CHAPTER SEVEN

THE WAVELL PLAN
The British Coalition Government made a futile attempt to solve the Indian deadlock by sending Sir Stafford Cripps with an offer to effect constitutional changes at the end of the war. But the offer did not take cognizance of the immediate demands of Indian nationalists. The British Government was thus successful in achieving its primary aim of convincing the world that the British were right in their policy towards India, and of blaming Indians for all the troubles as well as for the failure of the Cripps Mission. At the same time, Indian nationalists were very bitter about the attitude of the British Government. It confirmed their suspicion that the British Government was not prepared to part with power. The British Government, on the other hand, could pretend that they had done all they could in the circumstances. Surprisingly, the Press, the public and all the political parties shared the official British stand without question and blindly supported the Government in its unimaginative policy towards India.

'QUIT INDIA' MOVEMENT

On 2 July 1942, the Governor-General's Executive Council was expanded with the addition of six more Indian (non-Congress and non-League) members, but this made no impression on nationalist India. In fact, the abrupt termination of the Cripps' negotiations was a surprise and the reaction was strong and bitter. Indian nationalists had no hope of a settlement with Britain and no chance was given to the people of India to defend their country against invasion. The
Government of India tried to suppress the normal political and public activities and tightened their pressure. Indian nationalists did not like to submit to the official pressure and they decided to show their anguish in action. (1)

The Congress Working Committee met at Wardha from 6 to 14 July 1942, and urged the withdrawal of British power from India and pointed out that the Congress wished to take no hasty step and pleaded with the British Government to accept the Congress proposal. The resolution declared that frustration in India over British intrusiveness gave rise to ill-will against Britain and to growing satisfaction at the success of Japanese arms. The Congress would change the ill-will against Britain into goodwill if India felt the 'glow of freedom'. The resolution made it clear that a provisional government 'representative of all important sections of the people of India', would be formed on the British withdrawal. Its representatives and the representatives of Britain 'will confer together for the adjustment of future relations and co-operation of the two countries as allies in the common task of meeting aggression'. The resolution stated that the Congress did not like to embarrass Britain or the Allied Powers in their prosecution of the war. After emphasizing its impatience to achieve the national purpose, the Congress pleaded with the British 'to accept the very reasonable and just proposal . . . not only in the interest of India but also that of Britain and of the cause of freedom to which the United Nations proclaim their adherence'. If the appeal failed, the Congress would

(1) Jawaharlal Nehru, The Discovery of India (Calcutta, 1946) 562-8.
then be reluctantly compelled to utilize all its non-violent strength for the vindication of the political rights and liberty of India under the stewardship of Gandhiji. (2)

Conservative Reaction in Britain

The Working Committee's 'Quit India' resolution was harshly criticized by the Press and public and in Parliament in Britain. The Daily Telegraph set the tone of criticism when it declared that the Congress was not interested in independence but only in the entrenchment of its own dictatorship. 'Better in their view the Japanese yoke than a "free" India not tyrannized over by themselves.' It opposed further attempts to appease the Congress and commented that the British people who championed the case of Indian self-government were 'shocked and repelled' by the imbecility of Wardha. The obvious reference was to the British Labour Party which had condemned the very contemplation of civil disobedience at such a crisis in the world's affairs as 'proof of political irresponsibility'. The Times considered that the Congress resolution was 'a threat directed against the war effort and the security of India and the purposes of the United Nations'. It felt that Britain could not abdicate its authority during the war. To The Economist, the Wardha resolution meant revolt. Supporting the suppression of the movement, it observed later that the Congress Committee seemed to have in mind 'one of the most dramatic acts of political blackmail in world history'. (3)

(2) Indian National Congress: March 1940 to September 1946 (Allahabad, 1946) 120-4.

(3) Daily Telegraph, 16 and 23 July 1942.
The Times, 18 July 1942.
The Economist, 143 (25 July 1942) 92 and (8 August 1942) 161-2.
On 21 July, Amery held a private parliamentary meeting of some M.P.s at the House of Commons and discussed the position created by the Congress Working Committee's decision. Later, in the House of Commons on 30 July, Amery declared that though the Cripps plan was withdrawn, the Government stood firmly by the broad intention of their offer and reiterated their resolve to give the fullest opportunity for the attainment by India of complete self-government and also warned that the Government would not flinch from their duty to meet the situation. (4)

In his statement to the Press on the Indian problem, Cripps reiterated the resolve of the British Government to give the fullest opportunity for the attainment by India of complete self-government after the war. But he declared that because of various difficulties, they had recognized 'that while the war lasts a complete change-over and an entirely new constitution are an impossibility'. (5)

On the eve of the All-India Congress Committee (AICC) session, the Daily Telegraph threatened that Britain would neither quit India nor tolerate sabotage of India's war effort. The Times declared that the session would be momentous for the future of the Congress Party, for the course of the war, and for the prospects of Indian freedom and self-government. (6) The Congress Working Committee meeting at Bombay from 6 to 8 August 1942 passed what has since been popularly called the 'Quit India' resolution. It met the criticism of Cripps and others levelled against the Wardha resolution and declared that

(4) Hansard, H.C., 382 (30 July 1942) cols., 674-685.
(5) The Times, 6 August 1942, 5.
on the declaration of India's independence, free India would become an ally of the United Nations and permit foreign soldiers in India.

