CHAPTER SIX

THE CRIPPS MISSION
With the coming into power of Winston Churchill as Prime Minister of Great Britain, the initiative in regard to the problem of India passed into the War Cabinet, and the Governor-General was obliged to act strictly according to the directions of the new Home Government — nay, of the new Prime Minister. In a way, the change in the persons guiding the destiny of India was welcome to Indian nationalists, for during the preceding seven months, the British Government had been playing 'hide and seek' with the Indian demand for independence. Now came the time and the person for a straight talk and a final termination of this sickening stalemate. (1)

Soon after he took over charge as Secretary of State for India in the Coalition Government, Leopold Amery, explaining the attitude of the new Government declared, that the attainment of free and equal partnership by India was the goal of British policy and that they recognized the propriety of Indians themselves playing an important part in devising the constitution best suited to India's conditions and the Indian outlook. He categorically stated that the promise of the revision of the Government of India Act 1935 after the war 'necessarily implies discussion and negotiation and not dictation. We have no desire to delay any of the steps that may pave the way towards an agreed settlement that will take account of the

legitimate claims of all communities and interests.' (2)

THE CONGRESS AND THE WAR

The tragic drama of the World War enacted on the continent of Europe had its repercussions on Indian nationalists. The news of the surrender of France in the middle of June shocked the world, including India. This led the All-India Congress Committee (AICC) to re-examine the problem of their co-operation in the war effort and the Congress Working Committee met at Delhi on 3 July 1940 to review their attitude towards co-operation in the war effort. Although Gandhi ji demanded the acknowledgement of the 'Complete Independence' of India by the British, he was prepared to offer the moral support of India to the war effort. The Working Committee, however, agreed with Gandhi only in respect of the demand for the acknowledgement of India's independence, but differed in respect of the offer of co-operation in the war effort. It decided 'that the acknowledgement by Great Britain of the complete independence of India, is the only solution of the problems facing both India and Britain and are, therefore, of opinion that such an unequivocal

(2) Hansard, H.C., 361 (23 May 1940) cols. 283-5.

When Amery said that the problem was 'one of discussion and negotiation and not dictation' he was repeating Lord Zetland's earlier views.

The cautious change of tone of Amery, after he became the Secretary of State for India was noted pointedly by Indian nationalists. In March 1940, he had observed that India had reached the stage of deserving independence. 'There is a feeling amongst all classes of M.P.s in this country that India's grievances should be met at the earliest possible time. Her case has been investigated very carefully by all well-informed people in England, and everyone is convinced that she has come to a position when she can evolve a scheme to manage her own affairs herself . . . .' Sitaramayya, n. 1, 186.
declaration should be immediately made and that as an immediate step in giving effect to it, a provisional National Government should be constituted at the Centre, as the sine qua non for the Congress throwing its full weight into the effort for the effective organization of the defence of the country. (3)

The Delhi resolution created the hope of a possible agreement with the Government of India and among the Indian parties. After pleading for the formation of a provisional national government at the Centre, the Working Committee made it clear that unless those measures were adopted by the British Government, all defence effort would become ineffective. Indian nationalists were perfectly aware of the nature of the threat posed by the Axis Powers and therefore, so eager to extend their co-operation in the conduct of the war that they moderated their demands and even expressed their readiness to participate in the war effort in spite of Gandhiji's opposition.

The course of the world war offered a challenge, and the Congress responded to it favourably and called upon the British Government to accept its moderate demands as a testimony to its change of attitude. It was prepared to wait for constitutional changes at a later date and to that extent there was a toning down of the earlier and oft-repeated Congress demands for immediate recognition of Indian independence. It was clear that all this was agreed to by the Congress in view of international considerations. And Jawaharlal Nehru had remarked that 'if it was at all honourably possible, we should identify ourselves completely with the struggle against

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(3) Indian National Congress, March 1940 to September 1946 (Allahabad, 1946) 74-5.
Fascism and Nazism'. (4)

THE AUGUST OFFER

The Secretary of State for India, Amery, told the War Cabinet that the Indian deadlock could not be continued. Though there was no danger of lawlessness, there was the negative situation of the absence of any real and concerted national effort in India to aid the defence of Britain and there was disquiet among Europeans and loyal elements about the ineffectiveness of India's war effort. 'On the positive side, the estrangement between the Hindu and Moslem communities has reached serious proportions.' No doubt, both the Secretary of State and the Governor-General were happy at the estrangement between the Indian parties. Amery made it clear to the War Cabinet that the Congress Working Committee rejected Gandhiji's non-violence and 'indicated the possibility of attempts by the Congress to set up defence organizations of its own'. At the same time, he cautioned them that though there existed such a desire to assist, they could not have an assurance 'that, if we fail to take advantage of it, it might not turn to a feeling that Britain's difficulties are India's opportunities'. He concluded 'that a policy of inaction in present circumstances is no longer defensible and that the state of public opinion in India offers a better prospect of success than at any time during the last 8 months'.

Amery further expressed the necessity for a statement of British intentions as to future constitutional developments 'which should be more precise, both as to the method of approach and as

(4) Jawaharlal Nehru, The Discovery of India (Calcutta, 1946) 526-7.
to date, than the far-reaching but vague generalities of previous declarations'. He emphasized the necessity of a far-reaching and precise declaration and said that though Dominion Status of the Westminster type was offered in January, 'so long as we indicate neither date nor method, we remain open to the charge that we are insincere and are merely playing for time, and until we do so, our exhortations to Indians to agree amongst themselves meet with no response and only add to the suspicion that we are deliberately procrastinating'. He told them to concede the right of Indians to frame their constitution. 'That is the core of what is reasonable in the Congress demand and is, indeed, the natural corollary of our own pledges.'

Amery pointed out that their only concern was their obligations to the minorities and that they could not stand for an assembly which would be boycotted by them. He underlined the need to secure agreement among all the sections of public opinion in India, but agreement with a definite programme in sight and a more or less definite date for its commencement. He said that there was nothing in the declaration (which he was recommending to the War Cabinet) that is not already implicit in their previous pledges. 'What it does is, by giving precision to the method of implementing those pledges, to remove the otherwise ineradicable suspicion of Indians and others that we have not really meant what we have said.' (5)

(5) Amery suggested to the War Cabinet a precise Declaration in spite of the Governor-General's suggestion that the time was not ripe for a renewal of an initiative and thought it right to lie back until he was certain that his initiative was both necessary and likely to yield results. Memorandum of the Secretary of State for India to War Cabinet, 6 July 1940, W.P. (6)(40) 173, India Office Library, London. Zetland Collection. MSS. Eur. D 609/26.
The War Cabinet approved Amery's draft declaration, but with so many changes that it became 'a much more long-winded and imprecise document' than it was before. The declaration said that Indians should frame their own constitution subject to the provision that the British Government should have the right to discharge their obligations to the minorities. (6) It is interesting to note that the Conservative Secretary of State for India wanted to go a little further to meet India's demands, but the Prime Minister strongly disliked any such move in which he had the backing of the Governor-General.

The Governor-General with the concurrence of the Home Government made the statement public on 8 August 1940, and it is therefore popularly known as the 'August offer'. The Governor-General announced the decision to expand the Executive Council with representative Indians and to establish a National War Advisory Council which would meet at regular intervals along with the representatives of the States. He said that the Government was in sympathy with the Indian desire for constitutional machinery to devise a new constitutional scheme and that the framing of that scheme 'should be primarily the responsibility of Indians themselves, and should originate from Indian conceptions of the social, economic and political structure of Indian life'. They exposed their real attitude by putting a rider, 'that they could not contemplate the

(6) In a personal letter to Zetland, his predecessor in office, Amery confessed that he had lot of trouble over the statement, mainly owing to the Prime Minister's strong dislike of any move in connection with India and he disclaimed any responsibility to the style of it. Ibid., Private Letter from Amery to Zetland, 3 August 1940.
transfer of their present responsibilities for the peace and welfare of India to any system of Government whose authority is directly denied by large and powerful elements in India's national life. Nor could they be parties to the coercion of such elements into submission to such a government.† (7) This was really meant to appease the Muslim League claims that no constitutional change should be effected without their concurrence. By this, the Muslims secured a tactical advantage and a dominant voice in future constitutional developments. The persistent attempts of the Governor-General since the commencement of the war to secure recognition to the Muslim League in any settlement of the Indian constitutional problem was thus successful.

