

INDIAN PUBLIC OPINION ON THE SECOND WORLD WAR

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WHEN the war broke out in September 1939, the position in India was that the Indian National Congress, the premier political organisation of the country, was ruling in seven out of eleven British provinces since the elections of 1937 which had ushered in Provincial Autonomy under the Government of India Act of 1935. The Muslim League, a communal organisation, had not formed a ministry in any of the remaining four provinces, though three of them had Muslim Premiers and Muslim majorities.

The Congress had, in December 1929, adopted complete independence as its goal. This was followed by nearly five years of agitations, non-co-operation movements under Gandhi, discussions, conferences (including the Round Table Conference in London) outlawing of the Congress, rule by ordinances, defiance of ordinances and arrests of nationalist leaders and workers culminating in the Act of 1935. And yet the Act as finally passed was a far cry from independence and nowhere near even Dominion Status which the Viceroy had declared as the "natural issue of India's constitutional progress" as far back as 1929.

Briefly, the Act of 1935 had two main features: Provincial Autonomy which introduced responsible government in the British Provinces and an all-India federation of British provinces and those princely states which were willing to accede to it. The federal government was to be only partly responsible to the legislature with the more important subjects like Defence and Foreign Affairs to be "reserved" and administered by officers directly responsible to the Governor General and through him to the British Government in London. Of this scheme only the first part—Provincial Autonomy—was introduced in 1937, the second envisaging a federation never came into being owing to the reluctance of the Princes who, having first agreed to it in the Round Table Conference, now recoiled from the idea of permitting the federal authority to exercise those minimum powers in their States which are essential to the working of a federation. It thus speaks volumes for the compromising attitude of the Congress that, though committed to complete independence it, nevertheless, decided to give this unsatisfactory constitutional scheme a trial by working the Provincial Autonomy thereby abjuring extra-constitutional and revolutionary methods for the time being. In the elections which followed, it was returned to power in seven provinces thereby vindicating its claim to be the most popular political party in the country.

THE VICEROY'S PROCLAMATION

It was natural therefore that the Viceroy's Proclamation of 3 September 1939 announcing that war had broken out with Germany and a state of emergency existed in India, meaning that India was a party to the war, was resented by the Congress and all nationalists who felt that India had been "dragged into the war". The people's representatives had not even been sounded, to say nothing of being consulted. The Congress leaders were not so naive as to expect or claim the constitutional right to decide whether India should or should not enter the war. But in view of their party's position as the premier political organisation it would have been a statesmanlike move if, before issuing the Proclamation, the Viceroy had apprised them of it and expressed the hope that they would cooperate. Considering the abhorrence in which the Fascist powers were held by the Congress and other parties, it is certain that the gesture would have been appreciated and would have evoked a sympathetic response. But this was not to be and the fact of India having been automatically brought into the war by virtue of the Viceroy's proclamation was considered humiliating by all nationalists.

Though all parties were united in their condemnation of the Fascist powers they differed as to how and under what conditions help was to be given to the so-called democracies in defeating them. These various views and shades of public opinion are considered below.

THE INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS

Before the war : As the war clouds were gathering in Europe, some steps to meet the crisis had been taken in India. Some Indian troops had been despatched to Aden in April 1939 and a Bill was introduced in the British Parliament which among other things was intended to strengthen the powers of the Central Government in India. The Congress had disapproved of both these measures because it was opposed to the employment of Indian troops abroad for 'imperialist purpose' and because it thought that strengthening the Central Government would undermine the authority of the Provincial Governments who had been given autonomy hardly two years ago. Later when more regiments of the Indian Army were ordered to be sent abroad—to Singapore and Egypt—the Congress Working Committee passed a resolution in August denouncing British foreign policy which was likely to get India entangled in a war against the declared will of the people. The Congress argument at this time, and later repeatedly affirmed, was that India could not fight for freedom unless she herself was free. The Working Committee therefore directed the Congress members of the Central Legislative Assembly at Delhi to boycott the next session, and warned the Provincial Governments to "assist in no way the war preparations" and be prepared to resign. This was less than a month before the war broke out.

On the outbreak of War : Yet, so great was the hatred for Nazi ideology that on the outbreak of war, Nehru, the leading light of the Congress

next only to Gandhi, while returning from China after visiting Chiang Kai-shek, told Press correspondents at Rangoon: "This is no time to bargain. We are against the rising imperialism of Germany, Italy and Japan and for the decaying imperialism of Europe".

DEMAND FOR DECLARATION OF WAR AIMS—15 SEPTEMBER

However, on reaching India he found that the opinion among Congressmen was divided and many believed in the sentiment so pithily expressed by Subhas Chandra Bose—the erstwhile Congressman, who had earlier been forced to resign the Presidentship of the Congress, that "British adversity was India's opportunity". Thus the Congress leadership was faced with a dilemma: on the one hand it passionately desired the defeat of Nazism, on the other it was equally if not more passionately opposed to British imperialism which was keeping India in subjection and treating the country as a dependent colony as evidenced by its latest act of proclaiming India at war. Gandhi's astuteness resolved the dilemma. Under his inspiration the Congress Working Committee passed a resolution on 15 September which, while making a bitter attack on Fascism, demanded a declaration of the "war aims" of the democracies. The idea clearly was that if the war aims included independence for India, the Congress would be able to carry the country with it in support of the war effort.