The AICC meeting at Bombay on 7 and 8 August 1942 approved and endorsed the resolution of the Working Committee dated 14 July 1942 and stated that events subsequent to it had given further justification for the stand taken by the Congress. It declared that the immediate ending of British rule in India was an urgent necessity, both for the sake of India and for the success of the cause of world freedom. The ending of British rule in India was thus a vital and immediate issue on which depended the future of the war and the success of freedom and democracy. After passing the 'Quit India' resolution, it approved the starting of a mass struggle on non-violent lines under the leadership of Gandhiji. (7)

The resolution of the Governor-General-in-Council, regretting the Congress approval of the resolution and the Government of India's determination to meet the 'challenge' was published on the night of 8 August, after the AICC ratified the Congress Working Committee's resolution on 'Quit India'. (8)

The Congress resolution was a reasoned argument for the immediate recognition of Indian freedom and the ending of British rule in India. Gandhiji stressed the possibilities of an agreement

(7) Indian National Congress, n.s. 2, 29-35.

The 'Quit India' resolution 'marked the turning point in the history of India's freedom struggle'. As Gandhiji has said, it was a 'demand made upon Britain to do the right irrespective of the capacity of the Party wronged to bear the consequences of Britain's right act'. It was 'not a slogan but a potent cry of the soul of India struggling for self-realization'. See Pyarelal, Mahatma Gandhi: The Last Phase, Volume I (Ahmedabad, 1956) 10.

(8) The Hindu, 10 August 1942, 2. See also The Times, 10 August 1942, 3.
with the British Government. His final speech was an earnest plea for a settlement and his determination to approach the Governor-General in that behalf. The Congress had proposed to launch a civil disobedience campaign only if its offer of co-operation was rejected. The 'Quit India' decision had only sanctioned non-co-operation. But the decision and the method of implementing it was left to Gandhiji who had believed that a settlement with the British Government was possible. In fact, the plan was to have an interview with the authorities in India and inform them of his plans in advance, as he had always done on previous occasions. He had not defined action or indicated what he had proposed to do. (9)

The Government of India and the British Government had, however, decided to nip the movement in the bud by arresting all Congress leaders before the Congress had time to put its decision into effect. In the early hours of 9 August, all the members of the Congress Working Committee and other important leaders were arrested and all the Congress organizations declared illegal. (10)


In an exclusive interview to the Associated Press Gandhiji had declared that he did contemplate an interval between the passing of the Congress resolution and the starting of the struggle. He was to have pleaded with the Governor-General to avoid a conflict. The Hindu, 8 August 1942, 4.

(10) The decision to arrest the Congress leaders was arrived at by the Governor-General after full consultations with the India Office and the War Cabinet. The Governor-General's Executive Council unanimously proposed to arrest and intern the leaders of the Congress Party. As Churchill himself has noted, 'the War Cabinet, advised by their Committee on India, immediately endorsed this drastic policy'. This decision was arrived at by the British

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The Government of India's action in arresting the Congress leaders was a blunder. As The Hindu rightly puts it, 'Without making the slightest attempt to understand the new resolution or consider it seriously with a view to finding out whether it offered better prospects of a settlement than the Wardha resolution seemed to do', the Government had resolved to force a fight on the Congress. (11) The propaganda was set in motion to defend their action. After arrest, the great hopes that Cripps had raised were finally broken and buried underground. Cripps himself said that there were 11 Indians out of 15 in the Governor-General's Executive Council, and that the Government ordered the arrest of the Congress Party leaders. Action against Congress leaders 'was a decision of the Government of India supported fully by, but not proposed or initiated by, the British Government'. In a propagandist tone, he declared that they had given their backing to the Government of India, as law and order were India's first essential for the

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Cabinet under the leadership of the Deputy Prime Minister, the Labour Party leader, Clement Attlee when Churchill was away at Cairo. Attlee owned the responsibility for imprisoning all the Congress leaders. About its necessity he said 'If they chose to set themselves against the Government in war they had to answer for it . . . We had to make the arrests to stop a dangerous drift.' In fact the decision to arrest had been taken even earlier, should the AICC adopt the resolution. See Winston S. Churchill, The Second World War, Volume IV, The Ring of Fate (London, 1951) 455-7; Francis Williams, A Prime Minister Remembers (London, 1961) 205-6; Daily Telegraph, 6 and 10 August 1942.

successful defence of India. (12)

British Press' Bitter Reaction

The Daily Telegraph held that arrests were inevitable and thundered: 'What the "Quit India" resolution asks for is not the withdrawal of the British but the entry of the Japanese.' As though India enjoyed all of them at the time, it declared that the only effect of Congress policy would be 'to deprive the Indian soldier of arms, the Indian civilian of justice and order, and India herself of a place among the free nations.' To The Times, the arrests of the Congress leaders and the banning of the party organizations was a bitter necessity forced upon the Indian Government. The Right-wing Conservative Daily Mail felt that the Congress was trying to put through the greatest act of sabotage in history. 'In India we have dithered and hesitated and parleyed to no purpose, we have gone to the limit of the concession, and have had our offers flung back in our faces.' The Daily Express also justified the measures. (13) It is interesting to note that even the Labour weekly, New Statesman and Nation accepted that the British case for repression was strong. It held that a national government could not be created during the war. (14)

To cover up their unimaginative action the British authorities started a propaganda battle. On 9 August, the Secretary of State


The Daily Telegraph (6 August 1942) had foreshadowed the arrests on Thursday itself.