Thus the Governor-General's response to the Congress offer of conditional support in the war effort was rigid and uninspiring. The creation of a War Advisory Council was the only innovation. It was an opportunity for honourable compromise which would have galvanized the Congress into positive action. The Governor-General made no effort to remove Congress' deep-rooted distrust of Britain. He aggravated the situation by reassuring the Muslims and other minorities, 'that Britain would not sanction a constitutional settlement for India to which they were firmly opposed'. (8)

In a way, it was an important announcement because, for the first time, the British Parliament's sole responsibility for the constitutional advance of India was thus abrogated and the Governor-

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General spoke of 'free and equal partnership'. The only anomaly was that the undue concern shown for the minorities gave them veto power over any constitutional scheme for the country as a whole. The Congress demand for a national government was answered by an expansion of the Executive Council and the creation of a War Advisory Council. Reginald Coupland thought that it was a virtual abandonment of 'the right to control the constitutional advance of India which Parliament had exercised at every previous stage, since it made it practically impossible for Parliament to repudiate a constitution on which Indians were agreed', (9) But it should be noted, that the time had come when they could not control the advance of India even if they had attempted.

Reaction to the August Offer

The Press in Britain, by and large, supported the Government's India policy and welcomed the August offer and commended it to Indians. The Daily Telegraph thought that the principal Congress demand, that any new constitution should be framed by Indians, was conceded and its right of self-determination acknowledged and that the proposal was consistent with reason and prudence. The Times viewed the offer as 'a substantial advance both in recognition of the Indian claim to self-determination and in practical provision for the extension of Indian self-government in the interval before the future constitution of the country can be finally settled'. Even the Manchester Guardian noted that the proposals marked real advance with regard to the making and the character of the constitution. With regard to the framing of the new constitution, 'they

appear to meet the principal demands that the friends of India in this country have long made. It was dissatisfied only with the 'interim' proposals, and it suggested the selection of representative Indians. It argued that the terminology of the White Paper confirmed the Government's sincerity in that Dominion Status was abandoned as a definition of the British goal for India and that there was substituted the expression 'free and equal partnership in the Commonwealth'. To the Right-wing *Daily Mail* it was an attempt to fuse the warring elements in Indian political life into a body charged with prosecuting harmoniously the great war which threatened them all. The diplomatic correspondent of the *Daily Herald* thought that the proposal to form a representative body 'to devise the framework of the new constitution' seemed a clear advance on the October offer. (10) Thus, irrespective of party affiliations, the Press as a whole supported the Government's India policy.

Only the *New Statesman and Nation* was cautious in its comments. It thought that the offer was inadequate to achieve the reconciliation of India. It pointed out that the vague offer to enlarge the Governor-General's Council by the admission of representative Indians was hardly a step towards the solution of the problem. The promise that Indians should work out their own constitution after the war was vitiated by the undertaking which gave to any considerable minority a veto over the will of the majority. Again it declared that though Indians were willing to fight against Hitler, their self-respect revolted against the Government action in declaring them belligerents without their

(10) All dated 9 August 1940.
consent. 'There is no way out of this situation, save by a promise of self-determination, precisely dated for the end of the war and free from the conditions that give Mr. Jinnah and the Princes a veto over Indian democracy...'

Parliament's Support to the August Offer

Commending the August offer to the House of Commons, the Secretary of State for India, Amery, said that the demand of the Congress for a national government could not be accepted as it prejudged the constitutional issue and that their claim to speak for India was denied by other sections, specially the Muslims. He said that the offer provided an opportunity to Indian leaders to shoulder more responsibilities and influence the war effort of the Government. The purpose was that the Executive Council with representatives of all the leading parties would enjoy a wide measure of confidence and support in the Assembly. He emphasized the need for prior agreement for further constitutional progress. He declared that they wanted India should attain the same freedom and equal partnership as those enjoyed by other Dominions. He reiterated that by their offer they wished to see India frame its own constitution in its own way. He told the House that the new members would enjoy complete equality and that trusted representatives of their parties would be nominated.

Amery announced that British control would be limited to foreign policy and that that was a limitation which was inherent in the situation. Later he said that it was a far-reaching and

(11) The New Statesman and Nation, 20 (10 August 1940) 123; (7 September 1940) 223 and (26 October 1940) 406.

revolutionary announcement. 'It was in effect a recognition in advance of India's status as a Dominion.' (13) Though the demand for a constituent assembly was not mentioned, the right of the Indians to determine the constitution was accepted. With that declaration, Parliament's abdication of its right to shape India's future began.

All members of Parliament irrespective of party affiliation supported the Government's August offer. Hugh O'Neill, a Conservative member, thought that Churchill's Government had now committed itself to constitutional advance in India. Sir Frederick Sykes*, another Conservative member, considered the statement to be a proof of their steadfast faith in India and said that they could not surrender their right to protect the minorities. Sir Stanley Reed, an important Conservative back-bencher, preferred Dominion Status or partnership and said that it contained all the pith and substance of independence and embodied the greatest freedom of political development in constitutional structure. He asked the Secretary of State to assure the Indians 'that the essential principles of the constitution framed by so representative a body as he forecast, if they are reached by a substantial measure of agreement, shall be implemented by this House'. (14)

Even the Labour Party leaders welcomed the offer and advised Indians to seize the opportunity. The Labour Party hoped that Indians would look upon the statement favourably and that an honourable way out of the difficulty would be sought. They thought

* For a brief biographical sketch see Appendix I.

(13) Ibid., 371 (22 April 1941) cols. 57-60.

(14) Ibid., 384 (14 August 1940) cols. 883-919, and H.L., 117 (14 August 1940) cols. 207-27.
that for an impartial observer, the gap between the policy outlined in the statement and the demands of the Congress was not wide and that the difference was only in the form of words and in debates. The Liberal members also commended the offer and opposed the Congress demand for independence. (15)

The debate in the Parliament showed that all parties approved the proposals. There was unanimous support for the policy of granting India 'complete representative and responsible self-government at the earliest date at which Indians could agree upon a constitution drafted by themselves.' The moral right of the new Council to have its recommendations translated into law would be limited only by the duty 'which Parliament cannot abdicate, of harmonizing its proposals by amicable negotiation, with the long-standing obligations of the British Government'. (16)

Congress Rejects the August Offer

The Congress rejected the Governor-General's invitation and the working Committee declared that the offer was opposed to the principle of democracy and the best interests of India. The Committee said that the treatment of the minority problem was the most pernicious feature of the statement and that that issue 'has been made into an insuperable barrier to India's progress'. It authorized the starting of a satyagraha movement under Gandhiji's leadership. (17)

(15) Ibid.