The Congress stand has been criticised on two grounds:

- (1) that it was a bargaining attitude not consistent with the political morality of the type preached by Gandhi, and
- (2) that committed as it was to the ethics of non-violence, the Congress could have offered, at best, only moral support to the war.

BARGAINING

As regards the first criticism, it can be admitted at once that the Congress was bargaining. The opinion among Congressmen, both rank and file, who were familiar with and who had been frustrated by British dilatory tactics in the shape of commissions, discussions, conferences, select-committees etc. during the period between the two wars, was overwhelmingly in favour of obtaining a definite commitment from the British Government despite Gandhi's own dislike for a bargain.

It may be that this bargaining attitude did not seem quite consistent with the high moral standards to which Gandhi had been trying to raise politics in India, but its criticism on this score, coming from western diplomats and politicians does not hold water. After all, what are negotiations if not bargaining? All international agreements and treaties are based on a spirit of give and take and it seems hardly fair to look down upon the desire to achieve one's freedom by a bargain.

MORAL OR ACTIVE HELP

The second criticism is equally invalid and is not based on a correct evaluation of the mind of the Congress. Though some theoreticians in the Congress considered that it was not quite consistent with the policy of non-violence to participate in a war, there were others more practically minded, and they constituted a formidable group in the party, who hated totalitarianism to such an extent that they were willing to fight actively against it. But even this group felt that in order to enthuse the masses in favour of the war, it would be necessary to show to them that the country would be benefited in some way as a result of their sacrifices. This they could do only if there was a categorical declaration from the British Government regarding its war aims. Thus their dilemma, if any, arose not from any theoretical or ideological conflict between violence and non-violence, but from the practical consideration of how best to harness public opinion for a cause.

NON-VIOLENCE AND PACIFISM

The Congress view, particularly as represented by Nehru, had always made a distinction between non-violence and pacifism. To Nehru pacifism seemed a foolish doctrine as it implied surrender to evil and therefore an invitation to the aggressor, whereas the very basis of the theory of non-violence was resistance to the aggressor. He was of the view that the Czechs should have resisted Hitler militarily in 1938. There is no doubt that if the British Government had immediately given a definite promise of Dominion Status or independence at the end of the war, Nehru would have been able to persuade Gandhi and the Congress to offer all kinds of support in the war effort.

NOW OR LATER?

Another point on which the Congress resolution was misunderstood, perhaps deliberately, hinged around the word "immediate" occurring in it. The Congress had asked that India be *declared* independent, not *made* independent immediately. While Gandhi's philosophy of *Satyagraha* lays down that there should be no surrender on essentials, it also definitely favours compromise on details. In this case the essential point was the unambiguous declaration of independence in principle, while the detail on which compromise was possible was the time and date for giving effect to it fully. This was clarified by the A.I.C.C. resolution of 10 October which said: "India must be declared an independent nation and present application given to this status to the largest possible extent". As Coupland states: "In view of developments in the course of the next three years, it should be observed that at this time the Congress 'High Command' was apparently not asking for *complete* independence immediately, but only for as much of it as might be possible". Something had to be done immediately as a token of good faith.

THE BRITISH RESPONSE—17 OCTOBER

The Viceroy's statement of 17 October, issued after interviewing leaders of public opinion belonging to all parties pointed out that the British Government *had not yet defined their war aims* but Britain desired the establishment of a better international system and a real lasting peace.

As regards the constitutional position in India, the statement said that the scheme of 1935 would be open to "modification" at the end of the war after giving full weight to the views of minorities, that Dominion Status was still the goal of British policy in India but that any more clear indication of British purpose could not be given in view of the existing "world politics and of political realities in this country". *The political realities* was of course a reference to differences in India mainly between the Congress and the Muslim League.

For the present, the only step suggested was the establishment of a consultative group representing political parties and Indian princes over which the Viceroy himself would preside!

DISAPPOINTING STATEMENT

Nothing could be more disappointing to nationalist public opinion than this statement. Instead of an unambiguous definition of Britain's war aims, it merely referred vaguely to some better future and lasting peace. Such platitudes from British statesmen were well-known to Indian nationalists who regarded them as nothing more than clever devices for evading the real issue. Moreover, the statement also contained that argument—namely the interests and rights of minorities—which was later fostered and nurtured during the war years to grow into a full-fledged excuse not only for denying the Congress demand but also ultimately for dividing the country on communal basis.

CONGRESS REACTION : RESOLUTION OF 22 OCTOBER

According to Gandhi, the Viceroy's statement showed that there was to be no democracy in India if Britain could prevent it. The Congress Working Committee which considered the statement on 22 October rejected it completely. As this decision marks the beginning of open conflict between the Congress and the Government, it is given below in the words of the CWC's resolution itself:—

"The Viceroy's statement is an unequivocal reiteration of the old imperialist policy. The Committee regards the mention of differences amongst the several parties as a screen to hide the true intentions of Great Britain. The Congress has always stood for the amplest guarantee of the rights of the minorities. The freedom the Congress claimed was not for the Congress or any particular group or community but for the nation and all communities in India that go to build that nation.

The only way to establish this freedom and to ascertain the will of the nation as a whole is through a democratic process which gives full opportunity to all. The Committee must therefore regard the Viceroy's statement as in every way unfortunate. In the circumstances it cannot possibly give any support to Great Britain, for it would amount to an endorsement of the imperialist policy which the Congress has always sought to end. As a first step in this direction the Committee calls upon the Congress Ministries to tender their resignations."