(13) All dated 10 August 1942.

for India, Amery broadcast three times on India. He said that the Government of India had saved India and the Allied cause from a grave disaster by their prompt and resolute action. Amery told the Americans: 'What India is up against is nothing less than a deliberate campaign to sabotage her war effort and the war effort of all Indians . . . The campaign will fail — it must fail, if our common cause is not to suffer irretrievable damage.' He declared that the misguided action of the Congress leaders would not affect one way or the other, the broad purpose alike of the British Government and of the Government of India, 'that when Victory is won, India shall without delay have the fullest opportunity to attain to complete control of her own destiny among the free nations of the British Commonwealth and of the world within a constitutional framework of her own devising. That is our pledge to India and to the world. By that pledge we stand.' Further he declared that India could be free only if it was sufficiently united to be at peace within its borders and sufficiently strong to defend those borders against aggression. (15)

The 'Quit India' movement was suppressed by very strong repressive measures and the official propaganda machinery was successful in blaming Indian nationalists for all the trouble and the impression was created that Britain was right in its actions.

There was a move to have a debate in Parliament, but the British Government felt that no useful purpose would be served and might, in fact, be harmful 'to suggest any serious difference of

(15) See The Times, 11 August 1942 and The Indian Annual Register (July-December 1942) 17-18.
view about the action taken by the Government of India'. Whitehall hoped that the 'Quit India' movement being deprived of leadership, would peter out and that the moderates might gain ascendancy and recognize that Indian self-government could be achieved only by agreement with the Muslims and other minorities. They expected that the strong British action would have proved that Britain could hold India to the path 'which the great majority of Indians desire, the path of loyal, co-operation within the Empire and the United Nations in overthrowing the common foe'. (16) But The Times (12 August 1942) declared that repression unaccompanied by any constructive policy was likely to prove as vain and ineffective in war as in peace, and far more dangerous.

The 'Quit India' movement, in fact, was largely the expression of a mood crystallized by the Cripps Mission, -- by the hopes it had aroused and by its subsequent failure in resolving the Indian deadlock. (17) At the height of their propaganda battle, the British authorities claimed that 'Quit India' was a 'planned rebellion'. As Michael Brecher has pointed out: 'The evidence is dubious for it contradicts the secret reports of the Special Branch of the Intelligence Bureau.' In fact, the August movement was the outcome of persistent British intransigence since the commencement of the war. It created such a deep sense of frustration among Indian nationalists that they felt that the only course of action was civil disobedience, as a symbolic act of defiance. 'If, instead, violence


ensued, it was precipitated by the Government of India's abrupt and repressive action on 9 August which incapacitated the Indian National Congress of its entire leadership. Thereafter the clash could not be averted.¹ (18)

**CHURCHILL'S REITERATION OF GOVERNMENT'S INDIA POLICY**

In the House of Commons, on 10 September 1942, Winston Churchill reiterated that the broad principles of the Cripps Mission must be taken as representing the settled policy of the British Crown and Parliament and that those principles stood in their full scope and integrity without any additions or subtractions. Defending the severe measures taken by the Government of India against Indian nationalists, the Prime Minister charged that the Congress had given up non-violence and had openly adopted revolutionary methods hampering communications. He said that the Governor-General had suppressed the Congress organization and interned the leaders with the unanimous support of the Governor-General's Council which had a majority of Indians. Interrupted by a Labour member who questioned whether the policy was approved by the Government as a whole, Churchill revealed the blatant truth that on the previous night, the leader of the Labour Party and Deputy Prime Minister Attlee and himself had together worked out the statement which represented the general policy of the Government as a whole.² (19) The parliamentary

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(18) Brecher, n. 9, 292–3.


With the approval of Churchill, some Conservative private members of Parliament tabled a motion approving the statement and they had hoped that it would be better to have an Indian debate at.