(17) The Indian Annual Register (July-December 1940) 196-8, 212-13. See also Sitaramayya, n. 1, 206-15.
The Congress considered that the 'August Offer' was couched in terms which convinced them that the British had no intention of parting with power in India; they were bent on encouraging division and strengthening every medieval and reactionary element. It seemed to the Congress that the British preferred civil war and the ruin of India to a relaxation of their imperialist control. (18) The Working Committee of the All-India Muslim League, though at first it seemed satisfied and sought clarifications, later rejected the offer. (19) Commenting on the rejection of the offer by Indian parties, The Economist said that the League and the Congress were alike on the horns of a dilemma and that their views of India's proper status varied wildly, and pleaded that they should find an agreement. 'At present India's politicians are tying their own country's hands behind her and the possible maladroitness of British policy a year ago gives a poor excuse for masochism on such a scale.' (20) Soon the Governor-General gave up the plan for the expansion of his Executive Council, thereby initiating the suspicion

(18) Nehru, n. 4, 530.

V.P. Menon considered that if the Congress leaders had only discussed the details of the reconstruction of the Executive Council, the Governor-General would have gone half-way to meet the Congress. But there are grounds to believe that the Governor-General was not prepared to meet the Congress.

However, there is an element of truth in what Menon has said, that is, if the Congress had joined the Executive Council at the time, and 'with Congress ministries coming back into power in the provinces, the political situation would have changed immensely to the advantage of the Congress'. See V.P. Menon, The Transfer of Power in India (Bombay, 1957) 97.

(19) Indian Annual Register (July-December 1940) 243-6.

(20) The Economist, 139 (21 September 1940) 367-8.
that he was not prepared for any change as such. As the response of the British Government was not satisfactory, the Congress decided to conduct individual civil disobedience. It was started on a modest scale to voice a moral protest and not to inconvenience the war effort. Many Congressmen were arrested by the Government of India.

BRITISH ATTITUDE TOWARDS INDIA

Sir John Wardlaw-Milne, Stanley Reed, F.W. Pethick-Lawrence and a few other members of the British Parliament drawn from various parties stated in a letter to the people of India the fundamentals of the British attitude towards the Indian desire for full political freedom and appealed for a spirit of co-operation in resolving the deadlock. They expressed the view that the British people were irrevocably resolved to give India full political freedom and wished to see India decide its own constitution as rapidly as possible. Though they could not imagine a new constitution during the war, they declared that, 'the idea of looking on India as less than an equal - as less than an ally - is foreign to the House of Commons today'. (21) But they did not realize that the authorities in India and London did not fully share these feelings which alone could have changed the Indian attitude.

Broadcasting in the B.B.C. Overseas Service, Amery said that there was no disagreement so far as the attainment of the political goal and the essentials were concerned. He declared that the British policy was to help India overcome its internal differences which were the real obstacles to its progress towards the goal of

(21) The Times, 24 December 1940.
free and equal partnership in the Commonwealth. The attainment of that goal would mark the noblest achievement of statesmanship of both the countries. (22)

There was a serious change in the war situation and the Governor-General was unable to follow a policy of 'wait and see'. Hence he announced two steps to associate Indian public opinion with the conduct of war. One step was an enlargement of the Governor-General's Executive Council by the inclusion of non-Congress, non-League members and the formation of a National Defence Council. As a result, Indian members were in a majority in the Executive Council but it was only 'a decorative piece of administrative furniture'. (23)

Though the changes were not to affect the political situation as such, the British Press commended the changes. The Times thought it to be a bold departure from tradition and commented that the inclusion of Indians in the Council meant the recognition of the fact that the war had opened a new chapter in Indo-British relations and 'represented the opening in practical form of that transitional period of gradual relinquishment of control to Indian hands, which all constitutional experts in recent years have predicted must inevitably come'. The Daily Telegraph reported that the Government circles hoped that India would find in co-operation for winning the war a way to establish a united self-governing India. The changes marked a change in the spirit if not in the letter of the Indian constitution. (24)

(22) Ibid., 25 February 1941.
(23) The Economist, 141 (26 July 1941) 102.
Parliament's Debate on the Indian Problem

On the occasion of presenting his report on the India and Burma office estimates, Amery initiated a debate on India in the House of Commons on the recently announced administrative changes in India. He declared that the issue of how far the authority for the Government of India could be transferred to Indian hands, had been generally accepted, and that they were matters only of detail and method rather, than of fundamental principle.

The Conservative member, Lord Erskine*, thought that the changes were an advance and did give Indians majority membership in the Executive Council and brought fresh minds to co-operate in India's war effort. Speaking on behalf of the Conservative back-benchers, Stanley Reed criticized the Secretary of State's measures, and thought that they were no solution of the major constitutional problem and that they would not satisfy the full aspirations of India as to its future status. He welcomed the changes as an interim policy and told the Government that the 1935 Act was dead and had to be recast for the Centre both in form and in policy. He pleaded with the Government for the setting up of a small body to study the problem and wanted a time-limit for implementing the changes.

The Labour member, Ammon*, said that the main British concern was not so much to help Indians as themselves during the war situation. The Liberal member, Sir George Schuster*, said that the Executive Council would never be the same and thought that it would be a negation of all the principles for which they were fighting the war, if they had to go on without fulfilling their purpose of setting

* For a brief biographical sketch see Appendix I.
up a constitution giving India free and equal Dominion Status. Miss Eleanor Rathbone*, an independent member, thought that there was a great measure of common agreement throughout the debate and that they had realized the great importance of those measures in the direction of an interim solution of the Indian problem. Concluding the debate, Amery said, that in the absence of constitutional advance on account of disagreement among Indians, they took interim measures which did affect the spirit of India's administration and constitution. (25)

The British Parliament thus welcomed the expansion of the Governor-General's Executive Council and the establishment of a National Defence Council as an earnest of a genuine intention to accord Indians a greater share in the conduct of administration and war effort. The Daily Telegraph said that the Parliament's debate on India showed the keen and active interest of the Government and Parliament in the welfare of India. It declared that the change was an attempt to associate representative Indians in the war effort and denied that it aimed at sidetracking Dominion Status. The Daily Mail exaggerated the importance of administrative changes when it said that the changes were in effect 'a war cabinet for India, to handle and control the vast resources which India is throwing into the conflict'. The Sunday Times felt that though the changes did not give a new constitution, they extended the openings for Indian co-operation within the existing one. 'Only by patient and persistent policies of that kind is there hope of increasing

* For a brief biographical sketch see Appendix I.

(25) Hansard, H.C., 373 (1 August 1941) cols. 1680-1750.
Indian confidence in our intentions.' (26)

Though the changes were not an attempt to meet India's nationalist demands, the British Press and public exaggerated their value and importance and considered them to be steps towards India's independence.

Referring to the demand made by the Non-Party Political Leaders' conference held in India that the Executive Council should be treated as a Dominion government, Amery said that the proposed scheme amounted to a supersession of the then existing government and not a modification of it. (27) Thus it was clear that the British Government never liked to introduce any change in India at least during the war period. Instead, Amery appealed to the Indian public to adopt the watchword 'India First'. He explained that it meant the preservation of that unity which had been Britain's greatest gift. He pointed out that partition could not solve the minority problem. 'It is a counsel of despair and, I believe, of wholly unnecessary despair.' (28)

THE ATLANTIC CHARTER

The signing of the Atlantic Charter on 12 August 1941, by President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill promising self-determination to the peoples of the world kindled hope and enthusiasm among Indian nationalists. Though the Indians had no illusions about

(26) Daily Telegraph, 2 August 1941, 2.
Daily Mail, 2 August 1941.
Sunday Times, 3 August 1941.

(27) Hansard, H.C., 376 (22 August 1941) col. 56.
See also Indian Annual Register (July-December 1941).

the value of promises, still they saw a ray of hope in clause 3 of the Atlantic Charter which pledged to respect the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they would live. (29) But on 9 September 1941, Prime Minister Churchill, in his first public reference to India declared that the Atlantic Charter did not apply to the colonies and it merely referred to states and nations of Europe which were under the Nazi yoke. He categorically stated that the joint declaration did not in any way qualify the various statements of policy which had been made from time to time about the development of constitutional government in India. (30) It is difficult to exaggerate the disquieting effects of that statement. The statement created a new and uncomfortable suspicion not merely among nationalist but among sections which had always been loyal to the British Government. The ray of hope and expectation was extinguished and it deepened further the distress of Indians.

