CHAPTER EIGHT

THE CABINET MISSION
The Second World War formally ended on 15 August 1945 with the surrender of Japan. As a result, there came a sweeping change in international relations and this had its repercussions on Indo-British relations. The end of war increased the urgency of finding a permanent and lasting solution to the problem of India's demand for independence. Meanwhile, in the British General Elections of July 1945, the Labour Party had won a landslide majority. The Conservative leader, Winston Churchill, was succeeded by the Labour leader, Clement Attlee, as Prime Minister and Lord Pethick-Lawrence became the new Secretary of State for India. Soon, it seemed there was a slight change in the British attitude to the Indian problem and equally the Indian response and understanding underwent a change during the period.

Soon after assuming office, at a Press conference on 7 August, the new Secretary of State for India declared that equal partnership between Britain and India was the ideal goal to be reached. Meanwhile, the Congress President, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, demanded that a final and permanent solution of the question of India's freedom should be effected by establishing a democratic government for a free and independent India co-operating with other free governments of the world. (1)

In fact, at the end of the World War, British position

(1) See *The Indian Annual Register* (July-December 1945) 9-10.
seemed 'on a superficial view, firmly entrenched and capable of meeting a challenge'. Britain was pledged to give independence to India as soon as there was an agreement among the main political elements. That was the result of the Cripps offer and the subsequent British affirmations of adherence to its principles. The Cripps offer was the product of a Coalition Government and the British political parties were all alike committed to helping India to achieve its independence 'though their different ways of approaching the problem were indicated by the different aspects they emphasized'. (2)

BRITISH POLICY ANNOUNCED

At the State opening of the new Parliament on 16 August 1945, the King said in his speech that they would do their utmost to promote in conjunction with the leaders of Indian opinion the early realization of full self-government in India. Touching on the King's reference to India in his speech, the spokesman of the Conservative Opposition, Richard Austin Butler, former Under-Secretary of State for India, felt that there was nothing new in the rather jejune phrases on India. Between the formation of the Coalition Government in 1940 and the Labour Government in 1945, he said, they had done their best to promote those very objects which were referred to in the speech and told the House that they on that side were only too glad to extend their co-operation to any plan which did justice to the many and varied interests of India, which preserved India's position in the world and which achieved the

legitimate aspirations of its people. (3)

Soon, the Viceroy and Governor-General of India, Lord Wavell was invited to London for consultations in order to review the whole Indian problem de novo in consultation with him and he went there on 27 August and returned to India on 16 September. In a broadcast from New Delhi on 19 September, Wavell declared that His Majesty's Government were determined to do their utmost to promote, in conjunction with leaders of Indian opinion, the early realization of full self-government in India. On the same day, Prime Minister Attlee in a broadcast declared that the Government would act in accordance with the spirit of the Cripps offer. He announced elections to the Central and Provincial legislatures, the summoning of a 'constitution-making body' and after elections, of discussion with representatives to ascertain whether the Cripps proposals were acceptable as they stood or an alternative or modified scheme was preferred. (4)

Commenting on the offer, the Spectator observed that the Cripps offer took shape as a definite programme of action, as it was no longer hindered by war, and that a difficult time was ahead of Indians in seeking a way of reconciling their differences and devising a satisfactory constitution. Though the plan was hardly calculated to excite enthusiasm, it did provide evidence of the new Government's desire to promote a settlement at the earliest possible opportunity. 'Full Dominion Status is in their grasp if they will adopt it — or, indeed, independence should they prefer that inferior

(3) Hansard, H.C., 413 (15 August 1945) cols. 57 and 194.

status — founded on a treaty which the British Government proposes to negotiate with the constitution-making body." (5)

The All India Congress Committee (AICC) after discussing the political problem characterized the Government's proposals as vague, inadequate, and unsatisfactory. The Congress President declared in his concluding speech that the fire that had been kindled in the minds of the masses in 1942 was still burning and that he had no doubt that the country was on its march to the goal of independence. No power on earth could stop India's march towards its cherished goal, he added. (6) The plan seemed to have been a combination of the Cripps offer and the Simla plan. However, it seemed odd to British minds that the more closely each new offer contemplated the transfer of power, the reception of it in India appeared to be less enthusiastic. To the AICC, remarked The Economist, British policy seemed to have been based on delaying every advance

(5) Spectator, 175 (21 and 28 September 1945) 257 and 277.

