old times in the Middle East," he wrote to Amery.

On 4 May Wavell conveyed the decision to Amery. He told the Secretary of State that this was a case in which he must be guided by medical opinion, that deterioration in Gandhiji's health was such that his further participation in active politics was improbable, and that death in custody would intensify feelings against the Government. He wrote:

I am accordingly instructing Bombay Government to release Gandhi unconditionally at 8 a.m. on Saturday, 6th May, with the announcement that release is entirely on medical grounds and am informing all Governors accordingly.

Wavell in a separate communication to Amery informed him that in his telegram on 3 May Thorne had in fact expressed the view that Gandhiji should be released "forthwith" and London should be informed afterwards.



Amery then approached Churchill requesting him to approve his "authorizing" Wavell to release Gandhiji, without waiting for the matter to be taken up in the Cabinet.

Churchill agreed, with the proviso that "we can always arrest him again if he commits new offences. It is of course understood that there will be no negotiations between him and the Viceroy".

The members of the Cabinet were consulted individually and they concurred in the decision. [Ibid, pp. 948-52, 956]

In the Aga Khan Palace it was business as usual, with not a hint of the exchanges that had taken place in the preceding three days between Bombay, Delhi, Sikkim (where the Viceroy was) and London. On 5 May this author wrote to Col. Bhandari asking him to arrange for an X-ray to be taken of Gandhiji.

On the evening of 5 May Col. Bhandari suddenly showed up and sat down near Gandhiji. He then said: "All of you people will be released unconditionally at 8 a.m. tomorrow." Everyone was taken by surprise. Gandhiji said Bhandari must be joking. Bhandari assured him that he was not. "Orders arrived today. For God's sake, please have pity on me and do not come back again. See I have gone grey from worry."

Bapu was not at all pleased with this turn of events. In the first place he did not like the idea of being released on medical grounds, which sounded to him a phoney reason. "Could it really be the case that they are releasing me on the ground of my illness?" he wondered, and then said: "I doubt it. But of course we must believe them when they say so."

After the prayer, Khan Bahadur Kately came to pay respects to Bapu. On the following morning he would have to maintain his official posture. He was very happy. He requested Bapu that someone should wake him up for prayer the following morning.

Manu too was happy. She had been perpetually under the apprehension that she might be asked to leave and thus be separated from Bapu.

Bapu put everyone on notice that they must be up early on the following day and be packed up and ready by 7.45 a.m. Much of the night was therefore spent in packing and everyone had their baggage ready by 3 a.m.



On the morning of 6 May everyone got up at 4.45 to get ready for prayer. The first thing to be attended to after the prayer was Pyarelal's packing, which it had not been possible to do during the night.

Kately came and presented to Bapu a sum of Rs. 75. He said to Bapu: "When you go out, many people will bring you their offerings. I want to be the first with my offering." He had tears in his eyes.

At 7.30 the party paid their last visit to the samadhis of Mahadev and Ba. Bhandari came around 7.45. There was still fifteen minutes to go before the release would be effected, and this author went out to the porch, where all the baggage of the party had been collected, to see what articles could be carried as hand baggage in the car. The Collector of Poona with a police officer was there. The police officer said: "Don't worry about the baggage. It will all be there half an hour after you arrive."

Bapu and this author got into Bhandari's car exactly at 8 a.m. and were on the way out. As the car passed out of the barbed-wire fence a policeman stopped it and handed to this author a notice, which read: "You are forbidden to speak about whatever happened in the Aga Khan Palace." He then asked the author to sign it. On Bapu nodding his assent the author signed the notice. Bapu then said: "Similar notice could have been served on me." Evidently the officials were afraid to do so lest Bapu refused to go out.

Outside at the gate 40 to 50 people had assembled. Among them were Shantikumar Morarji, Swami Anand, Jamnadas Gandhi and Sushila Pai. Bapu saw no one. The car made its way direct to Parnkuti, the residence of Lady Thackersey. Bhandari had told Bapu: "You can of course stay around here if you like. But this is a military area and there will be streams of visitors coming to see you and there is possibility of friction. The best thing would be for you to go to Parnkuti."

In a short while Bapu and party arrived at Parnkuti, to the welcome of a large crowd of people waiting to receive him. He was at last free – free and ready to enter the last phase of his life, which would witness the jubilation of freedom and the tragedy and trauma of partition and communal killings and mass migrations, the phase that would end with one last perfect act, his assassination at the hands of a fanatic on 30 January 1948 with God's name on his lips. It is the subject-matter of the following volume – *The Last Phase* authored by Pyarelal.