CONFFLICT BEGINS

Though some of the Congress ministers were reluctant to resign, discipline was maintained and beginning with the Madras ministry on 27 October, all the Congress ministries had resigned by 15 November after getting resolutions passed through the respective legislatures re-affirming the Congress policy. The programme of social reform and cooperation with Government in a constitutional manner begun in 1937 thus came to an abrupt end. The Congress was again on the war path.

THE MUSLIM LEAGUE

The mutually antagonistic views of the League and the Congress had been accentuated after the sweeping victories of the Congress at the polls in 1937. The League had then wanted to form coalitions with the Congress in some provinces but the latter had spurned the suggestion. There may be some truth in the charge that the Congress was intoxicated with victory, but on the other hand the Congress could claim with a fair amount of justification that it had proved its right to be considered the only nationalist, secular and democratic party representing the whole of India. While the Muslim League, as its name implied, was an organisation of the Muslims only, the door of the Congress was open to all Indians who subscribed to its policy. It had many Muslims as its active members, as office holders in different echelons of the organisation and it had had even Muslim Presidents in the past. The Congress, therefore, while admitting the League to be an important organisation of the Muslim community refused to accept its claim to be the sole representative of all Indian Muslims. If the Muslims of the League wanted to share fully in the enjoyment of *Swaraj* (independence) when it came, they could join the Congress now and cooperate with it in achieving the objective.

This attitude of the Congress, though it seemed natural for a secular body at that time, was fraught with serious consequences. It completed the polarisation between the Congress and the Muslim League, whose President, Mr. Jinnah, began to dub the Congress as a Hindu body in whose hands the interests of the Muslim were not safe. A spectre of the tyranny of the majority was raised before the Muslims. The demand for a separate homeland for the Muslims can thus be seen to be more clearly and definitely marked from this time.

JINNAH'S OPPORTUNITY

The war was to provide Jinnah with his opportunity. If the Congress would not recognise him, he would get recognition from the British, but he would have to play his cards skilfully, and disclose his hand only at the right time. On 28 August, six days before the war, the Working Committee of the Muslim League had declared that it was premature to determine the attitude of the Muslims in the event of a war breaking out. But on the declaration of war, the Punjab and Bengal Ministries, headed by Muslim Premiers and backed by their legislatures promised full support to Britain. The Muslim Premier of Sind who had not supported the League in other matters, also followed suit. But the official policy of the League's High Command was not available for some time.

When however the League did come out with a resolution on 18 September, three days *after* the Congress resolution, it showed that the League too was out to bargain. After condemning the Nazi aggression and expressing sympathy with Poland, Britain and France it laid down two conditions on which whole-hearted Muslim support could be given. These were, firstly, that Muslim interests should be safeguarded in the Congress provinces and, secondly, that no constitutional changes in India should be introduced without the approval of the Muslim League which was the only organisation competent to speak for the Muslims of India.

It said nothing about either approving or disapproving the action of the three Muslim Premiers of Bengal, Punjab and Sind who had declared their unconditional support of Britain in war.

This was a clever move, for it gave a proof of the League's desire to help the British by its tacit approval of the Muslim Premiers' action and at the same time kept the door open for negotiations to extort consent to its demand. This attitude suited the British Government also whose response came in the Viceroy's declaration of 17 October which promised, *inter alia*, full weight to be given to the views and interests of the minorities, and to revise the 1935 Constitution.

The Muslim League's reaction to the statement was again realistic: it neither completely rejected nor completely accepted the declaration as a basis for cooperation. While approving of the Viceroy's assurance regarding protection of minorities, it criticised the idea of *revising* the constitution—it wanted the constitution to be scrapped and the whole constitutional question considered *de novo*. It asked for further clarification and discussion on certain points. This was the position by the end of October 1939—a deadlock seemed to have been reached in so far as the two main political parties were concerned.

VICEROY TRIES AGAIN

The Viceroy was, however, keen to see that India's great potential in money, troops and supplies should be fully exploited for the war. This could

be done only if he could hammer out some sort of agreement with the political parties and particularly with the Congress. So he made another effort in November to resolve the deadlock. He was prepared to go a little further—something more than a mere consultative body at the centre. But the Congress would have nothing short of a clear declaration on the lines of its resolutions of September and October. So the resolutions of the Congress Working Committee meetings held in November and December, reaffirmed its policy and implied that the Viceroy's efforts to bring about an agreement were not sincere since he was dragging in the communal question and the problem of the Princes to delay matters and "cloud the main issue". The Congress considered that once India was declared free and a Constituent Assembly convened to frame its constitution, all these difficulties could be solved in a democratic way. The Muslim League declared its firm opposition to the idea of a Constituent Assembly on the ground that the Assembly would be dominated and controlled by the Congress and the Hindus and that Muslim interests would be sacrificed.

OTHER PARTIES

The National Liberal Federation and the Hindu Mahasabha also held their meetings in December. Though both desired their followers to help in the war effort, the liberals were concerned more with the constitutional problem and the Mahasabha with the threat to peace and unity of India posed by the Muslim League's communal policy and the beginnings of the two-nation theory.