(6) The Indian Annual Register (July-December 1945) 16-17 and 93.

The following is the text of the resolution: 'The A.I.C.C. has carefully considered Lord Wavell's and the British Prime Minister's broadcasts on the steps proposed to be taken by the British authority in India. These proposals repeat with unimportant variations, the offer made in March 1942 by Sir Stafford Cripps on behalf of the British Government, an offer which was not accepted by the Congress. Neither the end of the war nor the change of Government in Great Britain appears to have resulted in any real change in British policy towards India which seems to be based on delaying every advance and in attempting to create new problems and fresh complications. It is just significant that there is no mention in these broadcasts of the Independence of India. Nothing short of Independence can be acceptable to the Congress and the country. The proposals now made are, in the opinion of the A.I.C.C., vague, inadequate and unsatisfactory.' Ibid., 93.
and an attempt to create new problems and complications — an exact reverse of the impression created in Britain. (7)

The Secretary of State for India said on 16 November that His Majesty's Government wanted to quicken India's march towards complete self-government. Meanwhile, Jawabarlal Nehru declared that the time had come when Indians would not wait for declarations and promises but would solve the issue for themselves. Commenting on it, the Spectator insinuated that the basis of their propaganda was the presumption that the British power in India could only be brought to an end by force and violence. They were no longer willing to accept any postponement of self-government on account of the impossibility of finding any basis of co-operation between them and the Muslims. It declared that they were so convinced of Great Britain's weakness that there was no longer any obstacle to achieving their aims by force. (8)

PARLIAMENTARY DELEGATION TO INDIA

Soon after settling down in office, in a major speech, Pethick-Lawrence declared in the House of Lords that the British Government proposed to grant full self-government to India as soon as possible and that it was by, and in consultation with, the directly elected representatives of the Indian peoples that decisions had to be taken. He announced that they would hold discussions with the elected representatives to secure the widest agreement as to the method of framing a constitution. He confessed that in the

(7) The Economist, 149 (29 September 1945) 449.
(8) Spectator, 175 (23 November 1945) 477.
face of their determination to emancipate India from British rule they had been confronted with a political deadlock. He was convinced that there was an urgent need to replace the feeling of frustration and bitterness with hope and confidence and to acquaint India with the change of British attitude towards them, and he announced the Government's decision to send a Parliamentary delegation to India. (9)

Some of the Conservative members pleaded with the Government to send the delegation on behalf of Parliament itself instead of on behalf of the Empire Parliamentary Association as the word 'Empire' was hated by Indians. (10) That showed how far the Conservative Party had understood the change in the spirit of the time and was eager to infuse confidence in Indians. The change was effected, and it was made clear that the delegation would visit India as representatives of British Parliament, 'to make personal contacts, to ascertain individual views and convey to leading Indians the broad general attitude of the chief political parties'. It was not charged with any official enquiry nor bound to make any report. (11) The delegation was to visit India on 'what will be essentially and reciprocally an exploratory and explanatory mission'.