Amery said in his speech at Manchester that the clamour for the application of the Atlantic Charter to India was a typical instance of loose thinking and declared that the August offer was no less far-reaching and far more definite in the procedure followed and the pledge involved. (31) He considered that the deadlock was due to the main elements in India's own national life. India's claim to self-government had been accepted but the limitations imposed

(29) Clause 3 said: 'They respect the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they live, and they wish to see sovereign rights and self-government restored to those who have been forcibly deprived of them.' For full details, see, Winston S. Churchill, The Second World War: Volume III The Grand Alliance (London, 1950) 393-4.

(30) Hansard, H.C., 374 (9 September 1941) cols. 67-9.

(31) The Times, 20 November 1941.
upon it were not the result of British reluctance to surrender control but was the result of ineluctable circumstances of India's external and internal relations. He declared that the parties in India should pull together with the main idea, India First. 'From every element in India the watchword "India First" demands comprehension, tolerance, compromise; acceptance of the real India as its \( \text{sic} \) exists today, not the uncompromising insistence upon the immediate and complete realization of the theoretical India which any particular element or party has inscribed upon its banner.' (32)

During the years 1940-41, British authorities did not make any further effort to meet the demands of Indian nationalists and to reach an agreement. It seemed that the Prime Minister and the Governor-General were not interested in arriving at a settlement of the problem. In the beginning, though the Secretary of State for India, viewed the problem differently, later he acquiesced. The influence of the Labour members of the Coalition Cabinet was conspicuous by its absence. In the autumn of 1941 there was a sense of irritation and frustration in the political scene of India.

**JAPAN'S ENTRY INTO THE WAR AND ITS IMPACT ON BRITISH ATTITUDE TO INDIA**

The entry of Japan into the war on 7 December 1941 by attacking Pearl Harbour and its victories radically altered the situation. As the country was exposed to invasion, it had a salutary effect on the government in so far as its attitude to the Indian nationalist demand

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(31) The Times, 20 November 1941.

was concerned. Pearl Harbour and what followed it gave a new perspective and the war began to approach and affect India intimately. The spectacular success of Japan toppled the whole pyramid of British Imperial power. The constant incantation of Dominion Status had too long masked a psychological conflict which was at the root of Britain's failure to satisfy India's aspirations. 'The repetition of past pledges, which is all the Government has provided hitherto, is beside the point, as is also the sort of appeal to forget the domestic differences.' (33) The British Government was called upon for a fresh start and the Governor-General was urged to have a representative Cabinet. Stanley Reed, a Conservative M.P., said that 'not only because of his dominant position but also because of his earlier views on the Indian question', the Prime Minister should be associated with the declaration that their goal was full Dominion Status. He proposed that immediately after the war a representative body should be called upon to frame a constitution and their conclusions should be implemented by Parliament within a definite period. Many of his colleagues on the Tory benches supported the proposal. (34)

The Times commended the suggestion of having a representative Cabinet in India. 'It requires on the one side a new willingness to co-operate actively in the prosecution of the war, on the other a new willingness to make such a Cabinet or Council the effective instrument of government in all matters save those which in time of

(33) W. Forsfall Carter, 'Partnership with India?' Fortnightly, 151 (January-June 1942) 293-302.

(34) The Times, 18 and 19 December 1941. See also Daily Herald, 20 December 1941.
war are necessarily reserved, even in democratic countries, for the Commander-in-Chief of the General Staff.' (35)

However, the Governor-General had not perceived the change in the spirit of the times. Not realizing that nothing substantial had been offered to meet the demands of the majority of Indian national leaders, the Governor-General, in his address to the annual meeting of the Chambers of Commerce said that they had done everything that could be done to bring the parties together, to provide materials for an amicable settlement and agreement between them and to smooth India's path to the realization of its goal. (36)

Parliament Clamours for a New Policy Towards India

When India was discussed in the British Parliament during January and February 1942, many members pleaded with the Government and the Prime Minister to take a new and definite step towards India to get its full co-operation in the war. Most members both in the House of Commons and in the House of Lords pleaded with the Prime Minister to make a bolder pronouncement regarding India. The Lords' debate added to the overwhelming weight of evidence that the establishment of self-government and Dominion Status for India were a definite object of British statesmanship. Replying to the pleadings of members in the Lords, the Duke of Devonshire said that their 'August offer' was a summing up, a recapitulation, and a re-affirmation of the very many declarations about India's constitutional future and was a definite promise to hand over power to Indians. He declared

(35) The Times, 23 December 1941.

(36) Linlithgow, p. 7, 306-10. See also The Times, 16 December 1941.
that the political question of transfer of power was settled many years earlier culminating in the Governor-General's definition of the objective of full Dominion Status of the Statute of Westminster type and full partnership contained in the August offer. He said that disagreement among the Indian parties came in the way of transfer of responsibility. (37) That showed that he had not understood the onset of new forces which prompted a new approach to the problem. Still the Daily Telegraph commenting on the statement of the Duke of Devonshire, said that it was plainly said and sincerely meant. The calling together of a representative constitution-making body, 'with the least-possible delay after the war was a definite promise'. (38)

Though it was clear to the British Government that India opposed Nazism and Fascism, they could not fully understand the inadequate response of India to the cause of war. The protest of Indian nationalists against the British Government for not setting up the national government had its effect on public opinion in India. With the entry of Japan into the war, far-reaching events took place in South-east Asia and the British realized the strategic significance of India to the defeat of the Axis Powers. There were references to India in the British Parliament, where members pleaded that a new offer should be made to India to mobilize its full support for the war. Many members requested the Prime Minister to announce a definite programme and clear the doubts about the aim of British


(38) Daily Telegraph, 4 February 1942
policy regarding full Dominion Status and pleaded that Indians should be invited to attend the meetings of the War Cabinet to represent Indian opinion.

President Chiang Kai-shek visited India in February 1942 with the intention of stimulating Indian resistance to the Japanese. In America, Press and public opinion pleaded with the British to arrive at a political settlement with India. President Roosevelt once spoke to Churchill in Washington about granting self-government to India and provoked so strong and so lengthy a rejoinder from Churchill that he never again raised the matter with Churchill. (39) That as late as January 1942 Churchill was against any change, is clear from his letter to the Lord Privy Seal (Cripps) dated 7 January 1942 opposing the suggestion of the Governor-General and the Cabinet for some change in the Indian Constitution to rally the people in support of the war. Churchill wanted Cripps to communicate his views to the Cabinet and he trusted that they would not depart from the position they had deliberately taken up. (40)

The war had now come to the very door step of India and the British Government was greatly exercised over the defence of this vast sub-continent, and a powerful body of articulate opinion in India believed that India should be neutral in the war. Churchill also feared that the Indians did not consider Japan as a greater threat to their freedom than British Imperialism and that therefore, they thought that they should remain neutral in the war, if somehow, the link with the British Empire was snapped. After the fall of


Singapore on 15 February, certain Congress leaders demanded the recognition of India's sovereign status and pleaded for the formation of a national government.