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correspondent of The Times reported that the Prime Minister's firm statement of the Government's India policy and its unchanged intentions for India's constitutional advance in the future was cordially supported by the House. (20) In fact, the Prime Minister's speech greatly aggravated an already ruinous situation in India and Indians lost the last shred of faith in British sincerity. (21)

The Daily Telegraph noted that the statement revealed little change. It held that the Congress could not be trusted when the enemy was at the gates, and it would be a betrayal to resume negotiations with it until that danger had been removed. The Daily Mail paid a compliment to Churchill on the firm attitude and forthright statement. The Times felt that though no agreement could be reached by taking account of Congress alone, it was equally true that the demand for independence was heard in one form or another from all the other

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The political correspondent of the Manchester Guardian reported that the statement caused dismay in the Opposition but did not find expression as the House was utterly loyal to Churchill - shy of publicly criticizing him in any field of policy even when it is as important as India. The Labour, Liberal and some Conservatives were quite unwilling to accept the Prime Minister's statement as the last word. The Indian and Burma Bill arrived most opportune and it shut out a direct debate on Churchill's statement and the debate covering the issue of the Indian situation was held on the motion to give second reading to India and Burma Bill - the measure renewing the powers of the substitute Administration in those Provinces where Congress ministries resigned. Manchester Guardian, 25 September 1942 and 3 and 6 October 1942.


(21) P.N. Brailsford, Subject India (New York, 1943) 88.
leading political groups. "No escape from the deadlock may yet be apparent." (22) The Economist judged that the statement had scarcely eased the solution of the impasse and Churchill's approach still smacked of his oppositional phase. However, it justified the imprisonment of Congress leaders and the use of strong measures. (23) It was pointed out that in the lobbies of the British Parliament the comment frequently made was that the Prime Minister's attitude had not changed since the days of the old India Bill debate. Despite the Prime Minister's assertion that he and Attlee worked far into the night in preparing the text, it had an unmistakable Churchillian flavour. (24)

Amery's Elucidation of Government's Policy

The Secretary of State for India, Amery, defended Churchill's statement and blamed the Congress for the August disturbances. He said that there was unanimity among all the parties in their desire to see India's destiny directed by Indian hands free from all external control. He admitted that 'India shall obtain, within a minimum of delay after the war, the same freedom as is enjoyed by the Great Dominions', and by Britain itself. But he declared that the basis of that constitution should be arrived at by agreement and compromise between the different elements within India.

(22) All dated 11 September 1942.

(23) The Economist, 143 (19 and 26 September 1942) 355, 389.

(24) Churchill disregarded the advice he had sought (and had been given) by non-Conservative collaborators in his Cabinet. He submitted the first draft to Cripps who suggested important modifications and the final draft did not confirm 'either to the first draft or to Cripps suggestion and it was not shown to Cripps.' Churchill is reported to have shown it in a peremptory sort of way to Major Clement R. Attlee . . . in the late hours of Thursday night.' The Chicago Daily News, 14 September 1942.
Further Amery said that Parliament had attempted to give India a constitution based on balance and compromise by the 1935 Act, but that since then they had realized that Indians themselves must decide their constitution. It was with that intention that the Cripps offer had been made. He held that the Cripps plan was a willing advance and a freely offered partnership in freedom. He declared that the final responsibility for defence had to rest with His Majesty's Government because the abdication of that would have meant the sacrifice of all guarantee for their future. He charged that the Congress had rejected all compromises and adopted violent methods to usurp power. He declared that the Government would not change their mind till the Congress abandoned its 'reactionary' methods.

The Conservative member, Sir Stanley Reed, justified the arrests and said that the 1935 Act was one of the greatest renunciations of power in history and thought that the Cripps offer was in effect the offer of complete independence within the Commonwealth or outside it. Many others held that the movement, in effect if not in intention, was a treasonable one.

In fact, even the Labour members justified the arrests, felt that the 'Quit India' movement was a proof of political irresponsibility, and considered the Government's action as timely and unavoidable. Even Attlee said that they were not prepared to negotiate with people who were in rebellion. The Labour Party approved the Government's India policy. (25) The feeling of the

House was expressed, apart from the speeches supporting the Government by the majority of 360 to 17 by which it negatived an Independent Labour Party amendment for rejection of the Indian and Burma Bill which was in effect a challenge to the Government's India policy.

**Unchanging Attitude of Winston Churchill**

The unchanging basic view of Churchill on the India policy was loudly reiterated in his Mansion House speech on 10 November 1942. Churchill declared that they did not have acquisitive appetites or ambitions in any part of the world, and had entered the war not for profit, but to do their duty in defending the right.

Let me, however, make this clear, in case there should be any mistake about it in any quarter. We mean to hold our own. I have not become the King's First Minister in order to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire. For the task, if ever it were prescribed, someone else would have to be found, and, under democracy, I suppose the nation would have to be consulted. "Here we are, and here we stand, a veritable rock of salvation in this drifting world." (26)

Commenting on this statement, The Economist remarked that it was only half the tale but that there must be no less determination to recognize and carry out the responsibilities of Empire more boldly and more quickly than in the previous years. Old social and racial prejudices had lingered on to maintain a frustrating division between Britons and the Imperial populations. 'To destroy the British Empire is not a war aim . . . But to make the Empire a


The leaders of the British Labour Party were anxious to demonstrate that they were behind no other group in their attachment to the imperial tradition. So they supported Churchill's statement and stressed the resolve of the British people to keep the empire together after the war. Nehru, n. 1, 597.
shining example of the free and full development . . . is war and peace aim of the greatest urgency. If the war does weaken a wide sense of Imperial responsibility among the British people, it will have done a great good.' (27)