The Daily Telegraph doubted whether the delegation would alter the situation and declared that on the British side, there could be no question of turning back on a policy which had been repeatedly endorsed by Parliament, though its expression in terms of the Cripps

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(10) Ibid., H.C., cols. 2653-4.

offer might require modification in the light of circumstances. It insisted on a reasonable and agreed settlement which offered the prospect of political and economic stability in India. (12)

The Economist thought that the decision to send a Parliamentary delegation would be useful, 'though not very weighty contribution towards a final solution that is still very far off'. (13)

In India, the announcement of a Parliamentary delegation was treated with almost unanimous lack of enthusiasm. It looked as if the Labour Government was offering not only the same old principles but the same built-in reasons for rejecting them. This new offer seemed finally to prove that the Labour Government was incapable of any new approach. 'It talked like its predecessors and it acted like them. Wearing the straight jacket of precedent, was it not likely to think in the same antique and often discredited terms?' (14)

In his new year broadcast to India, Pethick-Lawrence announced that the year 1946 would be a crucial one in its history and told Indians that the problem was to work a rational and acceptable plan of action. It must be a plan under which authority could be transferred to Indian control under a form of government which would be willingly accepted by the broad mass of India's people. He appealed to the Indians for their co-operation. 'If we all bend our minds and wills to this high endeavour, we can do something in 1946 for the greatness of India, for the future peace and prosperity of Asia and the world.' (15)

(13) The Economist, 149 (8 December 1945) 824.
(14) Michael Edwardes, The Last Years of British India (London, 1953) 98.
(15) Quoted in Vera Brittain, n. 9, 145-6.
The British Parliamentary delegation consisted of ten members - eight from the House of Commons and two from the House of Lords. It was led by a Labour Party member Professor Robert Richards. The delegation began its work on 9 January 1946. It was useful in convincing the British Parliament and the public to understand the reality of the situation in India. The visit of the British Parliamentary delegation to India was helpful in that they returned to England 'convinced of the danger of the situation and of the urgent need for some big and positive step by His Majesty's Government towards a constitutional settlement' (16). The members who were in the delegation on their return home emphasized the importance of an early political action to meet a new situation in India.

THE CABINET MISSION

The situation in India demanded some bolder and more imaginative action than the British Government had yet taken. The Congress and the Muslim League emerged as the most important parties in the elections held in India. In his despatch to the British Government, the Governor-General had drawn attention to the changed situation and the growing unpopularity of the Indian Government among all sections of people. The gulf between the British authorities in India and the people of India was wider and Indian nationalists distrusted the intentions of the British Government. There was need to reconstitute the Governor-General's Executive Council and summon a constituent assembly. The Government decided

(16) Sir Frederick James, 'The Indian Political Scene', International Affairs, 23 (April 1947) 220-7.
to send a mission of Cabinet Ministers to achieve those goals. (17)

As the Government thought that the Indian problem could not be
handled by the Secretary of State and the Governor-General, they
decided to send out a Cabinet mission, consisting of Pethick-
Lawrence, Secretary of State for India; Sir Stafford Cripps, President
of the Board of Trade; and A.V. Alexander, First Lord of the
Admiralty, to get into personal contact with the Indian leaders. (18)

Prime Minister Attlee in the House of Commons, and Pethick-
Lawrence in the House of Lords, announced that 'in view of the
paramount importance not only to India and to the British Common-
wealth but to the peace of the world of a successful outcome of the
discussions with the leaders of the Indian opinion', the Government's
decision to send out to India a special mission of Cabinet Ministers
'to seek in association with the Viceroy an agreement with these
leaders on the principles and procedure relating to the constitu-
tional issue'. They said that the Mission would strengthen the hands
of the Governor-General and declared that it was for Indians to
decide the basis of their own constitutional structure. The proposal
was welcomed by other parties. The Conservative Party's spokesmen,
Anthony Eden, extracted a promise that the framing of a constitution
should be the responsibility of Indians alone and fully supported the
Government's measure. (19)

(17) Parelal, Mahatma Gandhi: The Last Phase, Volume I
(Ahmedabad, 1956) 168-70.