**British Press Pleads with the Government for a New Offer**

The Times declared that in the perspective of history, the fall of Singapore appeared as the greatest blow which had befallen the British Empire since the loss of American colonies. It pointed out that the progress towards the full realization of the proclaimed new principles was grudging and faltering. 'Lack of imagination, insufficient flexibility, too much attention to past traditions and established interests, prevented that revolutionary and whole hearted re-orientation of British policy and outlook which could alone have equipped us to meet the hurricane in the Far East and now the first condition of recovery.' It said that a change of spirit is required and declared that the new machinery must be matched by a new spirit of partnership between equals - a partnership to be embodied after victory in new forms of mutual obligation. The Daily Mail declared that 'on the wisdom of the decisions we take now will depend the whole future of our Indian Empire' and urged upon the appointment of a new Secretary of State for India with War Cabinet status. The Daily Telegraph argued that in spite of India's great contribution to the war, 'the political situation in India is a serious source of weakness and misgiving, nothing that might reasonably be expected, to improve it should remain untried'.

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(41) The Times, 28 February 1942.
Daily Mail, 24 February 1942.
Daily Telegraph, 26 February 1942.
THE CRIPPS MISSION  MARCH - APRIL 1942

Great issues sprung up for India from the Japanese success in the initial stages of the war. The Government felt that it must do something now to prepare India for the new ordeal. That emerged from a practical appreciation of the strategic issues at stake and the psychological inspiration required. There was a great opportunity for national leadership in India and British statesmanship to give practical expression to that overwhelming feeling of goodwill which marked the attitude of British people towards India. (42)

Twenty-nine Labour M.P.s signed a motion demanding a 'plain declaration by the Government' that it recognized the national independence of India and was prepared to negotiate with leaders of the Indian national movement 'forthwith on means of transference of sovereign authority to an Indian provisional government'. (43) In fact even the Conservative 1922 Committee held a special meeting on 5 March and told Amery to take a new initiative immediately to meet the Indian demands. In both Conservative and Labour sides of the House there was a strong demand for concessions to the aspirations of Indian nationalists in view of the grave threat to the country. (44)

* The 1922 Committee is an organization of the entire back-bench membership of the Conservative Party in the House of Commons. It acts as a sounding-board of opinion on issues of policy. It keeps the party leadership in touch with private members' opinion and on occasion invites the Front Bench to explain Government policy to the back-benches.

(42) Sunday Times, 1 March 1942.
(43) The Times, 6 March 1942, 4.
(44) Ibid.
The British Cabinet found India's demand for more freedom one of the knottiest problems of the war. On 25 February, the Prime Minister formed a Cabinet sub-committee, under the chairmanship of Labour Party leader Clement Attlee, to study the course of Indian affairs from day to day and advise the War Cabinet. The War Cabinet had complete confidence in the Committee, and was largely guided by its advice. Churchill had reserved the right to attend the sub-committee's meetings, but as the views of the committee were so much in accordance with his own convictions, he never found an occasion to do so. (45)

The Cabinet Sub-Committee kept Indian affairs under close review and gave long and careful consideration to the whole question. On 15 February, Singapore surrendered and an all-party conference in India had put forward proposals, for the recognition of India's sovereign status and for the formation of an all-India national government. The issues were carefully considered by the Cabinet.

The British Cabinet on further consideration of the issue, felt that 'an offer of Dominion Status after the war must be made in the most impressive manner to the peoples of India'. (46) The Cabinet

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(45) W.S. Churchill, n. 39, 184-5.

Churchill says that Amery was the only member of the Conservative Party on the Cabinet Sub-Committee on India. All the others were Labour, Liberal or non-party. But Attlee in his Autobiography has said that it included R.A. Butler also. See Ibid., 184; C.R. Attlee, As It Happened (London, 1954) 180-1. Francis Williams, A Prime Minister Remembers (London, 1961) 206.


Personally Churchill was for asking the different communities of India to give them leading men to the constituent assembly, which would have avoided dealing only with party politicians. Prime Minister to Viceroy of India, 16 February 1942, quoted in Ibid., 184.
considered the Indian problem on the morning of 3 March 1942. Though Churchill favoured Dominion Status for India, several of his Cabinet colleagues seemed to have suggested a modified form of self-government, with further concessions after the war. (47)

The Cabinet Sub-Committee accepted a proposal propounded by Sir Stafford Cripps for a representative Indian constituent assembly to help Indians to decide their future. Attlee thought that 'the plan was a bold one, but was accepted by the Cabinet. This decision reflected great credit on those members of the Government who were not sanguine as to the feasibility of Indian self-government, and especially upon the Prime Minister, whose views on the subject were very strong.' (48) Thus the Cripps plan was a joint venture of the Labour and Conservative members of the Cabinet. But the Cabinet Sub-Committee seemed to have prepared a plan acceptable to Churchill. Though it is difficult to pinpoint the share of either party in framing the Cripps proposals, it is clear that if the Labour Party, 

(47) Ibid., 184.

On 3 March 1942, the King wrote in his diary that the P.M. told him about the Indian Declaration for Dominion Status after the war, which was considered by the Cabinet that morning. 'F.D.R. had urged Winston to give India a promise of Dominion Status now, as he thought it would unite all Indians to work for the war effort ... W. explained to F.D.R. that India was a continent the size of Europe ... that it was very difficult to reconcile the differences between Hindus and Mahommedans. The latter are of a minority of 100,000,000, & most of the Indian troops are Mahommedans. The draft declaration states to create a new Indian Union which shall constitute a Dominion associated with the U.K., & other Dominions, by a common allegiance to the Crown, but equal to them in every respect, & free to remain in or to separate itself ... W. is not satisfied with it.' King's Diary, 3 March 1942. Quoted in John W. Wheeler-Bennett, King George VI: His Life and Reign (London, 1958) 696-7.

(48) C.R. Attlee, n. 45, 131.
which was a major partner in the Coalition Government, had desired
to meet India's demand, Churchill would have definitely given in
during that critical stage of the war. As a result, the draft
proposals were the result of a policy approved by all the parties
represented in the Cabinet.

On 8 March the Japanese Army had entered Rangoon. The War
Cabinet constantly discussed Indian affairs and the Cabinet thought
of breaking the political deadlock with a view to organizing
effective defence of India. The fall of Singapore and Rangoon
threatened India. These factors forced the formidable and stubborn
British Prime Minister and the lethargic British Cabinet to some new
venture. As a result, Churchill in a statement to the House of
Commons on 11 March 1942 announced the Cripps Mission which represented
a new departure in British policy towards India. The British
Government's reactions to the Governor-General's proposals were
embodied in a draft declaration and it was decided to send a War
Cabinet Minister out to see whether it could be put across on the
spot... Stafford Cripps... volunteered, for this thankless
and hazardous task, as Churchill puts it, 'to conduct direct
discussions on the spot with the leaders of all Indian parties and communities'. (49)

(49) W. S. Churchill, n. 39, 190.

About the genesis of the Cripps Mission, there are different
interpretations. Attlee in his Autobiography claims that he had a
long talk with Cripps and Nehru, prior to the war, on the possible
lines of dealing with the problem of Indian self-government and
they had sketched out the idea of a constituent assembly for Indians
to decide on their future. A plan of that kind was propounded by
Cripps and was accepted by the Cabinet. However Cripps' biographer
claims that Cripps discussed Indian problem one week-end with the
Prime Minister early in March 1942 and the Mission sprang up from
those discussions. Attlee, n. 45, 180-1; Francis Williams, n. 45,
206; Colin Cooke, The Life of Richard Stafford Cripps (London,
1957) 234.

However, another Conservative minister at the time gives the
credit to Roosevelt and American opinion. See P. J. Grigg,
Prejudice and Judgement (London, 1948) 327.
Announcement of the Cripps Mission

Making a statement in the House of Commons on 11 March 1942 on the Cripps Mission, the Prime Minister declared that 'the crisis in the affairs of India arising out of the Japanese advance has made us wish to rally all the forces of Indian life to guard their country from the menace of the invader'. The 'August offer' of 1940 had promised Dominion Status after the war under a constitution to be framed by Indians, subject to agreement among the Indian parties. The intention of the Cripps Mission was 'to clothe these general declarations with precision and to convince all classes, races and creeds in India of our sincere resolve, the War Cabinet have agreed unitedly upon conclusions for present and future action', and proposed to send a member of the War Cabinet to India 'to satisfy himself upon the spot; by personal consultation, that the conclusions upon which we are agreed and which we believe represent a just and final solution, will achieve their purpose'. He said that Cripps would consult the Governor-General and the Commander-in-Chief on the military situation. (50)

(50) Hansard, H.C., 378 (11 March 1942) cols. 1069-70.