THE STELATE

During 1943 the stalemate continued and no more initiatives were taken by the British Government. Gandhiji undertook a fast in jail on 10 February 1943. A non-party conference appealed to the British Government and the Governor-General to release him immediately. But there was no response. Some Indian members of the Governor-General's Executive Council also resigned. It also did not have any effect on the political situation in the country. Throughout Great Britain, there were many associations and prominent persons who appealed to the Government to set Gandhiji free immediately. But the authorities were adamant. In fact the Governor-General described the fast as 'a form of political blackmail (himsa) for which there can be no moral justification'. (28)

The British Press generally upheld the Governor-General's stand. The unhelpful attitude of the authorities was supported by The Times when it declared in an editorial that all the appeals for the release of Gandhiji ignored 'the peculiar responsibilities that rigidly bind a Government with a war on one of its frontiers and the dilemma created by the original threat of civil disobedience which


(28) Correspondence with Mr. Gandhi: August 1942-April 1944 (New Delhi, 1944) 11. See also Daily Telegraph, 11 February 1942.
meant in practice strike action against the military security of India and the United Nations'. (29)

Towards the end of March, there was a debate in the British Parliament on the general situation in India. It took place on a series of formal Government motions to approve the proclamations under section 33 of the Government of India Act. Earlier the Government of India had issued a White Paper on 22 February 1943 blaming the Congress for the trouble and justifying the arrests of the Congress leaders. The White Paper also figured in the parliamentary debate on the general situation.

Initiating the debate on India, the Secretary of State for India, Amery, said that the Cripps' proposals were so far-reaching and explicit that it seemed to them almost inconceivable that they should be rejected. He held that the defeats of the Allied cause in the East were the reason for the rejection. He inferred that to Gandhi the Mission was the hoisting of a distress signal, a belated appeal to the Congress to commit itself to a war policy. He doubted the non-violent character of the movement and denied that there was a spontaneous manifestation of public indignation at the arrest of popular leaders. The expansion of the Governor-General's Executive Council offered, in his view, scope for Indian members for solid service to the Indian people.

The House appreciated the spirit of Amery's speech. Members of Parliament who took part in the debate, irrespective of party affiliation, supported the Government's India policy and recognized that the Government was without a practical alternative to the

(29) The Times, 23 February 1943.
course that was followed. It approved Government's policy towards
the Congress, mixed with a feeling that an active attempt to resolve
the deadlock of Indian self-government must be made. Though
agreement among Indians was necessary, some at least desired that
it should be promoted by Britain. (30)

The British Press followed the trend of the debate in the
Parliament and vied with one another in supporting the Government's
India policy. The Daily Telegraph held that the White Paper
marshalled convincing evidence to the effect that Gandhiji was
prepared to sell out to Japan rather than accept the Cripps offer.
It charged that the Congress pretence of injured innocence over
last year's commotion was a deliberate falsehood. It held that the
lesson of the Cripps Mission proved that the time had not yet come
for any more quixotic experiments in appeasement. The Times
considered that the transitional situation was met in a provisional
way and held that care for the security of India took precedence
over its constitutional progress. (31)

As a result of the Parliament's debate and the comments of
the British Press supporting the Government's India policy, it was
quite apparent that although the door did remain open, as Amery
claimed, the Government had no intention of embarking on further
discussions of Dominion Status till the end of the war. This was
because the authorities had much more confidence regarding the war
situation than they had in 1942 at the height of the political

(30) Hansard, H.C., 388 (30 March 1943) cols. 69-140.
(31) Daily Telegraph, 31 March 1943.
The Times, 31 March 1943.
crisis, when both disorder and the Japanese menace had to be met. (32)

The Indian problem figured at a combined meeting of the annual party conference and the Central Council of the Conservative Party held on 20-21 May 1943. The conference pledged its support to His Majesty's Government in the effective recognition of their two-fold responsibility towards India, namely the fulfilment of their declared policy that India should attain as soon as possible to free and equal partnership in the British Commonwealth of Nations under an agreed constitution of Indian devising and, secondly, the maintenance of that ordered liberty upon which depends India's contribution to war and the welfare of people. (33)

The New Viceroy

In October 1943, Lord Wavell was appointed the Viceroy and Governor-General to succeed Linlithgow. The new Governor-General had thought of beginning his rule with an act of clemency. He proposed to release Ghandhi and Nehru, but the suggestion was not supported by London. Later, he announced that there would not be any change of policy and that he would not release the Congress leaders till he was convinced that their policy of non-co-operation and obstruction was withdrawn. (34)

(32) Dewitt Mackenzie, Indian Problem Can be Solved (London, 1943) 190-1.

(33) Conservative Party Central Council Minutes, 384. See also The Unlooker (June 1943) 2. Published by the Conservative Party.

