CHAPTER FIVE

INDIA AND THE WAR SEPTEMBER 1939 - MAY 1940
The international situation had deteriorated in 1939 and war clouds were forming since 1938. In India full self-government was in operation in the Provinces for two years, and in the Central Legislature there was a majority of Indian elected members. Naturally Indians were eager to have their voice in the determination of their country's policies and attitudes to all problems, both internal and external. In 1938, the Central Legislature had demanded that the Indian troops should not be moved outside the country without its agreement and the Government had promised to inform it about the movement of the Indian troops.

In contrast to the liberal policy in the matter of internal self-government, Britain tried to exercise more control over India's external policies as the war approached and Indian nationalists protested against it. Though Congress opposed Nazism and Fascism, it protested against India being forced to enter the war. When the Government of India despatched Indian contingents to Aden, Egypt, and Singapore, the Congress Working Committee pointed out that it was against the will of the people. The Congress thought that the Government had flouted the declaration of the Central Legislative Assembly and defied public opinion, and it called upon all the members of the Assembly to refrain from attending the next session of the Assembly. (1) As The Economist put it rightly, the episode was not handled with great imagination by the Government of India.

(1) Indian National Congress March 1939 - January 1940 (Allahabad, 1940) 29-30.
The wise course was to consult the Legislature on such a matter which was close to nationalist susceptibilities. At least the decision should have been announced first in India as a token of respect to Indian opinion. (2)

DECLARATION OF WAR AND THE INDIAN REACTION

The Second World War broke out on 1 September 1939 and on the 3rd, the Governor-General’s declaration made India a belligerent in the war on the side of the Allies. By virtue of authority vested in him by the Act of 1919, the Governor-General declared that in India a state of war emergency existed and his proclamation committed India to war automatically without reference to, or consultation with, the representatives of the Indian people. At a crucial moment, the Governor-General committed an act which amounted to a blunder and from which further misunderstandings arose. It amounted to an offensive exhibition of imperialist attitude. The failure to soften even by informal discussion the exercise of his imperial authority, which in any event was acknowledged on all sides to be outdated, must be accounted a grave error of statesmanship. This exercise of authority revealed a disturbing incapacity to understand not only the psychology of a nationally conscious but still dependent people but also the whole trend of a Commonwealth development in recent years. (3)

(2) The Economist, 116 (19 August 1939) 354.


It stirred resentment. It was felt that there was something 'fundamentally wrong and rotten' in a system under which 'one man, and he a foreigner and a representative of a hated system', could plunge 400 million people in Asia into a European war 'without the slightest reference to them'. See Jawaharlal Nehru, The Discovery of India (Calcutta, 1946) 513-14.
Thus the political situation hardened in the mould set on the out-
break of the war. As Coupland has remarked, it was humiliating to
Indian nationalists, for it underlined so broadly the fact that at
this historic moment the people of India could not play their part
in the world on an equal footing with other peoples. (4) India faced
the war in a curious constitutional position. Though Indian
nationalists were anxious to play their part, they were faced with
the uncomfortable prospect of having to ally themselves with the
imperialism they had always condemned. The commencement of the war
showed up the dependence of India in external policy in sharp
contrast to the independence of the Dominions. In committing India
to the war, without consulting its leaders, the British Indian
Government exhibited lack of foresight, trust and confidence. It
is still not clear whether the Governor-General took the decision
all alone or whether he was forced to take such a decision by the
British Government.

The Congress Working Committee, meeting at Wardha on
14 September 1939, disapproved and condemned German aggression
against Poland and sympathized with those who resisted it. It
declared 'that the issue of war and peace for India must be decided
by the Indian people', and stated that they would co-operate as
equals by mutual consent. The resolution made it clear that 'India
cannot associate herself in a war said to be for democratic freedom
when that very freedom is denied to her'. The Committee declared
that India would not support to defend the status quo and told
Britain that democracy should be introduced in India and that a

(4) Reginald Coupland, Indian Politics 1936-42 (London, 1944) 212.
free democratic India would gladly associate with other nations for mutual defence and co-operation. It invited the British Government to declare their war aims and to define how those aims would be applied to India, and wanted something concrete from them to the sincerity of their promises. (5) The new position of the Congress was succinctly elucidated by The Hindu in an editorial. It said the Working Committee's resolution 'reveals a conflict between sympathy with the immediate and professed objective for which Britain has engaged in the struggle and suspicion of British intentions which Britain's record as an Imperial Power and, in particular, her attitude towards Indian aspirations have inevitably implanted in the minds of the Indian people...'. (6)

The Muslim League Working Committee welcomed the suspension of the federal scheme and urged the Government not to proceed with constitutional changes without its consent and approval. (7) The

(5) All India Congress Committee, Congress and War Crisis (Allahabad, 1942) 14-19.

Jawaharlal Nehru considered that the demand for the declaration of war aims 'was not put forward in any spirit of bargaining. It was the inevitable outcome of our long struggle for freedom, and it was the essential preliminary for any effort in India to make the war popular there'. If that brave offer had been accepted in the spirit in which it was made there would have been an end to generations of conflict and struggle between the two countries and it would have proved that England stood for democracy and freedom. J. Nehru, 'India's demand and England's answer', The Atlantic Monthly, 165 (January-June 1940) 449-55.

In spite of Congress Working Committee resolution, some prominent Congressmen were prepared to co-operate in the war effort. Some of them privately hinted 'that a break could be avoided if only His Majesty's Government would give a unilateral assurance that at the end of the war full Dominion Status would be conceded to India.' V. V. Menon, The Transfer of Power in India (Bombay, 1957) 58.

(6) The Hindu (Madras), 15 September 1939, 6.

(7) Maurice Gwyer and A. Appadorai, Speeches and Documents on Indian Constitution 2nd Volume (Bombay, 1957) 485-90

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deliberations of the Congress Working Committee caused apprehension in the authorities and the manifesto was profoundly disappointing to the Secretary of State for India. As a result, they started considering the Muslim League's resolution with sympathy. They took into account Muslim dislike of the Congress ministries in a highly complex situation. (8)

BRITISH POLICY TOWARDS INDIA

The Governor-General wrote to the Secretary of State that it would be wise to make an announcement to associate prominent individuals from the various parties with the war effort. He deliberately made no move and was anxious to let the situation take shape more definitely and he favoured associating non-officials with the conduct of war 'though on a basis of information and discussion and not of consultation'. If the Congress held office at the price of promises, Linlithgow thought it expedient to call an all parties conference to expose the hollowness of the Congress

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The Muslim League Working Committee urged upon the British Government for an assurance that 'no declaration regarding the question of constitutional advance for India should be made without the consent and approval of the All-India Muslim League nor any constitution be framed and finally adopted without such consent and approval'. Ibid.

(8) Zetland to Linlithgow, India Office Library (I.O.L.), London, Zetland Collection, MSS Eur D.608/11, 238-44.
claim to speak for the whole of India. (9) He emphasized that acceptance of the Congress demands would involve a very substantial break with the accepted policy and would have constituted a repudiation of their obligations to the Princes and the minorities, including the Muslims, who looked to them for the protection of their legitimate interests. He was definite that they could not give the Congress 'consistently with our obligations to the other communities and interests in this country, and with the general control of Parliament, the degree of reassurance as to future intentions which it appears to demand'. Linlithgow was for an informal consultation of Indian leaders and he did not want them to play an effective part. So he did not favour Lord Zetland's suggestion of a small committee of non-officials and told him 'that we should have no end of trouble in keeping it so small'. (10)

(9) Linlithgow to Zetland, Ibid., D, 609/18, 133-40.