(19) Hansard, H.C., 419 (19 February 1946) cols. 864-6 and
H.L., 139 (19 February 1946) cols. 667-77.
Conservative Reaction in Britain

The Times thought that the announcement inaugurated a remarkable mobilization of British authority and political experience to help the Indian leaders solve the constitutional dilemma of their country. 'In effect, the Cabinet transfers itself by delegation to Indian soil.' It was a bold step to the Daily Telegraph whereas it was the most puzzling announcement to the Right wing Daily Mail. The Evening Standard declared: Theirs [the Mission's] is a roving authority to devise, in conference with the representative Indian leaders, immediate and practical means for the realization of full self-government which is this nation's declared policy for the Indian people.' (20) To The Economist it was almost the last gesture, 'short of sending the King and the Prime Minister, which the Government can make to prove its desire to obtain a constitutional settlement, which would allow this country to renounce all further control over India', (21) The Press hoped that the Mission might be able to persuade the Indian parties that their disagreement alone was the obstacle to their full independence and warned that if it failed like the earlier ones, the Government would be faced with the ugly choice of imposing a British made constitution or setting a time-limit on British rule irrespective of agreement or disagreement.

During the Parliament's debate on the proposed Cabinet Mission, Prime Minister Attlee declared on 15 March that India would be at liberty to choose its position in the world, whether

(20) All dated 20 February 1946. The Evening Standard is a Conservative daily. It belongs to Beaverbrook group of papers.

(21) The Economist, 150 (23 February 1946) 288.
inside or outside the Commonwealth. 'I hope that the Indian people may elect to remain within the British Commonwealth. I am certain that she will find great advantages in doing so ... But if she does so elect, it must be by her own free will. The British Commonwealth and Empire is not bound together by chains of external compulsion. It is a free association of free peoples. If, on the other hand, she elects for independence, in our view, she has a right to do so. It will be for us to help to make the transition as smooth and easy as possible.' He also made it clear that though they were mindful of the rights of the minorities, they could not allow a minority the right of veto on the advance of the majority. (22)

Conservative Support to Government's India Policy

During the debate in Parliament, the Conservative Party's spokesman, Butler, declared that their Party recognized the urgency of trying to satisfy the expectations of the Indian people. He said that India's war record and the standing of Indian spokesmen necessitated an early advance towards that goal of self-government to which they were all pledged. At the same time he cautioned that a hurried solution would not have any chance of ultimate success. Butler held that their Party accepted the principles of Indian freedom within the Commonwealth or outside it, preceded by an agreement for evolving a body to frame the constitution. He hoped that the Mission would assist in establishing a machinery through which such a policy could be achieved. He pleaded that a way out had to be found, a way along which the Indians would themselves march forward. He thought that no final solution should be arrived

(22) Hansard, H.C., 420 (15 March 1946) cols. 1418-24,
at without realizing the need for some central nexus to handle the questions of all-India importance. He impressed on the House the necessity to safeguard the interests of minorities and the Princes.

Welcoming the Government's decision to send the Cabinet Mission, the Conservative member Sir Stanley Reed, declared that nobody in the House, nor in the country boggled at the term 'independence'. He hoped earnestly that the transfer of power should be done in amity, good faith, and the desire of including India as one of the self-governing Dominions. He opposed the division of the country and pleaded with the House not to oppose any Indian demand for independence. Godfrey Nicholson, another Conservative member, who had visited India recently as a member of the Parliamentary delegation, emphatically told the House that India had become politically an adult and that the cry for independence was not confined to a few individuals, and pointed out that the first task of the Mission should be to convince India of the sincerity of their desire to make India a free nation. The Conservative member, Sir John Anderson*, said that a solution to the Indian problem was not only inevitable and necessary but also urgent. It was absolutely in their own interests that a solution to that problem should be found speedily and on that all sections of the House were united. (23)

The Daily Telegraph pointed out that there was no difference of opinion among the members of all political parties as to India's right to full self-government within the Commonwealth 'if she so wills it, or without, if that is indeed the wish of the majority of