(34) John W. Wheeler-Bennett, King George VI, His Life and Reign (London, 1958) 703. See also Reginald Coupland, India, A Re-statement (London, 1945) 231; The Times, 18 February 1944.
In the House of Commons, Amory stated that the new appointment did not imply any change in the settled policy to which His Majesty's Government were pledged with regard to the development of Indian self-government. A few days later he said that they mainly aimed at preserving Indian unity. The whole object was to enable India to attain complete freedom, to unshackled control of its destiny under an agreed constitution of its own after the war. Unity could be preserved by an agreed constitution, provision being made for the Muslims to stand out of any scheme if it imperilled their culture. The British were not prepared to make non-agreement an excuse for indefinite postponement of Indian self-government. (35)

At the end of 1943 and the beginning of 1944, though an increasing number of Indians believed that the British intended to give Dominion Status for India and that Indians would be left free to choose their own constitution, they were not prepared to accept the idea that any radical change in the status of the government should be postponed until the end of the war. They sought a provisional national government at the Centre and popular ministries in the Provinces for the duration of the war which they considered to be practical proof of a prompt and satisfactory settlement after the war and a rightful recognition of the general desire of all the Indians to fight against Fascism and aggression. At that time there were brighter prospects of agreement between the two parties. Jinnah was favourable to the idea of inclusion of Muslim Provinces federally within a united India with new provincial boundaries.

The bulk of public opinion favoured such a solution and a new initiative should have been taken forgetting the past. But the authorities kept quiet.

In April 1944, Gandhiji was released and he was quite anxious about a settlement of the Indian problem, but the Governor-General Wavell, insisted on the withdrawal of the 'Quit India' movement and the abandonment of non-co-operation. Gandhiji replied that any change of policy had to be decided by the Congress Working Committee whose members were, however, in jail. The Government maintained that Gandhiji had been released for health reasons and that other leaders would not be released till they retreated from their position. As The Economist aptly commented, there was contradiction in the arguments of the Secretary of State since he asked 'that, in order to break the present deadlock, some gesture should be forthcoming from the Congress leaders, whereas being imprisoned, they are not in fact able either to reconsider their policy in consultation with their followers or to discuss it with the spokesmen of other parties'. (36)

In the course of Parliament's debate on India, Amery said that the situation was not altered and difficulties were still there for the resumption of self-government in the Provinces. Yet he declared that the door was always open not only as a matter of goodwill but also as a matter of constitutional duty and obligation on their part. (37) Though the House of Commons, on balance, seemed to have agreed that Gandhiji's statements had opened the way for

(36) The Economist, 146 (27 May 1944) 710.

fresh efforts to get a political settlement in India, neither the British Government nor the Governor-General shared that view.

THE WAVELL PLAN JUNE - JULY 1945

Since the Cripps offer of March-April 1942, there was no change in the British stand and the 1942 offer stood without change or qualification. However, at the end of 1944 the Governor-General felt the necessity for Government's intervention and thought of a plan. It was to summon a small conference of Indian political leaders of all parties to discuss the composition of the transitional government which could start working within the existing constitution. Wavell sent it to the Secretary of State for India admitting 'that there were obvious difficulties and risks', but emphasizing at the same time 'that the risks of following a policy of no action were much greater'.

The Secretary of State seemed to have sympathized with the objective of the proposed Wavell plan, but he felt that there were some practical difficulties. He suggested an alternative plan which Wavell found impracticable. At that stage, Amery, with boldness and vision, proposed recognition of India as a country enjoying full freedom of status like other Dominions. But he could not translate his ideas into practice, for Churchill held the key to the door of progress. (38)

Thus Wavell wished to set up a new Executive Council and proposed a conference of Indian political leaders. The Secretary of State for India was in sympathy with Wavell, 'but about how to do the

(38) V.P. Menon, The Transfer of Power in India (Bombay, 1957) 167-81.
job there were almost as many opinions as counsels. (39) In his enthusiasm to get his plan approved, Wavell proposed it to the Prime Minister directly and even Amery hoped that Wavell's plan would have a beneficial effect and that it would receive the approval of the Prime Minister.

The Governor-General Wavell, was called to London in March 1945 and he remained there upto the first week of June. A plan proposed by Wavell was agreed upon by the British Government and it is generally called the Wavell plan. (40) Meanwhile an important political change had taken place in Britain. The war-time Coalition Government had been replaced on 23 May 1945 by a purely Conservative Caretaker Government, still headed by Churchill. However, the Wavell plan had already been approved by all parties.

The Wavell plan was made public on 14 June 1945. Wavell broadcast his proposals 'designed to ease the present political situation and to advance India towards her goal of full self-government'. Wavell in his broadcast declared that the proposals were intended to make a long-term solution easier and behind them

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(40) For Wavell's proposals and other details see V.P. Manoon, n. 38, 171-81.