'Nothing could be more foolish, I suspect, on our part as a nation than to start at this point to commit ourselves to a series of objectives which may at the moment indeed appear to be reasonable and easily attainable, but which might as the war goes on call for very substantial revision; and the type of engagement into which, we somewhat light-heartedly entered in the earlier stages of the last war is, I should have thought, sufficient warning to us, if the extreme desirability of leaving our hands as free as practicable and to as late a stage as we can achieve, in the present conflict.' Ibid., 141-9.


'There is not the least chance, so far as I can judge, of our working with a committee of half a dozen; and I would say apart from that that were by any means to secure such a committee, it would be likely in my judgement to create a still more embarrassing position here, since, so small a body, representing important interests, and meeting every week, would raise far more dangerous possibilities of interference and control, immediately come in conflict with my Council, cut across my departmental arrangement, and to the extent that it was not drawn from the Legislature be likely to provoke difficulty with the Legislature when that body was sitting.' Ibid., 150-4.
Thus, though the Secretary of State was favourable for an effective association of non-officials with the conduct of administration, especially war preparations, the Governor-General rejected it pointing out certain imaginary hurdles. He was not willing to have anything but an ineffective consultative committee under his own chairmanship. As to the wise line to follow, Linlithgow wrote to Zetland that the ordinary Indian politician had forgotten that they had ever committed themselves to Dominion Status to any practicable extent, and he thought it a first-class opportunity to employ the magic words 'Dominion Status' without entering into any new commitment.

Making a statement on India in the House of Lords, the Secretary of State for India appreciated the help received from India and said that all political parties in India condemned the Germans for having resorted to force and the leaders had expressed their unqualified sympathy with the victims of aggression. He rejected the conditions imposed by the Congress for their co-operative and considered them to be too abstract. On the following day (27 September 1939), the Labour leader, Lord Snell, advised the Indians to deal first with lawless aggression, so that 'freemen everywhere may feel that they can continue to live in a free world'. He pleaded for articular envoys to India to interpret the situation, and to explain and reassure their belief in India's future.

Replying to the debate, Zetland appreciated the fact that the Congress demand was natural and said: 'They are men who are animated by a burning patriotism, and they do . . . sometimes a little loose sight by lifting their eyes to the stars of the practical difficulties which stand in their way on the ground at . . .
their feet." He did not like the Congress reassertion of their claims during the critical period of war. He emphasized that the British people were very susceptible to any treatment which they regarded as honourable and that they would favourably hear the Congress claims if they were animated by a spirit of gratitude for assistance rendered at a time of difficulty. He pointed out that if the Congress persisted in pressing its claims in Britain's hour of distress, it would only create embarrassment and even resentment. (11)

Commenting on the statement and the debate in the House of Lords, Gandhiji told the British that if they were fighting for the freedom of all, their representatives had to state in the clearest possible terms that the freedom of India was one of the aims of the war, and declared that the content of this freedom could only be decided by Indians alone. He took strong exception to Zetland's complaint that Congress chose that juncture for a clear declaration of Britain's aims. He appealed to the British to forget the old language of imperialism and open a new chapter to all those who had been held under imperial bondage. Jawaharlal Nehru wanted them to convince themselves of that world freedom of which they claimed to be champions and to see India in the picture of that world freedom. 'Only a free and consenting India can throw her weight for ideals that are openly proclaimed and acted upon.' The All India Congress Committee which met at Wardha urged an extension of democracy to all countries and demanded that India must be declared an independent nation. (12)

(11) Hansard, H.L., 114 (26 and 27 September 1939) cols. 1127-9 and 1163-78.

(12) All India Congress Committee, n.s. 5, 27-30.
The Secretary of State thought that the only direction in which they could travel in regard to the claims of Congress would be along the road leading to the establishment of a body of non-official character and proposed to the War Cabinet a small body of non-officials should be associated in a consultative capacity 'with a Central Government of India with a view to receiving information and tendering advice to the conduct of affairs in India in relation to the war'. (13) The War Cabinet feared 'that it [consultative committee] might entrench itself too deeply in the machinery of Government and that in due course great pressure would be brought to bear on us to give it some measure of control'. The Cabinet wanted a concrete picture of the composition and functions of the consultative committee before they approved it. However, they did not wish to withhold their consent and finally the Cabinet authorized the Governor-General to proceed on the general lines to secure the co-operation of the Indian political parties in the conduct of war. The motive was clear (and Zetland put it frankly): Though it might not prevent a break with the Congress, it would be welcomed by other parties and communities and 'will strengthen our hands in the eyes of public opinion generally in the event of Congress refusing to co-operate on the terms offered'. (14) He agreed with the Governor-General that the main demand of the Congress, namely the


The War Cabinet formed in September 1940 included the Prime Minister, John Simon, Lord Halifax, Lord Chatfield, W.S. Churchill, Leslie Hore-Belisha, Kingsley Wood and Lord Sankey.

(14) Telegram to Linlithgow, Ibid., 27 September 1939, 660; and Memorandum to War Cabinet, W.P., (G) 32, 12 October 1939, Ibid.
sharing of responsibility at the Centre was not a practicable proposition.

Thus, though the Secretary of State for India was ready to take a chance in associating Indian leaders with the conduct of the war, the War Cabinet seriously doubted the usefulness of the scheme. The Governor-General, however, accepted the consultative committee because he thought that the risk would largely be minimized by the existence of communal differences and also because he was himself to be the Chairman as a principal security. (15)

The next step was taken by the Governor-General. After a series of talks with Indian leaders, he issued a statement on 18 October 1939, describing the British war aims and their application to India. (16) He announced that Dominion Status was His Majesty's Government's 'clear and positive policy towards India and declared that the Government of India Act of 1935 would be amended at the end of the war in the light of Indian views'. The decision to establish a consultative group representative of all political parties to associate Indian public opinion in the conduct of war was made public. (17)


(16) When the statement was discussed in the Cabinet, Samuel Hoare objected 'to what he described as the number of vague phrases scattered over the text' and thought 'that the tone throughout was pessimistic and therefore depressing'. Zetland found Winston Churchill very valuable and 'by no means unreasonable' and that the only people who were really helpful were the Prime Minister and Edward Halifax. He had to make two re-drafts, one on war aims and the other on reconsideration of the Act of 1935. Zetland to Linlithgow, Ibid., D.609/11, 267-72.

(17) The Marquess of Linlithgow, Speeches and Statements 1936-43 (New Delhi, 1945) 204-11.
The Congress attitude to the prosecution of the war made an impression on the British. It was felt that 'non-co-operation' or even active hostility would be preferable to Congress 'co-operation'. A section of British opinion was not keen to have Congress ministries in office during the war and secretly welcomed their departure soon after its outbreak. In fact, if the Governor-General had proclaimed 'that a war for freedom could only end in the freedom of India - as in fact it did - the Congress would have been swung in favour of co-operation - in which case Jinnah would have had to cooperate too'. But Linlithgow renewed only previous assurances that Dominion Status was the goal without indicating when that goal was to be reached. 'It was so ill-calculated to appeal to Congress that cynics said it was purposely designed to ease them (the Congress) out of office'. (18)

British Press and India

Though the statement was a clever device to eyewash the problem, the public and the Press in Britain accepted it at its face value and welcomed it. They thought it to have marked an advance as it proposed the reconsideration of the federal scheme which had been repudiated by all groups in India. Supporting the Government's stand, The Times said that no responsible British statesman had committed himself to extending democracy in India and that it was impossible for the British Government to define the war aims with complete precision. It added that as the Congress claim was disputed by other political parties, nothing could be gained by accepting the Congress Party's totalitarian claim or by yielding to its demand for an independent nation. Even the liberal Manchester Guardian commented