POSITION AT THE CLOSE OF 1939

Thus the position at the end of 1939 may be summed up as follows:

- (1) The Congress, failing to get an unequivocal declaration of independence and considering the Viceroy's emphasis on minorities' rights as an excuse for denying the transfer of power to Indian hands, was on the war path—for which the first step, the resignation of Congress Ministries and legislators, had been taken.
- (2) The Muslim League, taking the situation as an excellent opportunity for strengthening its position with the British Government as well as the Muslim masses, was harping on minority rights. This was bringing about a polarisation of opinion between itself and what it called the 'Hindu' Congress.
- (3) The Hindu Mahasabha was for supporting the war effort and exhorted the Hindus to enlist in the armed forces in as large numbers as possible. This was not out of any love for the British or their allies but from the desire to see Hindu youth get military training and experience so as to be able to defend the country when India became free. The British Government's policy of recruitment to India's armed forces was based on the distinction

between the so-called 'martial' and 'non-martial' classes under which large sections of the Hindus had been classified non-martial and thereby denied the chance of adopting a military career. The Hindu Mahasabha saw in the war a good opportunity of getting this discriminatory rule annulled.

WAR SITUATION

Meanwhile, Europe was passing through what has been described as the period of the "phoney war". The magnitude of the danger to the Allies which was to become apparent in the spring of the new year was not realised at this time and the urgency of a settlement with India was not brought home to the British Government. The flow of men and material in India for the war was consequently slow but nevertheless steady.

THE SECOND YEAR

In the beginning of 1940, the Viceroy again made a policy statement in a luncheon speech at the Orient Club in Bombay on 10 January. In this he declared that Dominion Status of the Westminster variety was the objective of the British Government for India, but it could be introduced only after the war. In the meanwhile, he offered to enlarge his Executive Council by the inclusion of some Indian political leaders "as an immediate earnest of their (British Government's) intention". The good faith and sincerity of His Majesty's Government could not be questioned, he said, but problems of this magnitude could not be solved swiftly. He was however prepared to consider any practical suggestion "that has general support."

In February he met Gandhi to explain this policy and though they 'parted as friends' Gandhi said that a settlement with the British Government was not possible unless India was allowed to frame her own constitution. The Congress position was again stated in its session on 14 March at Ramgarh. The main points made here were (i) that Britain was carrying on the war for imperialist ends and therefore the Congress could not be a party to it, (ii) that the people of India alone could frame a constitution through a constituent assembly based on adult franchise, (iii) that the rights of all recognised minorities would be protected by agreement or arbitration and (iv) that the rulers of the princely states or any foreign vested interests should not be allowed to restrict the sovereignty of the Indian people.

The Viceroy was in a difficult position—on the one hand he wanted to carry the Congress with him in support of the war effort and on the other he was not in a position to introduce radical changes during the war. The British Government was sincere in its proclaimed determination to give Dominion Status at the end of the war (as documents published after the war revealed) but it is a tragic fact of history that the Viceroy failed completely to convey this determination to the Indian leaders and the public. A perusal of the second volume of the "Transfer of Power in India" (Published by

Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1971) makes this fact abundantly clear. As Maurice Zinkin remarks in his review of the book in *The Times*:

"Perhaps the only man who believed them (the British Govt.) was Jinnah. Perhaps that was why, in the end, Jinnah got more of his way than anybody else. Had the Congress believed that the British Government was sincere in its intentions to give up power its reaction might have been more willing to compromise".

Muslim League : Having seen that there was not likely to be any compromise between the Congress and the Government the Muslim League began to declare its demand in more clear terms than ever before. In an article in *Time and Tide* on 13 February Mr. Jinnah stated that the League was not opposed to freedom for India but was opposed only to the rule of the majority community. In India there was not one nation but two, "both of them must share in the governance of their common motherland". Twelve days later on 25 February the League Council meeting went a step further. It declared that the Viceroy's assurance that any settlement which ignored Muslims would be unthinkable, was not enough. It demanded that Muslims should be the 'sole judges of their destiny.'

Having failed to do business with the Congress, the Viceroy now invited Jinnah for a conference on 13 March. In this meeting a bargain was struck; while Jinnah assured the Viceroy that Muslims would do nothing to retard the war effort, the Viceroy promised to convey his (Jinnah's) views to London, namely, *no settlement with Congress without previous consent of Muslims*.

Encouraged by this promise, amounting virtually to a veto on Congress demand, Jinnah went further still at the League session on 23 March and had the League pass the famous resolution for a separate state for the Muslims.

THE PAKISTAN RESOLUTION

In this resolution the basic principle for framing a new constitution was stated to be that "geographically contiguous units are demarcated into regions which should be so constituted, with such territorial readjustments as may be necessary, that the areas in which Muslims are numerically in a majority, as in the north-western and eastern zones, should be grouped to constitute independent states, in which the constituent units shall be autonomous and sovereign".

The resolution is significant for three points—the word Pakistan was not used, no reference was made to the issue of war and lastly there were to be more than one independent Muslim *states* and not *a state*. The omission to mention war was deliberate as it, by implication, left the Muslims free to support the war effort, which in fact they were doing. If the real intent of this resolution had been followed in 1947, the so-called two nation theory

would have resulted in the creation of three independent states—India and two separate independent Muslim States in north western and eastern zones respectively.

The attitude of the other parties and organisations and the extent to which they reflected “public opinion” may be summarised below:

INDIAN COMMUNISTS

The Communist Party of India and some of their subsidiary organisations having been declared illegal in 1934, were in a state of obscurity for some time. But by 1939 they were emerging from this condition by penetrating into the Congress with the idea of using its platform for furthering their own views and policies. Originally opposed to the Congress, they now supported the ‘national reformist bourgeoisie’ for it was at least anti-Imperialist. This strategy paid dividends and when the war broke out the Indian communists were in a position of better strength than in 1934.