APPENDIX

TEXT OF THE RESOLUTION ADOPTED BY THE ALL-INDIA CONGRESS COMMITTEE ON 8 AUGUST 1942

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

The Committee has viewed with dismay the deterioration of the situation on the Russian and Chinese fronts and conveys to the Russian and Chinese peoples its high appreciation of their heroism in defence of their freedom. This increasing peril makes it incumbent on all those who strive for freedom and who sympathize with the victims of aggression, to examine the foundations of the policy so far pursued by the Allied Nations, which have led to repeated and disastrous failure. It is not by adhering to such aims and policies and methods that failure can be converted into success, for past experience has shown that failure is inherent in them. These policies have been based not on freedom so much as on the domination of subject and colonial countries, and the continuation of the Imperialist tradition and method. The possession of Empire, instead of adding to the strength of the ruling power, has become a burden and a curse. India, the classic land of modern Imperialism, has become the crux of the question, for by the freedom of India will Britain and the United Nations be judged, and the peoples of Asia and Africa be filled with hope and enthusiasm.

The ending of British rule in this country is thus a vital and immediate issue on which depend the future of the war and the success of freedom and



democracy. A free India will assure this success by throwing all her great resources in the struggle for freedom and against the aggression of Nazism, Fascism and Imperialism. This will not only affect materially the fortunes of the war, but will bring all subject and oppressed humanity on the side of the United Nations, and give these nations, whose ally India would be, the moral and spiritual leadership of the world. India in bondage will continue to be the symbol of British Imperialism and the taint of that Imperialism will affect the fortunes of all the United Nations.

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

The A.I.C.C., therefore, repeats with all emphasis the demand for the withdrawal of the British power from India. On the declaration of India's independence, a Provisional Government will be formed and free India will become an ally of the United Nations, sharing with them in the trials and tribulations of the joint enterprise of the struggle for freedom. The Provisional Government can only be formed by the cooperation of the principal parties and groups in the country. It will thus be a composite Government representative of all important sections of the people of India. Its primary functions must be to defend India and resist aggression with all the armed as well as the non-violent forces at its command, together with the Allied Powers, and to promote the well-being and progress of the workers in the fields and factories and elsewhere, to whom essentially all power and authority must belong. The Provisional Government will evolve a scheme for a constituent assembly which will prepare a constitution for the Government of India acceptable to all sections of the people. This constitution, according to the Congress view, should be a federal one, with the largest measure of autonomy for the federating units and with the residuary powers vesting in these units. The future relations between India and the Allied nations will be adjusted by representatives of all these free countries conferring together for their mutual advantage and for their co-operation in the



common task of resisting aggression. Freedom will enable India to resist aggression effectively with the people's united will and strength behind it.

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

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

An independent India would gladly join such a world federation and cooperate on an equal basis with other countries in the solution of international problems.

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

The Committee regretfully realizes, however, that despite the tragic and overwhelming lessons of the war and the perils that overhang the world, the Governments of few countries are yet prepared to take this inevitable step towards world federation. The reactions of the British Government and the



misguided criticism of the foreign Press also make it clear that even the obvious demand for India's independence is resisted, though this has been made essentially to meet the present peril and to enable India to defend herself and help China and Russia in their hour of need. The Committee is anxious not to embarrass in any way the defence of China or Russia, whose freedom is precious and must be preserved, or to jeopardize the defensive capacity of the United Nations. But the peril grows both to India and these nations, and inaction and submission to a foreign administration at this stage is not only degrading India and reducing her capacity to defend herself and resist aggression but is no answer to that growing peril and is no service to the peoples of the United Nations. The earnest appeal of the Working Committee to Great Britain and the United Nations has so far met with no response and the criticisms made in many foreign quarters have shown an ignorance of India's and the world's need, and sometimes even hostility to India's freedom, which is significant of a mentality of domination and racial superiority which cannot be tolerated by a proud people conscious of their strength and of the justice of their cause.

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

The Committee appeals to the people of India to face the dangers and hardships that will fall to their lot with courage and endurance, and to hold together under the leadership of Gandhiji and carry out his instructions as disciplined soldiers of Indian freedom. They must remember that non-violence is the basis of this movement. A time may come when it may not be possible to



issue instructions or for instructions to reach our people, and when no Congress committees can function. When this happens every man and woman who is participating in this movement must function for himself or herself within the four corners of the general instructions issued. Every Indian who desires freedom and strives for it must be his own guide urging him on along the hard road where there is no resting place and which leads ultimately to the independence and deliverance of India.

Lastly, whilst the A.I.C.C. has stated its own view of the future governance under free India, the A.I.C.C. wishes to make it quite clear to all concerned that by embarking on a mass struggle, it has no intention of gaining power for the Congress. The power, when it comes, will belong to the whole people of India.

The Indian Annual Register, 1942, Vol. II, pp. 209-11; also *Harijan*, 9-8-1942