(18) Penderel Moon, Divide and Quit (London, 1961) 24-5
the statement to Indian nationalists and said that it went a long way towards repairing the sins of omission committed by the Government since the outbreak of the war. It appealed to the Congress not to reject the offer. The same paper in another issue said that though the proposals were too vague to carry conviction, it was difficult to set a definite time-limit. The Economist considered the Governor-General's statement a pedestrian document and directed the readers to go through the appendices. It said that if the Indians had unitedly demanded Dominion Status and federation, the British Government might have been pressed to a more precise definition of its peace aims for India, but the fact was that federation would be a delicate and painful operation. (19) The vast majority of the British Press seemed to support the British Government's stand and their measures. The lonely opposition was voiced by the New Statesman and Nation. It said that the Governor-General's reply to the Congress' demand for a statement of war aims missed an opportunity that came only once in a generation. The Governor-General's statement made much of all the dissentient minorities in the worst Anglo-Indian tradition of dividing-to-rule and the promise of a consultative group would inflame Indian opinion rather than conciliate it. Again it commented that the Government had failed from lack of imagination rather than from ill-will. It pleaded for a responsible government at the Centre. (20)

(19) The Times, 18 October 1939, 9; Manchester Guardian, 18 and 24 October 1939, 6 and The Economist, 137 (21 October 1939) 87.

(20) New Statesman and Nation, 18 (21 October 1939) 537-8; 28 October 1939, 597-8; 11 November 1939, 666.
BRITISH PARLIAMENT AND INDIA

Explaining the stand of the Government in the House of Lords, Zetland said that it would have been a folly to discuss the despatch of troops and other military measures in the Legislature and pointed out that the root cause of all difficulties was the safeguards demanded by the minorities. He thought that the proposed consultative committee would have served as a link between the Government and the people and would have provided an opportunity for the lessening of their differences by emphasizing the common interests of all those who were represented on the committee. He called upon Indian nationalists to eliminate communal antagonisms which militated against the unity of India and to remain united with them in the struggle. (21) The debate in the House on the statement almost endorsed the policy and emphasized the communal differences as the most important impediment for the constitutional progress.

The Hindu said in an editorial that so long as Britain encouraged the view that the minorities could get more than a fair share by appealing to her over the head of the majority, the political unity of India would be an impossibility. It reminded the British, that the minorities were also as keen on self-government as the Congress. (22) The Congress Working Committee declared that the Governor-General's statement was an unequivocal reiteration of

(21) Hansard, H.L., 114 (18 October 1939) cols. 1445-53.

Though the Congress leaders did not deny the need to maintain secrecy, they felt, as Nehru said, that there were many ways of taking representative leaders into confidence. Nehru, n. 3, 510-11.

(22) The Hindu, 19 October 1939, 6.
the same old imperialistic policy, and it regarded the mention of 'the differences among several parties as a screen to hide the true intention of Great Britain'. It called for the resignation of Congress ministries. (23) The Muslim League adopted a midway position: It did not reject the statement, but pleaded for further discussion and clarification and demanded the scrapping of the federal scheme of the 1836 Act. (24) The Economist hoped that the debate in the House of Commons would go some way towards making up for a statement whose defects of form did nothing to compensate for a substance which was in any case, bound to be disappointing to Indian nationalists. (25)

The British Government were not ready to concede the demands of Indian nationalists and authorized the Governor-General to proceed cautiously on the lines of a consultative group. When the Secretary of State supported the proposal to drop the Commander-in-Chief and replace him by a civil member, the War Cabinet almost unanimously held that the beginning of a great war was not the right moment to drop the Commander-in-Chief from the post of Defence Member. The War Cabinet strongly urged upon the Governor-General to realize fully that his supreme power 'particularly with regard to the control of the Army and to security generally was in no way to be diminished and that you would exercise your right [of ruling] . . . within the borders of India itself or outside

(23) All India Congress Committee, n.s. 5, 65-7.
(24) The Indian Annual Register (July-December 1939) 352-3.
(25) The Economist, 137 (28 October 1939) 129.
In the House of Commons, Sir Samuel Hoare, formerly Secretary of State for India, denied that the consultative committee was a device for side-tracking the constitutional advance and said that Dominion Status was not a prize but a recognition of the facts. He thought that the proposed consultations would have been a bridge needed to carry Indians over the Great Divide of communal bitterness that stood in the way of constitutional advance. He warned that the non-co-operation movement would be dealt with properly and considered the differences between the communities the main obstacle for the setting up of responsible government at the Centre. He declared that 'as long as they do exist it is impossible for the government to accept a demand for immediate and full responsibility at the Centre on a particular date. If we did so we should be false to the pledges that time after time we have given in the most solemn words to the Muslims and the other


Zetland told the War Cabinet 'When Parliament accepted Dominion Status as the goal, the feeling was that the journey was a long one but the effect of the outbreak of the war has been to bring us hard up against the implication of Dominion Status for India...'. Memorandum by Secretary of State for India to the War Cabinet, W.P. (G) (39) 53, 23 October 1939, Ibid., D, 605/26.

On 23 October, Cripps met Halifax about his (Cripps') proposed journey to India. Halifax 'feared a head-on collision but could not see what the Government could do about it, for he felt it to be impossible to go beyond the statement recently made by the Governor-General. He claimed that he was not a "wicked imperialist" but could not accept the Indian National Congress as the only spokesman for the Indian people." It was clear that the Government thought that they were doing the right thing. Eric Estorick, Stafford Cripps: A Biography (London, 1949) 187-8.
minorities and the European community.' (27)

The Governor-General, who was indifferent to realities and unhelpful to Indian nationalists, was to a large extent under the influence of Muslim League members. He prevailed upon the home Government to make it clear that the interests of the minorities would be fully safeguarded in modifying the scheme of the Act. He saw advantage in drawing pointed attention to minorities and advised the Home Government that agreement between major parties must be a pre-condition for constitutional progress. Hence the emphasis by Hoare in the House of Commons on communal agreement as a prior condition for conceding their demands. (28)

During the course of the debate, many Conservative members in Parliament pleaded for the establishment of responsible government in India immediately after the war and demanded a declaration to that effect. Sir Stanley Reed argued that as the provincial scheme was

(27) Hansard, H.C., 352 (26 October 1939) cols. 1634-44.

Samuel Hoare suggested to Zetland that 'it will be in fact be impossible to postpone constitutional discussions till after the war' and he wanted to say 'that if provincial autonomy goes on working well during the war there is no reason why discussions should not begin before the end of it'. But the Governor-General thought 'despite its immediate attractiveness that it would be unwise to adopt it'. Telegram from Zetland to Linlithgow, No. 793, 22 October 1939 and telegram from Linlithgow to Zetland, No. 2385-S, 24 October 1939. I.O.L. MSS, Eur. D.609/26.


The Governor-General thought that the Muslim League's resolution was satisfactory. 'But it is for all that of real value that at this moment a body representing some 90,000,000 people should offer us co-operation and should accept as generally satisfactory the declaration which we have made.' Linlithgow to Zetland, Ibid., D.609/18, 22-3 October 1939, 190-4.
successful, the Central scheme should be implemented and wanted the House of Commons to send a message to Indian nationalists to the effect that they would establish responsible government at the earliest possible time after the war. Sir John Wardlaw-Milne accepted the justness of the demand for Dominion Status. Even the Labour members supported the idea of putting down the non-co-operation movement. (29) The debate in the House of Commons and the Governor-General's statement strengthened the belief that communal settlement was a pre-requisite to constitutional progress. Indian nationalists were not satisfied with the British attitude.