Their membership was small, but in addition to infiltrating into the Congress those of them who were not in jail had teamed up with other radical groups like the Forward Block of Subhas Bose and the Congress Socialists. They were also active in the various labour unions and peasant organisations.

Getting inspiration from the British Communists like Palme Dutt and Harry Pollit, they condemned the war as having been brought on by the British Government’s policy of appeasement of Hitler and the Fascists. Their policy, more ‘left’ even than that of the International Communist leadership at this stage (early 1940), was to grab the opportunity provided by the war to turn it into a “war of national liberation”. But their efforts in March 1940 to have the Ramgarh session of the Congress vote for “immediate launching of the struggle”, through an amendment of the main resolution failed—even the Congress socialists opposed them. Thus when they organised a strike in the textile industry, they were not supported by any influential party and the Government was able to suppress the movement easily, arresting all known communists and other leftists under the Defence of India Rules “for interfering in the efficient prosecution of the war”. The Communists blamed the Congress for manoeuvring for a suitable compromise with the British. Their arrests continued and having made no preparation for an underground existence they found themselves completely crippled. Their opportunity to be in the Indian political picture again, was, however, to come in the middle of 1941 with Hitler’s attack on Russia when the hitherto ‘imperialist’ war became overnight a people’s war for the Communists all over the world. After this date, the Indian Communists offered their help, for whatever it was worth, to the Government in its war effort, though the latter took some time before its distrust of the communists was sufficiently removed to enable it to release the imprisoned communists.

ALL INDIA FORWARD BLOCK

The party most violently opposed to compromise, constitutionalism, and any form of support to the British in the war, was the Forward Block of Subhas Chandra Bose, formed in 1939 after his break with the Congress. In its second session at Nagpur on 18 June, the party was for continuing the struggle for freedom of the country and for utilising "the opportunity presented by international events" for this purpose. Their rallying cry was "*all power to the Indian people*". They demanded the immediate transfer of power to the Indian people through a Provisional National Government for the establishment of which the British Parliament could pass an Act "in twenty-four hours". This Provisional National Government could later convene a Constituent Assembly, when things settled down, to frame a full-fledged Constitution. For the transitional period a "Citizens' Defence Corps"—a private body not connected with the Government—was to be formed for internal defence.

HINDUS

The Hindus formed the majority community of the country, but no single organisation could claim to reflect their opinion. Hindus could be found in the Congress which claimed to be secular and to represent all Indians, there were Hindus who were socialists and communists, there were Hindus of liberal views, there were Hindus among the extremists and leftists, as well as among the rightists. There was however one political organisation of the Hindus, the All India Hindu Mahasabha, which had risen to importance as a reaction to the growing Muslim attitude of extorting privileges and special rights since 1909, an attitude which was now leading to a division of the country. Hindu Mahasabha, led at this time by men like V.D. Savarkar, Dr. Moonje, Bhai Parmanand etc., represented Hindu nationalism as well as Hindu communalism as opposed to the Muslim communalism. Though a majority in the country as a whole the Hindus were in a minority in the Punjab, Sind and Bengal and were thus in fear of being dominated by a hostile community if those provinces became autonomous or independent. This factor can easily explain the Mahasabha's attitude to war, to the British Government and to the demand for Pakistan.

The resolutions passed by the All India Hindu Mahasabha in its Working Committee meetings or conferences in the first half of 1940, therefore, condemned the Pakistan scheme vehemently and laid down:

- (i) that the Mahasabha was prepared to help in the war effort in a spirit of responsive cooperation;
- (ii) that measures to give military training to Indians should be stepped up;
- (iii) that a declaration promising Dominion Status to India immediately on the cessation of war should be made;
- (iv) that the federal scheme was the quickest way to Dominion Status; and finally

- (v) that no agreement between Congress and Muslim League would be acceptable to Hindus unless approved by the Mahasabha.

The Hindu Mahasabha conferences in the Provinces passed resolutions in similar strain.

THE SIKHS

The Sikhs having a large stake in the Punjab were a community of confirmed warriors as also confirmed nationalists. While wanting independence for the country, their emphasis was on condemning the idea of Pakistan. The All India Akali Party, with Master Tara Singh at the helm, supported the Congress demand for independence, urged the government to give military training to the youth of the country on a large scale and declared their determination to resist the Pakistan demand by "all possible means".

The Khalsa National Party led by a Knight, Sir Sunder Singh Majithia, while saying nothing about the war, for the obvious reason that many Sikhs were joining the army, went so far as to assert that if the Pakistan demand was pressed, the Sikhs would "claim back the sovereignty of the Punjab which was only held as a trust by the British during the minority regime of Maharaja Dalip Singh." Other Sikh organisations held more or less similar views, viz., not withholding war aid but opposing the Pakistan idea.

THE PRINCES

The British Government in India was, however, not without staunch and loyal friends in the country. While other parties were bargaining and offering conditional support or responsive cooperation, the princes saw in the war an opportunity to get out of their commitments regarding joining an all-India federal system which would naturally result in some surrender of power on their part. In the annual session of the Chamber of Princes held in New Delhi on 11 March 1940, they passed a resolution in which they expressed "firm determination to render every possible assistance in men, money and material to His Imperial Majesty and his government in their heroic struggle for upholding the cause of justice——." They criticised the Congress and offered their voluntary and spontaneous help to Britain unlike those who were "out to bargain and barter or who were given to bluff and bluster".