The Prime Minister said that they had thought of setting forth immediately the terms to aid India in the realization of full self-government. 'We are, however, apprehensive that to make a public announcement at such a moment as this might do more harm than good. We must first assure ourselves that our scheme would win a reasonable and practical measure of acceptance and thus promote the concentration of all Indian thought and energies upon the defence of the native soil. We shall ill serve the cause if we made a declaration which would be rejected by essential elements in the Indian world and which provoked fierce constitutional and communal disputes at a moment when the enemy is at the gates of India.' Ibid.
The Cripps Mission was the result of the critical war situation and not of any sudden generosity on the part of the British Government towards the Indian people. The Cabinet wanted to gain time. This was made clear by the Prime Minister in his letter to the Governor-General just before the announcement of the Mission. His one intention was to prove that though they were sincere, the problem was insoluble and he confessed that that step was unavoidable. In his letter to the Governor-General dated 10 March 1942, Churchill said: 'The announcement of his Cripps mission will still febrile agitation, and will give time for the problem to be calmly solved, or alternatively proved to be, for the time being insoluble.' The document represented united policy and if that was rejected, 'our sincerity will be proved to the world, and we shall stand together and fight on it here, should that ever be necessary'. He was bound by the draft declaration which was their utmost limit. 'It would be impossible . . . to stand on a purely negative attitude, and the Cripps Mission is indispensable to prove our honesty of purpose and to gain time for the necessary consultations.' (51)

That Japanese military success and the threat posed thereby to India was the immediate cause of the Cripps Mission was later confirmed inadvertently by Churchill himself. He declared that those proposals were made at a moment when the danger of Japanese invasion threatened India in a terrible manner and 'I personally was induced to agree to them by the all compelling war interest, as it seemed of trying to rally all the forces in India to the defence of their soil against Japanese aggression'. (52)

(51) Prime Minister to Viceroy of India, 10 March 1942. Quoted in W.S. Churchill, n. 39, 190-1. Emphasis added.

Reception in Britain

The announcement cheered Conservatives and Labour as well. Members were worried that the effort for a settlement came a little too late and that the Government had tarried too long in sending a Cabinet minister to urge the adoption of a policy that might have commended itself to India before the war began.

In a leader 'Message to India', The Economist said that it would be a notable attempt to break through the racial and social barriers which had held the British and Indian leaders apart. It declared that the offer was belated and 'it would be hypocritical to deny that the expediency of the moment has given British policy the air of a death-bed repentence... Now the ground has been cut away under them by events... without free aid of all Indians... India may well be indefensible.' Though Churchill was no enthusiast for Indian self-government, he recognized and accepted it as the agreed national policy and made a bold bid to achieve a reconciliation of the conflicting sections. (53) The Times hailed the announcement of the Mission as 'one of those decisions whose boldness strikes the imagination. It imparts a breath of fresh life and hope to an issue which had begun to seem well-nigh desperate'. The Daily Telegraph eloquently noted the purpose of the Mission. 'There is a fine sense of realities in the Government's new approach to a solution of the Indian deadlock. It is the merit of the proposals that they go straight to the heart of India's problem, which is her own disunion. They recognize that without our proffered help and without India's responsive co-operation there can be no hope of unity which is so essential alike to her constitutional development

(53) The Economist, 142 (14 March 1942) 345-6.
and to her defence against imminent peril... The Observer thought that the Mission was destined to mark the end of British Imperialism and its replacement by a more equal and enduring link between India and Britain. (54)

THE CRIPPS PLAN

The purpose of the Cripps Mission was to explain the Indian leaders the British Government's proposals 'for India's attainment of full self-government after the war', and to express in person the Government's desire that Indian leaders should effectively participate 'for the defence of India and the prosecution of the world war effort as a whole'. (55) The proposals were the unanimous result of the deliberations of a body of people who were known to have had widely differing outlooks upon the Indian question. In his Press conference and two broadcasts Stafford Cripps explained the object of the plan as the creation of an Indian Union equal in status to that of Britain and other Dominions in every respect and declared that they would set up a constituent assembly after the war to frame a new constitution for India and promised to accept such a constitution, subject only to the right of any province of British India to keep away, if it so desired. A treaty was to be signed between the constitution-making body and the British Government with provisions for the participation of the States. (56)


(56) India (Lord Privy Seal's Mission) Command Paper, 6350 (1942) 4-6. See also Colin Cooke, n. 49, 286.
The British Press commended the Cripps plan emphasizing different aspects without caring to consider whether it attempted to meet India's demands, especially for the interim war period. It was pointed out that it was a precise and clear definition of the 'goal which British policy in India has stated in general terms for a generation'. It placed the responsibility for India's future upon Indians themselves and the Indian Government was to have the right to withdraw from the Commonwealth should it so desire. But the changes were to be effective only after the war. The Daily Telegraph was realistic when it pointed out that the novelty of the plan was 'that for the first time it names a date, suggests machinery and defines exactly the position which India would enjoy under Dominion Status'. Even the New Statesman and Nation commended it as a bold and straightforward offer. 'The offer is as large as it is honest. . . . the substance, nonetheless, of independence, is plainly in this offer.' (57)

The British public, including many Conservatives, felt that if unity could not be achieved among Indian parties, the only way seemed to be to partition India. They held that the real novelty of the Cripps proposals lay in the bold solution it suggested for the resolution of the communal deadlock. They thought that the offer represented a statesmanlike attempt to meet India's desire for liberation. (58) Thus the offer was commended by the Press and

(57) The Economist, 142 (4 April 1942) 453-4.
The Times, 30 March 1942.
Daily Telegraph, 30 March 1942, 2.
New Statesman and Nation, 23 (January-June 1942) 217-18.

the public without a full realization of its limitations. The declaration was an attempt to secure co-operation on the basis of assurances of future constitutional advance. 'If it was not too little, it seemed to many in the early spring of 1942 too late . . .'
If it be conceded that the draft Declaration was sound in principle and statesmanlike in approach, it has still to be noted that it was produced at a desperate hour to ease a well-nigh desperate situation.' (59) In fact, the offer was not a satisfactory attempt 'either in the procedure adopted or in its contents'. It was rigid and suffered from a few initial drawbacks. There was no agreement either between the Governor-General and Cripps or between Cripps and the War Cabinet. (60) The declaration was provisional and prospective. It was not to be declared until Cripps procured the necessary measure of assent and the promised independence could not be attained until the new constitution was framed and thus it was prospective. (61)

Indian Parties and the Cripps Plan

The proposals published on 30 March embodied different items


In 1940 the British Government reacted to the fall of France with the "August offer"; in 1942 to the surrender of Singapore with the Cripps Mission. In the long months between the outbreak of war and the invasion of the low countries it took no important initiative. If its action, in 1942, was ill timed not least because it had the appearance of being prompted not by conviction but by calamity, that was because earlier inaction had made some move almost imperative.' Ibid., 154-5.

(60) See H. N. Brailsford, Subject India (New York, 1943) 205 and V. P. Menon, n. 18, 120-1.