Acting on Samuel Hoare's suggestion in the Commons, the Governor-General met the Indian leaders early in November and told them that it was due to lack of agreement between the major communities that they could not go further than the consultative group at the Centre. He asked them to submit proposals for the expansion of the Governor-General's Executive Council. He expressed the anxiety felt by His Majesty's Government not to leave anything undone towards an agreement. (30) Commenting on the statement, Gandhiji declared that no solution was possible unless an acceptable declaration of war aims about India was forthcoming. The pronouncements made hitherto were after the old style, suspected and discredited by freedom-loving India. He reminded the British statesmen that what was wanted was a declaration of Britain's policy on India irrespective of India's wishes.

(29) Hansard, H.C., 352 (26 October 1939) cols. 1473–84.
The tripartite talks failed and in the House of Lords, Zetland made it clear that the British Government was not prepared to concede the Congress demand for a declaration of independence or permit an Indian Constitution to be worked out and made law by an Indian constituent assembly. He told the House that the British Government felt the necessity for an agreement between the Hindus and Muslims, so that the Muslims were to be convinced about the effective protection of their rights. (31)

The Press in England supported the Government in its thesis that no progress would be possible without an agreement between the Hindus and the Muslims. The Times in an editorial commented that if the Indian communities were united in their demands, Dominion Status would be a political reality to which the Imperial Government could give legal recognition. In supporting the Government's India policy the paper questioned the all-India character of the Congress and declared that the Imperial Government could not force a settlement over the heads of the Muslims and other minorities. (32)

In accordance with the directive of the Congress Working Committee, the Congress ministries in the Provinces resigned in 1939 and thus the co-operation of the Congress with the British Indian Government came to an end. Soon after the Congress resigned

(31) Hansard, H.L., 114 (7 November 1939) cols. 1695-8.

The Governor-General told the Congress that His Majesty's Government would not contemplate any commitment either as to Dominion Status by a given date, or as to acceptance of anything which a constituent assembly might formulate. They could not, he said, abdicate their general responsibility for future schemes of government nor could they divest themselves of their responsibilities towards the minorities. (32) The Times, 4 November 1939, 7.

(32) The Times, 4 November 1939, 7.
their provincial ministries, Linlithgow changed his attitude and began to lean more on the support of the Muslim League. 'For all practical purposes Jinnah was given a veto on further constitutional progress . . . The Viceroy even discouraged the efforts of certain well-wishers to bridge the gulf between the Congress and the Government.' (33)

The fact that the British Government was reluctant to part with power had been made clear by the attitude of the Cabinet. At its meeting on 6 November, the War Cabinet viewed with apprehension the possibility of a serious situation in India and the certainty of such a development being exploited by Germany for propaganda purposes. They were, however, agreed that they could not make a statement on the lines demanded by the Congress. They only desired the Governors to do all that was possible to keep the temperature low. (34)

Zetland, in his enthusiasm to tackle the problem in its perspective,

(33) V.P. Menon, n. 5, 69-72.

There is no doubt that the control of eight provincial governments had put the Congress in a position of great strength and bargaining power. V.P. Menon considered that 'the Congress should have thought many times before voluntarily abandoning such an advantage. Actually, the outcome of the resignation of Provincial Ministries in 1939 was by far more unfortunate than could have been foreseen, for, among the more serious consequences of this monumental error, must be reckoned the later partition of the country.' But Nehru justified the Congress decision. See V.P. Menon, An Outline of Constitutional History (Bombay, 1965) 63. See Nehru, n. 3, 518-20.

suggested a parliamentary mission to India. (36) But the Governor-General, who was not prepared for any change as such, opposed it. It is very unfortunate that at a very crucial stage of India's national movement, the Governor-General deliberately emphasized the communal differences and pleaded with the Home Government in every one of his letters to give special importance to the point of view of the Muslim League. He also tried his best to destroy the claim of the Congress to speak for the whole of India. (36)

THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL AND THE CONGRESS DEMANDS

At its meeting at Allahabad during 19-23 November 1939, the Congress Working Committee decided not to associate with the war

(35) Zetland renewed the suggestion of a parliamentary delegation frequently but the Governor-General persistently opposed it. Linlithgow wrote to Zetland: 'I am sorry to have been such a nuisance to you about these various rumours of Parliamentary Delegations to visit India . . . But I can see no prospect myself of such a visit, at any rate in the present circumstances, by a number of members with no particular mandate and in most cases no familiarity with the country or the problem, making any real contribution to the solution.' Linlithgow to Zetland, Ibid., D. 603/18, 168-9.

(36) In his letter to Zetland, Linlithgow said: 'we may have to go a good deal further than we have done in giving weight to their (Muslims') point of view.' He suggested 'that it might be of value . . . to admit in the House of Lords, or in the speech in the country, that considering this problem one did definitely have to give weight not only to the size of the minority — twice the population of the British Isles and as large as the whole of the present German Reich — but also to the deep cultural division and the fundamental cleavage on the religious issue'. He was impressed with the stiffness of the Muslim attitude and wished that the Muslims had as efficient a publicity organization as the Congress. 'The issues raised [by Jinnah] are very substantial indeed; and we shall have to be extremely careful as to what we say to him and as to the manner and form of any reply. I do not in the least want to discourage the Muslims . . . ' He suggested that the wise course would be to give further weight than they had done in the past, 'to the importance of soothing the Muslims in such public statements as you or I may have to make on Indian policy generally'. Linlithgow to Zetland, Ibid., D. 603/18, 208-46,
effort, as the war, like the World War of 1914-18, was being carried on for imperialist ends and to make imperialism entrenched in India. It pointed out 'that the declaration of British Government's intentions on what was obviously a moral issue and the policy of taking shelter under irrelevant issues was only the result of a desire to maintain imperialist domination in India in alliance with the reactionary elements in the country'. After pointing out that in spite of differences even the minorities demanded independence, it called upon the Government to recognize India's right to independence and the right of its people to frame their own constitution through a constituent assembly. It asserted that the constituent assembly was an adequate instrument for solving the communal and other difficulties. It decided to continue the policy of non-co-operation till the Government revised its policy and accepted the Congress contention. (37) Commenting on the resolution, The Hindu said that in contrast to the repeated insistence of the British statesman on solving the communal problem before conceding what India wanted, the Congress Working Committee had given a conclusive reply that what India wanted was a change in Britain's moral attitude, a recognition that India was 'an independent nation' whose policy would be guided according to the wishes of the people. (38)

The Governor-General was prejudiced against Indian nationalists and the Congress demand for a constituent assembly. He was afraid that the Home Government might meet the demands of the Congress and

(37) All India Congress Committee, n.s. 5, 137-40.
(38) The Hindu, 24 November 1939, 6.
he put up persistent opposition to any such move by pointing out that the Muslim League would not accept such a solution and that it would affect their own interests and their relations towards the Princes and the minorities. He viewed any talk of a constituent assembly with the utmost misgiving and he repeated that they should not be bounced by the insistent pressure of one party into any commitment which would go counter to Muslims, Princes and minorities. (39) He believed that the Congress wanted control of India as a whole and the Muslims were equally clear that they did not intend to allow Congress to achieve that control and would stand by the British. He pleaded with the Government to safeguard the interests of minorities, Princes and Europeans. (40)


To prevent the British Government from taking any course of action, the Governor-General detailed the imaginary fears of the object of Congress. 'The object of Congress will inevitably be to endeavour to concentrate public attention upon the abstract claim of India to "freedom", to glaze over the difficulties of their proposal for a Constituent Assembly, and to ignore not only the communal question and the problem of the Indian states; but those points of essential importance to us including, in particular, defence, which must be safeguarded in any settlement.' And the more we can bring out and underline the existence of Princely India as a factor that must be given full weight, the importance and complexity of the defence issue, and the importance of the claims to consideration of communities other than those represented by the Congress, in particular, the Muslims and the Europeans, the less difficulty we may anticipate, if and when it comes to doing business . . . I feel more and more that what Congress are out to do is . . . with our assistance to tie the Muslims up well in legislative and statutory bonds, to be maintained if necessary with the assistance of our defence forces, and to establish themselves as the sole authority in this country.' Ibid.