How little they represented the public opinion in their states was made clear by the All India States Peoples' Conference which repudiated the Princes' claim to speak on behalf of their peoples. The Conference pointed out the incongruity of the rulers expressing support for democracy in Europe while maintaining "undiluted autocracy in their own states".

THE LIBERALS

The leadership of the National Liberal Federation of India consisted mainly of knighted and titled persons, moneyed men of business and vested interests who were traditionally supporters of the status quo and opposed to any radical changes. Their following was numerically weak. The Council

of the Federation met in Bombay on 18 February 1940, under the Presidentship of Dr. Paranjpye. Others present included Sir Chimanlal Setalwad, Sir Cowas Jehangir, Rao Sahib Vaidya and others of the same ilk. They passed a long resolution which, shorn of typical liberal verbiage and jargon, may be summed up as under:—

Welcomed the Viceroy's declaration about Dominion Status after the war, dubbed the Congress demand for constituent assembly on adult franchise and independence as impracticable. Repudiated the two-nation theory of Muslim League. Demanded enlargement of the Viceroy's Executive Council, Indianisation and enlargement of the armed forces, and encouragement of industries connected to war purposes. Called for convening a small conference of about 150 people as a preliminary to a large conference later to lay down the principles for the future constitution of India.

Again meeting in June 1940 at Poona, the Federation called upon all parties to sink their differences in view of the "intensely critical situation caused by the entry of Italy in the war" so as to ensure the "full cooperation of India in the prosecution of the war". Demanded the expansion of armed forces and the appointment of an Indian defence minister.

MISCELLANEOUS OTHER ORGANISATIONS

In addition to the above mentioned main parties, there were many other organisations and groups who considered the war as against the interests of the people, and as an opportunity for gaining freedom for India. Among these may be mentioned, the All India Students' Federation, U.P. Students' Conference, the All India Anti-Corruption Conference (Communist dominated), the All-India Akali Conference etc. etc. Some of these influenced by Subhas Chandra Bose or some other leftist leaders were opposed to the compromising attitude of the Congress, while some assured the Congress of their support in a struggle for independence, but most of these were anti-British, anti-war, and anti-Pakistan movement.

This position, a stalemate with the Congress, an understanding with the Muslim League, and offers of support and different suggestions from various parties, remained unchanged for a few months till the German offensive on the Western front and the fall of France. The disaster which had overtaken the Allies and its likely consequences had their repercussions not only on the attitude of the British Government in India but also on the political parties and public opinion in the country.

CRIPPS MISSION

Although the Viceroy and the bureaucracy were satisfied that India was putting in the maximum war effort, Whitehall, concerned about American criticism, authorised Linlithgow to enlarge his Executive Council in a bid to win popular support. Eight Indians and four Britons were appointed

to the new Council, the "natives" outnumbering the whites for the first time. But the gesture was lost when Churchill dashed all hopes roused by the Atlantic Charter by his statement in the Commons that the Charter did not apply to India. Nationalist India reacted angrily and Gandhi firmly refused to approve an earlier proposal by a section of the Congress leaders, who had come out of jail at the end of their term, that they should resume ministerial responsibility.

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour on 7 December 1941 brought the U.S. into the war and quickened the pace of political developments. It also gave a fillip to American anxiety for a settlement with India.

In 1942, Chiang Kai-shek and his wife visited India in February to urge the Indian leaders to support the war effort against Japan. They met Gandhi in Calcutta and at the end of the visit Chiang Kai-shek issued a statement supporting the Indian demand for independence. It was, however, not released for broadcast in India until the Viceroy had been sounded and had agreed to allow its publication. It caused a great furore when Madame Chiang, in Delhi, said that the Americans were fully behind the Indian demand, that their visit would strengthen the hands of President Roosevelt in putting pressure on Churchill to change his attitude on India. She added that Lord Halifax was exerting pressure from Washington and that Churchill would have to yield.

Not long after the Japanese entered Singapore and Rangoon had fallen. The situation appeared ominous and the urgency of a settlement with India was felt more than ever before. The British Government decided to send Sir Stafford Cripps, a Cabinet minister, to India. It was no secret to anyone that another effort for reconciliation with India was going to be made under the stress of circumstances. Now that America was also at war, Roosevelt wanted to make sure that the Mission was handled properly and therefore sent his own personal envoy, Col Louis Johnson, to Delhi in April 1942. The Cripps' proposals promised Dominion Status and a constitution making body *at the end of the war*. Provision was to be made for the participation of the Indian (Princely) states and the constitution so framed was to be accepted by the British subject to a treaty for the protection of racial and religious minorities *and the right of any province to opt out of the new State*. Britain meanwhile was to retain control and direction of the defence of India as part of their global war strategy, "but the task of organising the full military, moral and material resources of India was to be with the cooperation of the peoples of India."

As can be seen easily, these proposals implied no vital immediate change. Gandhi therefore declared that at best they amounted to a "post-dated cheque on a crashing bank". He held the view that if the Japanese invasion was to be met, the British must immediately transfer power so that an Indian Government could take control of the machinery of administra-

tion. This would enthuse the people in favour of the war. The Congress rejected the Cripps' offer for it was only a promise, and the Muslim League rejected it for the reason that parliamentary government ("counting of heads", as Jinnah called it) was not suitable for India.

Meanwhile the war situation was becoming increasingly desperate. Japanese ships appeared in the Bay of Bengal and the retreat of British-Indian forces northwards of Rangoon was in progress. Though it was not a rout but an organised withdrawal marked by gallant rearguard actions the outcome was not in doubt and the invasion of India through its north-eastern borders with Burma was a distinct probability.