After sending the proposals to Churchill directly, Wavell urged the Secretary of State that his proposals should be considered early. The Cabinet felt the need for personal discussion and Wavell was ready to go to England in January itself. But the Secretary of State persuaded him to postpone Wavell's visit. Finally when he visited London, the matter was further delayed, as the British Cabinet was preoccupied with important matters. A draft statement was discussed and re-discussed before it was finally accepted. Meanwhile Germany surrendered on 7 May and the last stage of the war even in the East underlined the urgency of settling the Indian problem. Ibid., 171-2 and 175-81.
was 'a most genuine desire on the part of all responsible leaders in the United Kingdom and of the British people as a whole to help India towards her goal'. On the same day, the Secretary of State for India announced the 'Wavell plan' in the British House of Commons. Without any legal changes, the plan offered to reconstitute the Governor-General's Executive Council by bringing in leaders of Indian political life. The method suggested was that the Governor-General was to call a conference of leading Indian politicians and select persons out of the lists submitted by the political leaders. Except the Governor-General and the Commander-in-Chief, all the other members were to be Indians and even the portfolio of external affairs was to be placed in charge of an Indian. (41)

Explaining the new scheme in the House of Commons, Amery said that the Cripps offer of 1942 stood in its entirety and it was based on two main principles: i) There was no limit to India's freedom to decide her destiny herself; ii) freedom could only be achieved under a constitution or constitutions framed by Indians with the consent of the main elements. He said that those principles 'stand in their full scope and integrity. No one can add anything to them and no one can take anything away.' He told the House that they aimed at a united India without prejudging the question of ultimate settlement, so there could be no question of making the Executive responsible to the Legislature, which would have implied the control of a unified India by a Hindu majority.

(41) Text of Wavell's broadcast could be found in The Indian Annual Register (January-June 1945) 247-8; Hansard, H.C., 411 (14 June 1945) cols. 1831-45; Cmd. 6652; See also The Times, 15 June 1945.
Amery declared, that the powers of the Governor-General could not be given up as they were a necessary protection for the minorities. The Governor-General's powers were 'a power in reserve, not an instrument in normal use'. He pointed out that if the proposals were accepted, the new Executive would be a representative body of Indian political opinion with equal representation to two communities. The proposals owed their initiative to Wavell and their actual final form was shaped in consultation with the leading members of both of the main political parties and represented an agreed national offer of Britain to India.

Amery further said that it was the utmost they could do pending Indian agreement upon the final constitutional settlement. He believed that if the offer was accepted, the co-operation of Indian statesmen in facing the practical issues of India's needs might help to bring the hour of agreement nearer. He emphasized that the proposals were not concessions in the hour of their weakness, but were offered in the hour of victory as an earnest of their goodwill to India and of their genuine desire to help forward the fulfilment of its aspirations as well as the fulfilment of their own traditions and instincts.

**Support to Wavell Plan**

The Conservative M.P. John Wardlaw-Milne thought it a very definite step forward. Another Conservative member, Frederick Sykes, said that the statement gave the impression of absolute sincerity in its hope and belief that they were trying to do the

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(42) *Hansard, H.C.*, 411 (14 June 1945) cols.* 1831-45.*
See also *Cmd., 6652.*
right thing in the right way. However, Winterton, another Conservative, thought that a communal settlement was an inescapable pre-condition, though he frankly confessed that none of them wanted to deprive India of self-government.

The Opposition Labour leader, Attlee also supported the Government's India policy. In the House of Lords, the Under-Secretary of State for India, the Earl of Scarbrough, said that the Government hoped that the plan marked a genuine step forward in the collaboration of the British and Indian peoples towards Indian self-government. They were a stride forward, and though only a stride, they were a stride away from the past and towards the goal. On behalf of the Labour Party, the Earl of Listowel welcomed the new attempt to break the deadlock and said that his party shared in the preparation of the policy and thought that the proposed method of the Government to achieve self-government was the right and the only practical method. (43)

**British Attitude to India**

After the Cripps Mission, the attitude of the Englishmen was to wash their hands off the future constitution of India. Political India realized that an indefinite further continuance of the present constitutional system was impossible with the growing inadequacy in physical and administrative power. Though the British people wanted the grant of self-government to be conditional upon a guaranteed system of government without the threat of disorder, revolution or civil war, Britain itself could not give absolute guarantee that

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such catastrophes would not attend its own rule. If the self-government was delayed longer, they were most likely to happen. 'It follows that Britain's negative pledge— in effect that "we will not stand in the way of Indian self-government"—should, in the interests of good government itself, be turned into the positive policy of working for Indian self-government', by uniting the Hindus, Muslims and other communities. (44)

The Wavell plan lifted the future of India out of the list of major issues at the British General Election. The offer was an attempt to get back to the road towards Dominion Status. While the Cripps offer tried to tempt Indian leaders under the transitional gap by fixing attention on a post-war constitution in which they did not and could not believe, the Wavell plan concentrated on the transitional gap leaving it to the leaders' common sense to see that it was the only possible stepping stone towards their objective.

The offer was made with a view to breaking the political deadlock and creating conditions which would enable the policy of the 1942 offer become effective. It had proposed the substance of Dominion status forthwith. The essential point was that the members of the Governor-General's Executive Council should be leaders of Indian political life. British political parties were unanimous in their desire to see India a self-governing Dominion within the British Commonwealth.

**THE SIMLA CONFERENCE, JUNE-JULY 1945**

Most of the Congressmen were released on 15 June, and the Simla conference for the settlement of the Indian problem on the basis of...