(40) Ibid., 247-67.

Again in his letter Linlithgow continued to show his opposition to the Congress and emphasized the importance of standing by the Muslims. He wrote that 'there is a heavy obligation to safeguard the interests of that great minority, and also of the smaller . . . minorities. Finally, the Princes cannot be handed over, tied hand and foot to any political organization in British India . . . we cannot possibly ignore or refuse to give full weight to the existence and the content of the Princely Treaties.' Ibid., 268-78.
THE SECRETARY OF STATE VERSUS THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL

The Secretary of State for India had the wisdom to view the Indian national problem in a realistic way and he wrote to the Prime Minister on 1 December 1939 that they would find it impossible at the end of the war to pick up the threads and carry on as if nothing had happened. 'War on the grand scale seems to be accompanied by the churning of the ocean of thought . . . I do not believe that the picture of India moving towards the goal which we have set before her by smooth, measured and leisurely stages - which is what we have hitherto had in mind - is likely to be realized.'

When the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State discussed the Indian problem on 4 December, both of them agreed that 'a new approach to the Indian problem might well have to be seriously considered', as a result of the war. They were fascinated by the idea of a treaty for a definite period as a means to secure their special interests. The Prime Minister at first thought of only a treaty without a constituent assembly, but Zetland reminded him that the Congress demanded a constituent assembly and suggested the advantages in placing the onus of producing a constitution upon Indians themselves. On reflection, the Prime Minister agreed 'that if in this matter the Congress had definitely nailed their colours to the mast, we might have to consider giving a constituent assembly a trial' and he added that if, having done so, the prospects of such an assembly were 'wrecked on the rock of communal antagonisms, other parties might then be persuaded more readily to agree to work the federal provisions of the Act'. But they sought the views of the 'man on the spot' before they finally decided. Zetland indicated
the lines of a Government declaration and sought the views of the Governor-General. Though he appreciated the problem of Muslim opposition, the Secretary of State did not agree that they should acquiesce in a state of affairs in which the Muslims were to stand for all time in the way of India acquiring the status of a Dominion. (41)

While the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for India thus thought in terms of a settlement without committing themselves finally to any concrete scheme, the Governor-General was against any move whatsoever. He persisted with his stony attitude. He argued as though he were the spokesman of the Muslim League. Though he agreed with the Secretary of State that the war made it necessary to consider a new approach, he thought that the time had not yet come

(41) Zetland to Linlithgow, Ibid., D. 609/11, 6 December 1939, 324–34. See also Zetland, n. 10, 275–6.

Zetland wrote: 'What impelled me more than anything else to the exploratory scheme was the change in opinion here about our relations to India. I am not thinking of "undergraduate" opinion, which has for years past been strongly in favour of "advance", without real knowledge of the problem. What has surprised me is an increasing feeling among mature people, and people of our own Party in particular, about the need for reaching agreement in India before very long. It may be that our constant reiteration that our aim in the war is "freedom" has sown doubts about our attitude to India which have never existed in the past . . . The rank and file of the parties in Parliament are, I surmise, closer together because they all expect something to happen which will bring some kind of settlement in India. If I am right we must expect this feeling to get stronger, the longer the war lasts and indeed the critical time for us may be the framing of peace terms . . . What I cannot dismiss as impossible is that unless the war ends very soon we may be faced soon and certainly at its conclusion with a sheer weight of public opinion here and abroad which will make the task of settlement in India immensely difficult. I felt bound therefore to make a beginning, however tentative, with a plan to meet that situation, and this is my excuse for having put to you what must have seemed to you and in fact is: a somewhat startling scheme.' Ibid., 20 December 1939, 340-1. Emphasis added.
for such an approach. He expressed his fear strongly that if independence was recognized, it might not be possible to settle the problem of the minorities amicably and that the Congress would pose as the spokesman for the whole of India. After pointing out the differences in the attitude of the Congress and that of the Muslim League towards the Government of India, he said that the Congress did not co-operate with them whereas the Muslim League stood by them, thereby definitely implying that they had to give more importance to the claims of the Muslim League.

Thus the Governor-General turned out to be a partisan favouring the Muslim League's point of view without trying to solve the problem in its proper perspective. He wrote that the tentative proposals suggested by the Secretary of State did not convince him and repeated the old arguments 'that the stage for an advance or a change of method, so radical as that . . . has not yet been reached'.

To prove his own thesis, he said that though they could not accept the principle that any single community should impose a veto on constitutional advance,

I am clear that there is at the moment little chance of friendly agreement between the communities in British India and that to defer to the demand of the major community, or to make a move now which would appear to Indian public opinion as yielding to pressure from that community, would result at once in our being rushed off our feet so far as British India is concerned. We should immeasurably strengthen the prestige and the morale of Congress, neither of them at the moment at all so high as they were three months ago, and that at a time when they have given little evidence of a generous or accommodating frame of mind, whether in relation to His Majesty's Government or to other Indian communities, and at a juncture when they are exposed to an attack more intense than they have so far experienced from the largest minority. We should confirm the Muslims in the view which one has frequently heard attributed to them that we are undependable allies, who will always be more anxious to come to terms with our opponents than to support or safeguard our friends. And we should do so at a point at which the provisions of the Act of 1935 are
being operated by Muslims alone; and at which the Muslim community, as distinct from the Congress, have, even with certain reservations, given full and loyal support in the prosecution of the war, in face of Congress refusal to do so save on terms. The indigenous Indian minorities could not be blamed if they read into our decision a decision to make terms with the majority party at almost any cost, and I would anticipate that the Congress... would in consequence be in an even strong bargaining position... Once in the enjoyment of this powerful position, we may be sure that the Congress would be eager to get as much as possible... and I do not doubt that we should at once find ourselves hard pressed upon the issues of the debt and commercial discrimination. Nor is it unreasonable to anticipate that so long as a vestige of their claims remained unsatisfied they would decline to deliver the goods of co-operation for war purposes.

He concluded 'that despite the obvious risks of going slow, the case for action on more radical lines is not yet established'. (42)

Thus at a period when the news from India had been completely censored and the British Government and the public entirely depended upon the reports of the men on the spot, the Governor-General misrepresented the real situation and projected his own imperialist attitude of 'divide and rule' to further British control without attempting to solve the problem. He even doubted whether a friendly settlement with Congress would be of decisive importance. He thought it a mistake to placate the Congress at the cost of others and wrote 'that it would be all the greater mistake to regard the return of Congress to office as something to be secured at almost any price, at a moment when the general position in this country of Congress is weaker, and when the prestige of its opponents is stronger than earlier'.

At long last he came out openly with his real intention which was to shape the Government of India's policy for a long time.