(61) R. Coupland, Indian Politics 1936-1943 (London, 1944) 277.
palatable to different tastes. To the Congress there was the preamble which spoke of Dominion Status, the right to secede and the constituent assembly. The Muslim League had the comfortable provision of any province having the right not to accede to the Indian Union and States were free to join or keep aloof. Cripps in his very first Press Conference stated that Defence could not be transferred even if all the parties joined in making a united demand in that behalf. 'That clinched the decision of the Working Committee of the Congress to reject the Cabinet's proposals.' The Working Committee considered that the British authorities never intended to part with power and at Cripps' request, the resolution was kept in abeyance till 10 April 1942. After a brief study of the offer, Gandhiji was reported to have said to Cripps: 'Why did you come, if this is what you have to offer? If this is your entire proposal to India, I would advise you to take the next plane home.' Cripps replied: 'I will consider it.' (62)

It became clear to Cripps that the Congress and Gandhiji were opposed to the declaration. Cripps never liked the breakdown of the talks on defence only and thought of a compromise plan. He got authority from the British Cabinet 'to pursue the idea of a limited transfer of functions.' It was not opposed by the Governor-General


When he read those proposals for the first time, Nehru was profoundly depressed for he had expected something more substantial from Cripps as well as from the critical situation that had arisen. The more he read those proposals and considered their implications, the greater was his feeling of depression. Nehru, n. 4, 549.

See also Louis Fischer, The Life of Mahatma Gandhi (New York, 1951) 386.
and the Commander-in-Chief. (63) The biographer of Cripps says that not a single member of the Congress Working Committee was in favour of acceptance of the proposals and rightly he has said that Cripps was not in a position to manœuvre, to accept suggestions or make modifications as he came to persuade them to accept the plan as a whole. Still they went on talking. (64) At this stage Colonel Louis A. Johnson, United States President's personal representative, intervened and prevented an early breakdown of talks with the Congress. (65) At a time when there were high hopes of an agreement, it is significant that the British Ambassador in the United States, Lord Halifax, speaking on the Indian problem, in New York, on 7 April 1942, by implication forecast the impending failure of the Mission owing to the unreasonable demands of the Congress leaders on the issue of defence. (66)

After consultations with all the leaders concerned, Johnson, along with Cripps, put forward a new plan called Cripps-Johnson.

(63) Colin Cooke, n. 49, 290.

For details of Cripps' talks at Delhi and the causes for the failure of his Mission see H.N. Brailsford, n. 60, 73-81.


(65) For the role of Colonel Johnson and his status and American President's interest in Indian settlement, see M.S. Venkataramani and B.K. Srivastava, 'The United States and the Cripps Mission', India Quarterly (New Delhi), 19 (July-September 1963) 214-65.


There seems to be no doubt that Halifax delivered the speech at the behest of the British Government to convince the Americans about the genuineness of their offer and to create the impression that Indians were responsible for the failure of the Mission. See also Amerasia (New York), (6 May 1942) 121-32.
Plan. (67) That new plan was proposed to the Congress leaders by Cripps. He had not informed the Governor-General and the Commander-in-Chief. 'There was anxiety at home that Sir Stafford's zeal might have outpaced his discretion and this was shared by the King.' The King took exception to bringing in Johnson and for having kept the Governor-General and the Commander-in-Chief ignorant. (68) The Governor-General sought for specific instructions from the Prime Minister and the latter, after a meeting with Harry Hopkins, adviser of the United States President, cabled to the Governor-General that Louis Johnson was not acting as personal representative of the President, thereby implying that no importance should be given to him. Churchill also sent a telegram to Cripps reminding him that his duty was not to negotiate the terms of an agreement but to explain and clarify the terms of a statement of policy that could not be altered. (69)

During that period, Cripps had consulted Churchill on three occasions. He might have also consulted other members of the War Cabinet. The Cripps offer stressed that Indian independence would be recognized after the war, the only change contemplated during the war was that the Executive Council would be entirely Indian

(67) V. P. Menon, n. 18, 122.

(68) Wheeler-Bennett, n. 47, 628.

and would consist of the leaders of the political parties. (70)
The scheme of dyarchy contemplated by Cripps in his formula dated 7 April, gave place to the complete transference of the Defence Department to a representative Indian member with the exception of functions to be exercised by the Commander-in-Chief as war member of the Executive Council. It was a delegation of function rather than division. As Cripps had been reminded of his limited authority and as he had no support from the Governor-General for his new plan, when the Congress President and Nehru met him for clarifications and asked him about the lists, he referred them back to the earlier lists which had been considered and rejected already. That led to the final rejection and the end of the chapter of negotiations. 'Defence and Cabinet responsibility were the rocks on which Cripps scheme split.' (71) The Congress rejected the offer, because, it seemed to Congress leaders that 'in today's grave crisis, it is the present that counts, and even proposals for the future are important in so far as they affect the present . . . For this present the British War Cabinet's proposals are vague and altogether incomplete, and it would appear that no vital changes in the present structure


Alan Moorehead, correspondent of the Right-wing Conservative paper, Daily Express covered the Cripps Mission in Delhi. He says that Cripps agreed to shift his ground slightly and wired suggestions to London for an alteration of the draft. Cripps suddenly became much more rigid. He had been probably pulled up by his senior partners in London. He made it clear that there would be no change in the Governor-General's position. Alan Moorehead, 'When Cripps went to India,' Gandhi, Nehru, Jinnah and the British in Action, Harper's Magazine, 125 (May 1943) 607-19.

See also The Hindu, 7 and 8 April 1942, 4.

(71) Sitaramayya, n. l, 317-18, 322.
are contemplated.' (72)

At his press conference on 11 April, Cripps announced the failure of his Mission and declared that the draft was withdrawn and that they would revert to the position as it was before he came to India. As if to sign and seal the doom of all chances of an amicable settlement British Government announced the withdrawal of their offer. (73) Thus the Cripps Mission failed in its aim to solve the Indian deadlock. By shifting his ground from a 'Cabinet' and a 'National Government' to the Governor-General's Executive Council, Nehru felt, Cripps had retreated to the August offer. It is interesting to note that this view was confirmed by Reginald Coupland when he wrote that the offer did not represent a change of policy. 'In principle, in fact, the Draft Declaration went no further than the "August offer".' (74)

Indian nationalists had demanded freedom immediately and the alliance of a free people and their national government in alliance with Britain against the Axis Powers. Both Cripps and the British Government were emphatic that the Indian proposals were 'impossible of application because they would mean an alteration in the constitution of Britain and of India'. Once that difference became clear, 'all subsequent discussions could only take the form of elucidating

(72) Indian National Congress, n. 3, 108-11.

In fact, since the commencement of the war, the Congress had demanded from the British, something concrete immediately as a testimony to the sincerity of their promises.

(73) The Indian Annual Register (January-December 1942) 246-7.

See also The Hindu, 12 April 1942.

(74) R. Coupland, n. 55, 45-6.

Prof. Coupland had joined the staff of Stafford Cripps during his Mission to India.
details and a mutual searching for points of vantage in justification of each other's position'. (75)

Indian national leaders found that the British authorities were not prepared to part with power, and the Congress stated that 'the test of the offer in its application to the present was inadequate and unacceptable'. The talks mainly broke down on defence and on the status of Indians in the Executive Council and not on the communal question as Cripps later said in the Parliament. The proposals were not meant for modifications and alterations but to be accepted or rejected as a whole and that was mainly responsible for their failure. Though the visit of Cripps raised hopes, the subsequent discovery that he could not offer even immediate Dominion Status was a disastrous let down. He simply miscalculated the fact 'that the Indians regard the afterwar situation as now less certain than the after life . . . A little more patience and a few more concessions would have crowned the Cripps mission with success.' (76) All parties in India rejected the proposals, though for different reasons and its significance could not be understood properly by the British Government and the Parliament.