C. R. ACCEPTS PAKISTAN

Realising this danger certain segments of public opinion in India including those in the Congress were keen on a settlement with the Government to enable them to render effective support to the administration in its war effort. The Congress members of the Madras legislature, therefore, led by C. Rajagopalachari (affectionately known as C.R.) passed a resolution recommending that the League's claim for separation be accepted and negotiations with it for a national government started to meet the expected invasion. This further strengthened, at least morally, the hands of Jinnah.

However, within a week, the All India Congress Committee met at Allahabad and discountenanced the Madras resolution by a large majority. Instead, it passed one of its own, emphasising the unity of India and calling for non-cooperation with and non-violent resistance to the invader. The Cripps Mission's offer was thus rejected by Congress and later by the Muslim League also.

FAILURE OF CRIPPS MISSION

The failure of the Cripps Mission, curious as it might seem, did not gladden the hearts of the Tory diehards. Relief that no interim national government was possible in India was temporary, and was quickly swamped by the conviction that this "jewel of the British Empire" was lost. Striking evidence of the feeling then prevalent in the ruling circles in Britain is afforded by a note in the diary of King George VI recorded after one of his Tuesday luncheons with Churchill in July 1942:

"He amazed me by saying that his colleagues and both, or all three, parties in Parliament were quite prepared to give up India to the Indians after the war. He felt they had already been talked into giving up India. Cripps, the Press and U.S. public opinion have all contributed to make their minds up that our rule in India is wrong, and had always been wrong for India. I disagree and have always said India has got to be governed, and this will have to be our policy". (*King George VI—His Life and Reign*, by John W. Wheeler-Bennett).

The political situation was clearly developing into a triangular contest. The Congress still laboured under the sincere but mistaken belief that

it could cope with Jinnah's intransigence if it succeeded in striking a deal with the British. The Cripps' proposals had conceded the principle of partition and Gandhi therefore left Delhi in a fit of disgust. The Congress Working Committee adopted a resolution expressing regret that the proposals "gravely imperil the development of a free and united national government and the establishment of a democratic state."

CONGRESS ACCEPTS PAKISTAN

"Nevertheless", the resolution went on to say, "the Committee cannot think in terms of compelling the people of any territorial unit to remain in the Indian Union against their declared and established will". This resolution, drafted by Nehru, ironically, accepted by implication the novel principle of yielding to the provinces the right to secede or not to accede to the federation if they so chose. The partition in principle had been accepted! Jinnah rightly and exultingly declared that he had won his battle for Pakistan. The idea which had first been put forth at the time of the Round Table Conference by some young Muslims in England 10 years earlier and had been then proclaimed "chimerical and impracticable" was now definitely within the realm of practical politics.

The League executive almost simultaneously passed a resolution expressing "gratification that the possibility of Pakistan is recognised by implication by providing for the establishment of two or more unions in India" and rejecting the Cripps' proposals for the reason already mentioned.

Reluctant to alienate American sympathy, however, the Congress adopted another resolution on 14 July 1942, stating that it 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 people of the world" and that this was only possible "if India feels the glow of freedom". It added: "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". But the 'glow of freedom' was not to appear, as the India Office and the Viceroy were now agreed on building up Jinnah as the crescent card to neutralise the Congress challenge. The challenge was not far in coming. Having realised that all their hopes for a settlement *during* the war were frustrated, the AICC met at Bombay and decided upon the Quit India Movement on 8 August 1942, which was to be a mass non-violent struggle. The Government acted promptly and within a few hours of the passing of the resolution, all Congress leaders were taken in custody before dawn on 9 August and the Congress declared an illegal organisation.

QUIT INDIA MOVEMENT

Bereft of effective leadership, the agitation was carried on by underground workers and quickly turned into a chaotic and at places violent battle with authority. The entry into the ranks of the non-violent freedom fighters of the extremists, terrorists and anti-social elements led to alarming distur-

bances all over the country. Communications were disrupted, much public property was destroyed indiscriminately and the war effort was impeded considerably. The situation in Bihar, some Maharashtra areas of Bombay province and eastern regions of the U.P. was particularly grim. Communications with Bengal and Assam were paralysed and the supply of war material to the forces defending India on the eastern border was placed in great jeopardy. But the stern measures taken by the Government succeeded in breaking the back of the struggle by the end of September.

But Jinnah seemed to go from strength to strength. Back from a League session in April 1943, glowing with pride, he said that now indeed his claim that the League was the sole representative of the Muslims of India had been vindicated, for three of the four Muslim-majority provinces were being governed by League Ministers. The Muslims and the Princes were already supporting the war effort and with the Congress out of the way other elements also cooperated largely because the increased tempo of recruitment was providing job opportunities for educated as well as semi-educated young men of all classes. By this time news of Allied offensives in Africa and elsewhere were coming in, converging Soviet attacks had cut off the German Sixth Army around Stalingrad in November 1942, and preparations to oust the Japanese were briskly going ahead with India as the base.