After all, we framed the constitution, as it stands in the Act of 1935, because we thought that was the best way — given the political position in both countries — of maintaining British influence in India. It is no part of our policy, I take it, to expedite in India constitutional changes for their own sake, or gratuitously to hurry the handing over of the controls to Indian hands at any pace faster than that which we regard as best calculated, on a long view, to hold India to the Empire. (43)

The Times noted that 'the Viceroy was right in urging the political leaders to secure some measure of agreement as a preliminary to further advance, for it is obvious that the greater the unity attained the more quickly will Dominion status be realized'. (44)

The Governor-General was sceptical of the possibility of a constituent assembly and the proposal for the formation of such a body 'did not carry the faintest shadow of conviction to his mind'. He doubted 'if any such body could be got together, or if it did meet, if it could remain in session for many hours without a tremendous row'. (45) That did not mean that the British Government was favourable to concede the demands of the Congress, in toto, but there was no doubt that the British Government was willing to try a new approach and get a settlement by conceding some of the demands of the Congress. The Governor-General, however, made it impossible to act. He was bent on helping the growth of the Muslim League, and on forcing the British Government to appreciate and encourage the stiffness of the Muslim League's stand.

Influenced by the Governor-General, Zetland emphasized in the House of Lords that the difference of opinion between the Congress

(43) Ibid., 317. Emphasis added. See also Zetland, n. 10, 277.

(44) The Times, 5 December 1939.

(45) Zetland, n. 10, 275.
and the Muslim League stood in the way of settlement. Touching upon
the Congress argument that no communal consideration arose in meeting
the demands of the Congress, he expressed the British Government's
inability to share it, for in their view no constitution in India
could be expected to function successfully unless it met with the
general assent of the minorities who had to live under it. (46)

Thus it was clear that the British Government was not ready
to concede the Congress' demand for an elected constituent assembly
and so they insisted on the impossible understanding between the
Congress and the Muslim League. To European observers, the Congress
appeared to be playing into the hands of the Muslim extremists and
of other reactionaries who desired the failure of the parliamentary
experiment. They thought that the Congress demand for a constituent
assembly raised in its acutest form India's communal problem. After
considering the situation to be grave, The Economist hoped that it
might be eased if the British Government made a declaration to the
effect that the British Parliament would ratify a form of Dominion
Constitution agreed upon by the Congress and other sectional
leaders. (47) Commenting on Zetland's speech, The Hindu said in an
editorial that if the British Government had declared its intention
to grant self-government, the problem of minorities would have been
solved automatically. To suggest, as Zetland had done, that agreement
among the minorities should precede agreement with Britain over these
matters, was to evade the issue. (48)

The Congress Working Committee met on 18 December and regretted the pronouncements of the Secretary of State on the communal question without mentioning the central fact of the failure of the British Government to define their war aims vis-a-vis India's freedom. The Committee said that the communal problem could not be solved in the presence of a third power. They charged that the British Government was unwilling to withdraw and even reluctant to part with power and so used the communal question as an apple of discord, and asserted that the constituent assembly was the only way for settlement. The Committee further directed all Congressmen to be prepared for the struggle and to take the Independence Pledge on 26 January 1940, demanding Purna Swaraj (complete independence). (49)

The Governor-General could not accept the Congress thesis that they were to hand over the government to them. Though he accepted the fact that it was the best organized party speaking for the majority of Indians, he remained convinced that they should 'effectively safeguard the minority position' and 'that we must also avoid allowing ourselves to be stampeded into measures of constitutional advance'. He suggested lobbying in the British Parliament and influencing the American Press on the lines that the Congress was important only because of its nuisance value, that they could rely on India's help in the prosecution of war without worry, and that the interests and role of the minorities ought not to be ignored. He wanted to project those imaginary hurdles as great obstacles because he was not in the least inclined to consider any transfer of power and authority. As he never liked to part with power, he

(49) All India Congress Committee, n. 5, 163-7.
supported the Muslims as a counter-move against the Congress. (50)

BRITISH OBJECTIVE OF DOMINION STATUS ANNOUNCED

In a speech at the Orient Club, Bombay, on 10 January 1940, the Governor-General declared that their main objective was to lead India to Dominion Status of the Statute of Westminster variety and expressed their readiness to reconsider the Government of India Act of 1935 with Indians immediately after the war, subject to an understanding among the leaders of the different communities. As an immediate earnest of their intention, the Governor-General announced the expansion of the Executive Council by the inclusion of non-Congress political leaders. (51) It meant for the first time that the Government expressed their desire to constitute India into a Dominion like other Dominions and accepted the necessity for the modification of the Act of 1935.


After his talks with Gandhiji and Jinnah, Linlithgow wrote that they ought to recognize Muslims as reasonable men (because they never wanted any change of policy or withdrawal of the British or any statement on war aims) and 'we ought not, therefore, to be tempted by the argument that an assurance would place him /Jinnah/ in the commanding position of being the arbiter of future policy. He should be trusted to act with reason.' Ibid., 16 January 1940, 33-54.

(61) Linlithgow, n. 17, 227-40.

While approving the statement, the Secretary of State for India Zetland doubted whether they could for long hold that position. He also expressed that 'a promise of Dominion Status, subject to insistence by us upon incorporation in the Dominion Constitution itself of limitations on self-government so fundamental as the defence and commercial limitations in question, can be represented as almost a contradiction in terms. Will it not lay us open to the old charge of insincerity?' Zetland to Linlithgow, 1.0.L., MSS. Eur. D.609/12, 17 January 1940, 18A-B.
Though the offer seemed to be generous, and it was a
categorical declaration of war aims, it came a little too late to
have its real effect. The response of the British Government to the
challenge of the situation was belated. It was, however, regarded
as a straightforward, frank, sincere, and honest statement and the
political situation greatly improved. It is very unfortunate that
the British Government, time and again, delayed matters till the
situation deteriorated almost beyond repair. Three months of
suspense and prevarication on the part of the British made the Indian
mind more suspicious of British intentions. (52) The Times
editorially said that the Governor-General's speech gave an accurate
picture of the British attitude towards most of the claims put
forward by Indian nationalists. It added that the British Government
could not be expected to accede to the Congress view that they should
have no hand in the framing of the final constitution and made it
clear that even if the Muslim League and the Congress agreed, there
would be problems in which Britain was vitally concerned. It
considered that the Congress demand for the British to stand aside
was inadmissible. (53)

Even the President of the Liberal Party, Lord Keaton,
criticized the Congress High Command and said that there could be
no discussion of the policy of severing the British connection and
that they would not allow 'totalitarianism' to take the place of
democracy. He pleaded with the Government not to abandon their

(52) D. Graham Pole, "Indian Self-Government",
Political Quarterly, 11 (July-September 1940) 266.

(53) The Times, 20 January 1940, 7.
obligations to the Princes, the Muslims, and other minorities. (54)
The Governor-General's Bombay speech had a mixed reception in India and the All India Congress Committee found in the speech 'a step in advance' and a genuine note of sincerity about improving the political status of India. (55)

ZETLAND PLEADS FOR A NEW POLICY

In his memorandum to the War Cabinet, the Secretary of State reported that they did not choose lack of agreement as a bar to progress but thought that agreement was the only possible basis for further progress so long as the minority problem remained the ultimate responsibility of His Majesty's Government. He regarded the postulate of Indian agreement as interlinked with the acceptance by them of the results of that agreement subject to certain stipulations. He suggested the idea of a small conference, but he thought that the Congress demand for a constituent assembly 'of necessarily enormous dimensions elected on a wide manhood suffrage - is so fantastic as a practical proposition as hardly to merit serious consideration'. The memorandum carried further the process of bringing the Cabinet to a full realization of the implications of their promise. Zetland urged the Cabinet to accept responsibility for saying to the Congress and the minorities 'that provided our desiderata were met to our satisfaction, we would accept a constitution framed by Indians themselves. By that, their position would be strengthened as it would be clear that failure to reach the goal was due to the

(54) Manchester Guardian, 23 January 1940.
(55) The Indian Annual Register (January-June 1940) 25.
inability of Indians themselves to reach agreement.' He was impressed by his talks with Sir Harry Haig, who warned him that they should meet the standpoint of the Congress and that the main factor was the outbreak of the war, the causes and issues at stake and the principles for which they had taken up arms. (56)

The War Cabinet approved the main proposals of the Secretary of State for India, but the Governor-General was left with the freedom to decide as he thought best in the circumstances. As a result, the Governor-General, who was not favourable to any settlement with Congress as it impinged on his own power and authority, left the situation to sort itself out.