(44) *Round Table*, 35 (March 1945) 122-9.
the Wavell plan opened on 25 June 1945. The Governor-General held the conference with a view to reconstituting his Executive Council by the inclusion of leaders of Indian political life at the Centre and in the Provinces, to provide a balanced representation of the main communities, including equal proportions of Muslims and Hindus. The Congress accepted the communal parity with certain reservations. Jinnah wrote to the Governor-General that the Working Committee of the Muslim League was emphatically of the opinion 'that all the Muslim members of the proposed Executive Council should be chosen from the Muslim League'. The Governor-General refused to commit himself to give that guarantee. Jinnah rejected the proposed plan and the Simla conference failed. The Governor-General officially announced the failure of the conference on 14 July. (45)

The conference failed owing to the intransigent attitude of the Muslim League which wanted the sole right of naming the Muslim representatives. However, the conference marked a breakwater in Indian political history, for the negotiations failed not on the basic political issue between India and Britain but on the communal issue dividing different Indian groups. (46) The Governor-General accepted the responsibility for the failure of the conference, and thus made more than a gesture in order to hold the door open for a new effort and moderate the sense of frustration which was bound to

(45) Sir Maurice Gwyer and A. Appadorai, Speeches and Documents on the Indian Constitution, 1921-46, 2nd Volume (Bombay, 1957) 557-64.

For full details of discussions held on the conference and the causes for the failure see Menon, n. 38, 191-212.

assail political India. About the failure of the talks, a writer commented that the Congress claimed at the conference to represent all communities and 'it did this (said The Times correspondent) with a subtle air of reasonableness'. The writer declared that 'the Simla Conference bodes ill for an attempt to cajole India into united agreement on a single choice'. He proposed the consideration of the Partition proposal. (47) Though the Simla conference failed in its major purposes, it was clear that the British Raj was resolved on the final abdication of its responsibility. It brought the Congress leaders into personal relations with their British rulers and their League opponents. (48) The Round Table correspondent philosophically commented that from the August (1940) offer to Wavell plan, British official policy was that it was for the Indian parties to arrive at an agreement and for His Majesty's Government to ratify the result subject to certain conditions. 'Both in form and in essence the Cripps offer was a classification of a mechanism whereby agreement among the several interests in India could be attained.' (49)

The Reaction of the Press

The British Press widely commented on the failure of the Simla conference on 16 July 1945. The Wavell plan of 1945 might have succeeded in 1942, before or just after the 'Cripps offer' or in 1940, after the 'August offer', which contained in essence the Cripps

(48) Mansergh, n. 17, 208.
(49) Round Table, 35 (September 1945) 296-9.
and Wavell policies together but was couched in clumsy terms and was not backed by determination to take risks in establishing a representative Indian government for the conduct of the war. (50) The Times thought it natural to place the blame for the failure on Jinnah and the Muslim League. It reiterated the determination of the British people to assist the Indian people in achieving complete self-government. The Daily Telegraph declared that none challenged the right of India to self-government any longer but that the problem was to find the means. This, it said, depended on the capacity of responsible Indians themselves. The Daily Mail thought that Gandhi wrecked Cripps proposals and Simla was Jinnah’s turn. (51)

According to Stafford Cripps, the obvious cause of the failure was not so much the constitution of an interim government as the influence of any temporary arrangement was likely to have upon more permanent decisions which were to have been made for full and free self-government of India. (52)

British policy was set on a new and constructive track by the White Papers and the Government took the responsibility of their own positions by taking the lead in advancing the immediate practice of national self-government. Indian nationalists criticized the Wavell plan as merely an election stunt of Churchill’s and insinuated that the Government were using Jinnah as a cloak for retaining power in their own hands. Wavell’s conference ended soon after the General Elections

(50) Ibid., 36 (March 1946) 164.

(51) All dated 16 July 1945. Also quoted in The Indian Annual Register (July-December 1945) 142-5.

(52) Quoted in The Indian Annual Register (July-December 1945) 4-5.
ended in England. With the defeat of the Conservative Party at the elections and with a landslide success of the Labour Party a new chapter and a new attitude began to prevail between India and Britain.

Thus after the failure of the Cripps Mission, Indian nationalists were disappointed at the unhelpful attitude of the British Government, and the Congress demanded the British to 'Quit India'. The British authorities imprisoned the Congress leaders. The British public and the Press bitterly reacted to the Congress demand for British withdrawal from India and supported measures taken by the Government of India to suppress the freedom movement and the British Government took no more initiatives except renewing the Cripps offer. The Labour Party supported the Government's India policy. Wavell succeeded Linlithgow in 1943 and there was no change in British policy as such. However, early in 1946, Wavell plan, after reaffirming the Cripps offer, proposed an interim solution to the Indian problem with a view to breaking the political deadlock and creating conditions which would enable Government to carry out the changes envisaged in the Cripps offer. To put the plan into effect, a conference was held at Simla but could not succeed in its aim owing to the intransigence of Jinnah. Meanwhile in Britain Churchill's Government fell from power.