**British Attitude to Indian Demands**

The Governor-General and the high officials were opposed to the settlement. Nehru thought that it was a propaganda stunt for American consumption, and that Churchill did not send Cripps to solve the deadlock. When Cripps realized that he was not being

(75) Eric Estoric, n.s. 64, 308-10.

(76) Edgar Snow, 'Must Britain Give Up India'? The Saturday Evening Post, 215 (12 September 1942) 9-10.
supported by the Governor-General and the Cabinet in full, he backed out. Especially after his speech in London blaming the Congress for the failure, Indian nationalists were convinced that there was no genuine desire on the part of the British Government to part with power. From the details of negotiations, it had become clear that the moment the document was handed over to Indian leaders and published to the world, 'the British Government were not prepared to yield one inch of power to the Indians now and wanted their willing co-operation as complete subordinates on the strength of a "post-dated cheque" of a questionable character. Neither the earnest advocacy of Stafford, nor his drive, nor his eloquence could persuade the Indian leaders that there was more than this in the proposals he had brought. Indeed the more Nehru and Azad drew out the details of the proposed Defence portfolio which the Indians were to hold, the more hollow appeared the proposal and the deeper became Indian suspicions of the whole scheme.' (77)

Churchill made an offer in an attempt to pacify the critics, both in the country and abroad. Though at the face of it, the offer looked generous it never attempted to change the nature of the British rule for the duration of the war at least, even if it had been accepted by Indian leaders. Churchill had made his gesture of appeasement to the United States and to the Labour members of the War Cabinet. It was a gesture without real meaning. When Churchill received news from India about the failure of the Mission, 'he is reported to have danced around the Cabinet room. No tea with treason, no truck with American or British Labour...

(77) Eric Estorick, n. 64, 313.
sentimentality, but back to the solemn — and exciting — business of war.' (78) The London correspondent of The Chicago Daily News (11 April 1942) reported that it was clear that there never was any more than a slim, sporting chance that the British proposals would be accepted, and in London, 'disappointment over the failure is mitigated by the feeling that the intransigents of the all-India Congress party can be held principally responsible'.

The Cripps Mission attempted to revitalize the ideas of Indian nationalists towards the war. The understanding tone of the Parliamentary debates, the restraint of Churchill's own statement, the antecedents of Cripps and the air of mystery surrounding the proposals helped to arouse considerable expectations. However, it was a full-blooded offer of complete self-government subject to certain limitations. But the changes were to be effective only at the end of the war whereas Indian nationalists were more concerned with the immediate changes, in token of a change in the British attitude towards India. 'Politically the Cripps Mission had marked a stage in the retrocession of the British from power in India which it was never possible to retrace.' The main purpose of the Mission was to get a union of parties for the defence of India; the constitutional scheme was primarily a means to an end. (79)

As regards the Congress demand for an Indian Defence Minister, the British Press and the public were united in their opposition. To them, with the advance of the Japanese army, it was unreasonable to transfer military control to inexperienced civil administration.


(79) **Wheeler-Bennett**, *n.s.* 47, 696-7, 702.
No section of British opinion was ready to agree to such a demand. In fact, many of them felt that it would not be possible to make another offer to India in war time. A section of the Labour Party thought that it was wiser if the Government put it on record that it was ready to re-open negotiations at any favourable moment. Some Conservatives also shared that view. They thought that having gone so far they should not now yield to understandable temptation to fold its hands in a sort of injured passivity.

ACHIEVEMENTS OF CRIPPS MISSION

In the Parliamentary debate on the Cripps Mission, the Conservative member, Cadogan, said that Cripps clarified the obscure situation and had laid a solid foundation upon which the edifice of the Indian constitution could be erected. Another Conservative member, Stanley Reed, said that the Declaration was impressive for its sonorous language copied from the Statute of Westminster. The Declaration laid down in language clarified beyond all possible doubt the intention of the Parliament and the country and he took the finished and complete goal of Dominion Status or independence if desired, and also the means by which the constitution could be hammered out on the soundest basis immediately after the war. He thought that Cripps was the victim of their own mistakes and of the manner in which they had treated the defence of India upto that time reserving it as their own province without delegating any partnership to Indians. He wanted some further steps to be taken towards the authoritative representation of public opinion in India.

Even the Labour member, Milner, declared that though the Labour Party was committed to self-government for India, it was
quite a different thing from the immediate transference in the middle of a war of full responsibility with the dangers and the constitutional changes that involved. The demand for the immediate change of the constitution was an amazing proposition to a liberal member, Lord Crewe, who felt that the Mission had a useful effect in clearing the air and steadying public opinion. Many believed that the impression was created that but for the hardening of the attitude of the British government, Cripps would have conceded the form of national government which Congress desired and on which all parties were actually agreed.

Replying to the demand, Amery, in the House of Commons, and the Duke of Devonshire, in the House of Lords felt that the proposals were the natural and inevitable culmination of a steady development of thought and feeling about Indian political aspirations. The Mission marked a peculiar degree of unity of outlook and policy with regard to India that had been reached by the Government, by Parliament, and by British public opinion. Contrary to what was felt by the Press and the public, they denied that the proposals were a sudden improvisation to meet a critical external situation, the death-bed repentence of an effete Imperialism. (80)

As the Round Table has noted: 'While Congress leaders implied that no change in the constitution was being sought, they actually wanted these changes to be made by means of an agreed convention which would bind the Viceroy to accept the decision of his Council.' (81) Though a few changes and understandings could have

(80) Hansard, H.C., 379 (29 April 1942) cols. 842-906;
     H.L., 122 (29 April 1942) cols. 749-60.

(81) Round Table, 32 (June 1942) 377-90.
met the Congress demands, the authorities interpreted them to be a requirement for fundamental changes in the constitution. In a way the new offer was, save in minor detail, no advance on the declaration of August 1940. Though some concessions were offered, 'the unpalatable fact remained that final authority was still to rest with the India Office and the Viceroy, and while the bait of a further enlargement of the Viceroy's Council was met with indifference, the paltry functions suggested for the Indian Defence Minister had in Indian eyes, almost the air of an insult'. (82)

Still the British Press and public attached importance to the Mission. The Times declared that a British envoy, for the first time, with a policy approved by Government, talked on frank and friendly terms of equality with Indian leaders of all parties in an atmosphere of mutual respect and confidence. It held that the negotiations, though barren of immediate results, laid the foundations for the future. That was the measure and magnitude of Cripps' achievement. The mood of the British public was reflected by the Daily Mail when it pointed out that the Cripps Mission was worthwhile and the Indian problem was revealed to the world as a complex tangle of racial, religious, and political interests and the gesture did much to help Anglo-American relations. The Daily Telegraph showered praise on Churchill and the War Cabinet for the offer of the Cripps plan and blamed the Congress. 'What they [the Congress] asked was nothing less than the abolition of the existing constitution and the establishment here and now of a 'National Government' responsible neither to the Viceroy nor ... to any body

(82) Lord Huntingdon, Commonsense About India (London, 1942) 56.
else . . . The Government of India was to be handed over without further ado to the present party leaders which in practice meant Congress. But it was otherwise, for the concessions actually made by Britain, 'apart from further promises, did not go beyond Indianising the Viceroy's Executive Council within the framework of the present constitution which dates back to 1919'. However, Cripps felt, in common with the Prime Minister, the War Cabinet and the British people, that all that could be done had been done.

Thus during the critical stage of the war period, the influence of Conservative members, specially the Prime Minister and the Governor-General in the making of British Coalition Government's India policy was very great. At the same time, the Labour leaders colluded with the Conservatives and acquiesced in their policy. At the critical stages of the war, and to pacify the critics, a few attempts were made to solve the Indian deadlock on the basis of proposed changes in future. The attempt failed because the offers never aimed at changing the nature of the British rule immediately. Thus they were not attempts, in the real sense, to meet the demands of Indian nationalists.