In an exclusive interview to the Sunday Times, Zetland said that agreement between the Congress and those opposed to it was a prerequisite to any further substantial advance towards complete self-government as a unit of the British Commonwealth, the goal to which they were committed. He said that he was working for full Dominion Status for India and took exception to the Congress claim for 'independence' as it created a false impression in Britain of the aim which the vast majority of Indians had in view. He could not imagine India out of Commonwealth and thought that Indians gave importance to the substance of independence under Dominion Status rather than to the shadow. He told the interviewer that what

* For a brief biographical sketch see Appendix I.

(56) Memorandum by Secretary of State for India to War Cabinet, W.P. (G) (40) 37, dated 31 January 1940, I.O.L. MSS, Eur. D. 609/26, 1-11, and Zetland to Linlithgow, 4 February 1940, Ibid., D. 609/12, 36-45. See also Zetland, n. 10, 279-80,
was wanted was an escape 'from the tyranny of phrases and a descent from idealism to realism, from the abstract to the concrete'. He pleaded for discussions. (57)

The Governor-General viewed the statement from his own mental framework and was delighted. Quickly, he put forward his views to advance his own line of masterly inactivity. He wrote that they should abstain from action and let the situation develop by itself. Linlithgow warned that they would make a great mistake if they started running after the Congress. He suggested that they should keep on reiterating the offer that they had made and insist, at the same time, on the necessity for agreement among the Indian groups. He argued that they could not disassociate themselves from their responsibilities in India. He did not agree that the small Round Table idea was practical politics at that time. (58) He was opposed to the Congress claim of a constituent assembly and on the other hand he always cared for the Muslim League and the Princes, lest his own power would be reduced.


(58) The Governor-General wrote: 'I have not the least doubt that . . . we should make a very great mistake were we in present circumstances to start running after the Congress; and I am equally clear that the thing for us to do is to keep on reiterating the generous offer we have made (dressing it, if necessary in somewhat different garments, a process to which I have been devoting myself for the last three months) but not extending or amplying it in any way whatever; that we should combine that with a continued insistence on the necessity for people in this country getting together themselves . . . It is I am certain, only in this way that we can bring home to Congress . . . that they cannot look to His Majesty's Government to remain in this country in a Dominion Status position and hold down the Muslims and the Princes in the interests of the Congress. They continue in their ostrich-like way to assume that all will be well so long as their full paper demands are granted.' Linlithgow to Zetland, 13 February 1940, L.O.L. MSS. Eur. D.609/18, 111-24. See also his letter dated 19/21 February 1940, Ibid., 125-41.
Zetland's remark that the Congress made a fetish of the word independence was considered an offence by the Congress and Gandhi ji's criticism of Zetland's statement was taken by Britain that Gandhi had banged the door against further negotiation. The Rangpur Congress Session of March 1940 declared that India could not endure the prospect of Nazism and Fascism but was even more tired of British imperialism and said that they did not wish to see British imperialism triumphant and stronger and lengthen their own subjection to it. It decided to start a civil disobedience movement and demanded a constituent assembly to frame a constitution for India. (59) The Times commented that the British and Indian statesmanship faced a dilemma as they could not heed the rival claims of the Congress or the Muslim League and the only thing they could do was to recognize the right of Indian political opinion to be fully and freely consulted in the future constitutional advance, provided they reached an agreement. (60)

Appraising the situation after the Congress Party's reiteration of its demand for a constituent assembly and its threat to start civil disobedience movement, the Governor-General suggested to the British Government the same old policy of inactivity. In support of such an unrealistic policy, he stated that a friendly settlement with Congress would not improve their contribution to the war effort. He warned that what Congress are really concerned to do is to get us deeply committed to [the] principle of Dominion

(59) The Indian Annual Register (January-June 1940) 228-9.
(60) The Times, 18 April 1940, 7.
status of the fullest kind, with the implication that there shall be no interference by His Majesty’s Government save such as may be provided for by any documents exchanged at the time of recognition of Dominion; that special powers and responsibilities of Governor-General and Governors must disappear. Such powers were to be vested in the new Dominion Government. He was ‘strongly in favour of taking no action, and of lying back’. He was not for making any further move towards the Congress beyond repeating their readiness to help. If a break was inevitable, he was for dealing firmly with the Congress. (61)

Zetland did not agree with the Governor-General that they should keep quiet and told the War Cabinet that it was advantageous to secure the initiative for themselves and that they should have a constructive plan of action. He told them that the principle which had hitherto governed their approaches to the Indian problem was difficult to reconcile with the principles for which they were at war and pleaded with the War Cabinet to approve a definite

(61) Memorandum of the Secretary of State for India to the War Cabinet, W.P. (G) (40) 73, Appendix A; Telegram from Linlithgow to Zetland, I.O.L. MSS. Eur. D.609/26, 8 March 1940, 358-61.

The Governor-General was dead opposed to any new initiative. He wrote that there was no trouble in the Congress Provinces and that people thought the resignation of Congress Ministries a relief. He warned that the Congress tried to get them committed to ‘unqualified acceptance of the implications of normal Dominion status and then require us to hand over responsibility to a Dominion Government in which they will be in a decisive majority under an agreement which would reduce our power of effective interference in the Government of India as a whole to a minimum. We must . . . be careful . . . not to commit our prestige too deeply by taking up a position which we may be forced to evacuate’. Ibid.
policy. (62) At the same time, he could not ignore the emphasis laid repeatedly by the Governor-General on the differences and the necessity for prior agreement among the Indians. He therefore thought that the differences must be settled by agreement and that the absence of a prior agreement was an insurmountable barrier in the way of self-government, an obstacle which only Indians could remove.

The War Cabinet considered the memorandum of the Secretary of State for India on 15 March and deferred taking a decision on the proposals and awaited a further appreciation of the political situation from the Governor-General, specially after the Congress session held at Ramgarh. (63)

The Governor-General maintained his policy of 'lying back', by which he meant that neither he nor His Majesty's Government should make any attempt to relieve the situation resulting from the action of the Congress.

What disturbs me frankly at the moment ... is the fact that the minorities have now begun to consider what is involved in Dominion Status and that their reaction to full self-government, if by full self-government, we mean ... a system of government here from which His

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(62) Linlithgow did not like Zetland's line of argument before the Cabinet. He wrote: 'The one thing that does strike me (I trust I am not being cynical in this) is this, that there seems to me an unreality in the criticism so often made, and touched on in your memorandum, that we cannot, consistently with the objects which we are fighting for in Europe, continue to govern India as a possession ... If the state of Europe showed anything it was the folly of handing over minorities to their natural enemies; and I cannot help asking myself what sort of contribution it would be to world peace were we to abandon India to chaos, and how unworthy it would be now to buy off the criticism of the U.S.A. by a policy which, I would myself say, would in five years lead India to disruption.' Linlithgow to Zetland, Ibid., D.609/19, 220-1.