COMMUNISTS ATTITUDE

Since June 1941, after the invasion of the USSR by Hitler the communist tactics all over the world was to subordinate everything to the sole aim of saving Russia and working for its victory. The Indian communists had, however no idea of this new line of policy for some time for they were either underground or in jails. Only after some communist papers and other literature was 'smuggled' (with the connivance of the authorities) and reached the Indian communists in jail and outside that they were finally converted to the 'Peoples War' thesis by December 1941. Their openly expressed slogan now was "make the Indian people play a people's role in the People's War". The Government after being fully convinced of this change of heart, responded by releasing all communist prisoners and declared the CPI (Communist Party of India) a legal body in July 1942, and got their support for the war for whatever it was worth.

Owing to all these factors, the Congress was virtually isolated and the public opinion in India, by and large, became reconciled to waiting for Allied victory, and all effective hostility to the war effort was almost completely at an end.

INDIAN NATIONAL ARMY (INA)

Thus, though by the beginning of 1943, the internal situation in India was, from the Government's point of view, as satisfactory as possible under the circumstances, a new danger seemed to appear on the Burma front. Subhas Chander Bose, a consistent opponent of the British rule in India,

having escaped from the country in 1941 had reached Malaya via Germany and Japan. Under an agreement with the Japanese and with their help and cooperation he formed a Government of Free India at Singapore and organised an Indian National Army getting recruits from the large number of officers and men of the Indian army who had become prisoners of war on the unconditional surrender of the Allied forces to the Japanese at Singapore in February 1942. Any news of the romantic escape and exploits of Bose (now known as Netaji or leader) which were allowed to trickle into India thrilled the people and made them proud that a great and brave son of India was fighting the battle of his country's freedom abroad. (The leader of an earlier, INA, 'General' Mohan Singh, had been imprisoned by the Japanese before Bose's arrival). Netaji's name became a legend in India in spite of the fact that the public, by and large, was sceptical about his success which was necessarily linked with the military fortunes of the Japanese. The Government of India, too, was not unduly worried about the military implications of the INA, though they were concerned about the possible effect on the morale of Indian soldiers at the prospect of having to fight for the British against their ex-comrades at arms fighting in the name of a Government of Free India.

However, the war effort in India continued at an increasing tempo and by 1944 about two and a half million Indians were serving in the armed forces as compared to only one-fifth of a million in 1939. The developments in India after this have very little to do with public opinion on war as they were mainly concerned with questions of constitutional changes expected at the end of the war. These can be briefly stated to bring the story up to the partition of India on 15 August 1947.

THE END

Gandhi was released unconditionally on 6 May 1944. In a press interview, Gandhi said in July that what he asked now was different from what he had wanted in 1942. He would now be satisfied with nothing less than a national government in full control of the civil administration.

A couple of days after this interview was published, a journalist (Durga Dass) wrote in the Hindustan Times a piece entitled: "Conspiracy Between British Diehards and Jinnah". This was based on a talk with a top Britisher who had said to him: "Mr. Jinnah will never come to an agreement during the war. While he is intransigent, he is on top; the moment he settles with the Congress, the latter will be on top. Mr. Jinnah's intransigence suits us, and if he maintains his attitude and keeps his hands off the Punjab, which is our special preserve, he will deserve some support at the end of the war".

While Indian politicians were pinning hopes on intervention by the U.S. President, Rajagopalachari (C.R.) convinced Gandhi that he should take up the threads of the negotiations with Jinnah where C.R. had left them. The Gandhi-Jinnah talks in Bombay in September 1944, lasting well over a fortnight proved abortive. Jinnah poured scorn on Gandhi's formula,

which envisaged an all-India central authority. "What I am being offered is a truncated and moth-eaten Pakistan", he exclaimed indignantly.

Jinnah came out jubilant from the parleys. "Gandhi has defined Pakistan for me," he said. "Gandhi asked me whether it would be a state whose policy on defence and external affairs could be in conflict with India's. I had only to answer 'yes'."

In an imaginative and statesmanlike move to lift the clouds darkening the political horizon, Wavell who had succeeded Linlithgow as Viceroy in March 43 proceeded to London in March 1945 for consultations with Whitehall. On his return he made his fateful announcement on reconstituting his Executive Council in June. Jinnah spurned the Wavell plan although it had given parity to the League with the Congress. He remarked, "Am I a fool to accept this when I am offered Pakistan on a platter?" The Congress was also not agreeable as in the proposed new Executive Council the Viceroy and the C-in-C were still to be non-Indians.

CABINET MISSION

After the war, when the Labour Government came into power in Britain, it ordered fresh elections to be held in India. The Congress won sweeping victories for the General seats and the League for the Muslim seats. A Cabinet Mission was sent to India in March 1946 and complete independence declared as a possible goal if the Indians so desired. As no agreement could be reached between the Congress and the League, the Cabinet Mission gave its own recommendation for a federal government for the whole of India including the Princely States, and for the convening of a Constituent Assembly to frame the detailed constitution, and the formation of an interim government.

The League first accepted the Mission's proposals and later rejected them. An interim government with Jawaharlal Nehru and his colleagues was sworn in on 2nd September 1946. Later some Muslim members were also included in the Cabinet, but the League refused to join the Constituent Assembly, which met in December 1946, and began its work without any Muslim members in it.

In February 1947, therefore, the British Government declared its intention to quit India and appointed Lord Mountbatten to arrange the transfer of power by June 1948. The Muslim League resorted to "Direct Action" for securing Pakistan, which led to widespread communal riots. Partition was now inevitable.

Mountbatten who had assumed office as Viceroy on 24 March 1947, therefore announced a new procedure in June for partitioning the country into two dominions, and later advanced the date for transfer of power to 15 August 1947, on which date India was divided into two independent Dominions of the Westminster variety.