(63) Memorandum of the Secretary of State for India to War Cabinet, W.P. (C) (40) 96, 9 April 1940, Ibid., D.609/23.
Majesty's Government stand aside entirely to such limited extent (as your Memorandum to Cabinet indicates) as may be necessary to safeguard certain responsibilities, is that it is not encouraging from their point of view that the safeguards would be administered, if they are administered at all, by that majority community and without any effective possibility of interference by Parliament and His Majesty's Government.

He could not contemplate backing the Congress to the exclusion of others as 'we should, even at the cost of misunderstanding abroad and of difficulty with Parliament, let the situation sort itself out a little more'. (64) He repeated his pet arguments that the Muslims were not prepared to accept any arrangement which involved a Hindu majority at the Centre and were not prepared to contemplate a constituent assembly. 'I am still... of opinion that the line of action suggested in my appreciation, negative as you will probably feel that it is, remains for the present the right one in the circumstances.' (65) Again and again he persisted with his pet theory in all his letters, opposed every move to appease the Congress, underlined the need to cultivate the Muslim League, and sympathized with the Muslim League's scheme for partition. He frankly confessed that he was not keen to talk about the early ending of the British

(64) Linlithgow to Zetland, Ibid., D. 605/19, 22 February 1940, 142-54. Emphasis added.

(65) Ibid., 25 March 1940, 186-90. Emphasis added.

The Governor-General emphasized the Muslim League's conference at Lahore. 'The Muslims are now not prepared to accept any arrangement which involves a Hindu majority at the Centre. They are not prepared to accept the Federal Scheme of the Act. They are not prepared to contemplate a Constituent Assembly... that even so far as the scheme of Provincial Autonomy embodied in the Act of 1935 is concerned, they are disposed to threaten serious trouble if the Congress Ministries are allowed to return to office in provinces in which they have relinquished office without some satisfaction first being given to the claims and complaints of the Muslims... But there can be no question as I see it, your overruling or ignoring Muslim opposition of this type.' Ibid., 188-9.
rule in India. (66)

ZETLAND ANNOUNCES A NEW POLICY

The arguments repeatedly put forward by the Governor-General influenced the Secretary of State for India, who agreed with the Governor-General's conclusion that no progress was possible until Indians agreed upon 'the ways and means of governing their own country'. He was at the same time convinced that such a result would never be attained until Indians were assured 'that whatever they can agree upon amongst themselves, if not accepted without question, will at least provide a basis of negotiation between India and Britain as distinct from dictation from Britain'. He told the War Cabinet that they should accept the reasonableness of the claim 'that Indians themselves should play a predominant part in devising the sort of constitution which they deemed best suited to circum-

(66) Ibid., 5 April 1940, 201-5.

About the partition scheme of the Muslim League he wrote: 'Silly as the Muslim scheme for partition is, it would be a pity to throw too much cold water on it at the moment, though clearly we cannot accept it or associate ourselves with it ... My only other reaction is that I am not too keen to start talking about a period after which British rule will have ceased in India. I suspect that day is very remote and I feel the least we say about it in all probability the better.' Ibid.

In fact, as early as 5 February, Jinnah had informed the Governor-General that the League would pass the partition resolution at Lahore. See Choudhry Khaliquzzaman, *Pathway to Pakistan* (Lahore, 1961) 234.
stances of their country'. (67) The War Cabinet, adhering to the Conservative principle of giving importance to the assessment and suggestions of the 'man on the spot', ignored the more liberal suggestions of the Secretary of State for India and supported the Governor-General's imperialistic views.

Announcing the new policy, in the House of Lords, Zetland declared that British Government's undertaking 'to examine the constitutional field in consultation with the representatives of all parties and interests in India surely connotes not dictation but negotiation'. At the same time he threatened to crush the civil disobedience movement firmly if it was started. (68)

(67) Memorandum of Secretary of State for India to the War Cabinet, W.P. (6)/(40) 96, 9 April 1940, Ibid. D.609/26.

Earlier the Governor-General in his telegram had impressed his own views. He said that the princely attitude was stiffened. The Muslim League's resolutions 'were categorical in their insistence on consultation with the Muslim League and on its concurrence with constitutional change'. They wanted partition and the Governor-General reported that he was clear about the stiffening of their attitude and was perfectly clear as to the seriousness of the factor which that hardening on their part represented and expressed the difficulty of ignoring their claim. He did not accept a further attempt to a conference. He thought that they should be wiser to make no move in the political field. 'Nor am I, having again considered the matter, at this stage, in favour of considering, before reaching an agreement with Congress, either in the expansion of my Council or establishment of a Consultative Committee... For the present we should continue to mark time.' Secret Telegram from Linlithgow to Zetland, 6 April 1940, Ibid.

(68) Hansard, H.L., 116 (18 April 1940) cols. 169-76.

The Right-wing in the War Cabinet was not happy and Zetland was obliged to change the word 'predominant' to 'vital'. He refrained from communicating to the Cabinet another phrase lest he should be obliged to omit or alter it. The phrase was: 'The undertaking given by His Majesty's Government to examine the constitutional field in consultation with representatives of all parties and interests in India connotes not dictation but negotiation.' Zetland to Linlithgow, 24 April 1940, I.O.L. MSS., Eur. D.609/12, 110-19C.
In the House of Commons, the Under-Secretary of State for India, Hugh O'Neill, said that the Congress resolution threw overboard their obligations to the Muslim community, the minorities, and the Princes, who had all repudiated the Congress policy and that the only hope was for the parties to settle their problems and said that they could not hand over the management of India except to an organization which satisfied them about its ability to govern the country.

During the debate in the House of Commons, many Conservative members expressed their views on the problem. Earl Winterton, an important Conservative member, confessed that the Tory Party in the past did little to assist the moderate public opinion and declared that there was a sound consensus of opinion that they must find a solution to the Indian problem. He emphasized that there was a growing unity of opinion and a general demand for greater freedom for India but they differed as to the form of the constitution under which this freedom could be given and the ways and means of reconciling terrific conflicts of opinion obtaining among Indians. A united self-governing India was the goal of a vast number of politically minded people in India, and that was echoed by thousands of well-wishers of India in Britain. Stanley Reed, another Conservative member, wanted the Government to seize that opportunity to get acceptance of a scheme which would bring the parties together and lay down the principles of a constitution which could be worked. He urged that no stone should be left unturned to get together a body of people to grapple with the matter and decide on concrete proposals which would compel them all to clarify their minds. He wanted the Parliament to send out a message that it would accept the implications
of the Governor-General's declaration at Bombay. (69)

Thus there was among members of Parliament some effort to understand and appreciate India's aspirations. It was a memorable debate, and it was generally agreed that the Government of India was India's business and that self-government was India's right.

The political controversy which had not been affected by the fortunes of war, took a different turn all of a sudden in the middle of April. Important European countries fell to the Axis Powers and this had a tremendous effect on the Indian problem. In the beginning of May 1940, Chamberlain's Government was replaced by a Coalition Government headed by Winston Churchill and Leopold Amery succeeded Zetland as Secretary of State for India. Inevitably Indo-British relations took a new turn. Thus during the period covered in this part the Conservative Government supported and carried some of the reforms into effect.

However, as the war approached, Britain stiffened its control over India and the Governor-General's declaration of war made India a belligerent and allowed India to drift into an attitude of suspense and unfriendly neutrality. Having been influenced by Muslim League leaders, the Governor-General was unhelpful and prejudiced to the demands of the Indian Congress; and prevailed upon the Home Government to insist that agreement should be a pre-condition of further constitutional progress and opposed every move on the part of the Home Government. Zetland differed from the Governor-General and suggested a constructive policy but the War Cabinet supported the latter and the deadlock continued.

(69) Hansard, H.C., 359 (18 April 1940) cols., 1165-1207.