* For a brief biographical sketch see Appendix I:

of Indians'. The Times pointed out that they approached the problem from a 'positive mood', and though they were mindful of their obligations, they could not allow a minority to place a veto on the advance of the majority. Even the Manchester Guardian paid a special tribute to Conservative members who 'with no less warmth and sincerity' offered the support of their party. (24)

The Sunday Times (17 March 1946) felt that the debate reflected the unanimous will of the British Parliament that India should have complete charge of its national destiny as soon as it could frame a constitution for its peoples. The Economist commented: 'Never before had British political leaders protested so openly, so clearly and in such unison their determination to see India freed from British rule in the immediate future.' (25) The Prime Minister declared, that if India opted for independence that would not be contested, 'no subsequent speaker challenged that decisive statement of principle'. (26) The end of the war had changed the situation to a very large extent as whatever was decided could have been implemented immediately. Though the policy was the same, the approach and the circumstances were new and the alternatives were narrowed down.

Indian nationalist leaders were not fully satisfied with the announcement of the proposed visit to India of the Cabinet Mission. Though Attlee made the 'independence' question clearer at the time of announcing the Cabinet Mission, even that declaration was unable

(24) All dated 16 March 1946.
to wipe out at once the deep century-old suspicion that 'Britain was up to her tricks again and finding a new way of keeping her grip on India under the banner of freedom'. (27)

THE CABINET MISSION PLAN

The Cabinet Mission arrived in New Delhi on 24 March. The Secretary of State for India, Pethick-Lawrence, made it clear that they came with the only intention of representing British Government in helping Indians to achieve their independence. The Cabinet Mission held discussions and interviews with political leaders and successfully arranged a conference at Simla. Failing to induce the parties to reach agreement, they put forward their own proposals and presented them to Indians for acceptance. On 16 May, Prime Minister Attlee presented a statement in the House of Commons, which was issued in India by the Cabinet Mission and the Governor-General, in which he said that the Government looked upon the Cabinet Mission proposals as 'the best arrangements possible to ensure a speedy setting up of the new constitution' for India. He hoped that they would be accepted and operated in the spirit of accommodation and goodwill.

The main objective of the plan was not to impose an award, but to set in motion machinery by which a constitution could be settled by Indians themselves. The Cabinet Mission decided on immediate arrangements to work out the future constitution of India and to set up an interim government. Though they were impressed by the evidence in favour of a united India, they considered the suggested schemes for the creation of Pakistan and were forced to

conclude that neither a larger nor a smaller sovereign state of Pakistan would provide an acceptable solution for the communal problem. There were weighty administrative and military considerations which forced them to advise the British Government against partition. They suggested a scheme which would be just to the essential claims of all parties ensuring a practical form of constitution.

The scheme provided for a union of India which would deal with foreign affairs, defence and communications of the whole country, with powers to raise the necessary finances. It was to have an executive and a legislature. Any major communal issue required for its decision a majority of the representatives present and voting of each of the two major communities as well as the majority of all the members present and voting. All other subjects remained with the Provinces and States, and Provinces were free to form groups with executives and legislatures of their own and each group had the power to determine the subjects to be taken up. There was to be a treaty between the union constituent assembly and Britain to provide for matters that arose out of the transfer of power. (28)

(28) Hansard, H.C., 422 (16 May 1946) cols. 2109-20; and India (Cabinet Mission): Statement by the Cabinet Mission And His Excellency the Viceroy, Cmd. 6821 (1946).


Brecher has said that the three-tier plan was drafted by Cripps at breakfast one morning in Delhi just after his return from Kashmir. He considered that the Muslim League was offered a de facto Pakistan. See Michael Brecher, Nehru: A Political Biography (London, 1959) 310-11.

For full details of talks held, see Pyarelal, n. 17, 200-17.
The Cabinet Mission plan demonstrated the British conviction that the best solution lay not in dividing India on communal basis but in maintaining the unity of the country. It represented a skilful attempt to ensure this unity with adequate safeguards for the rights of the minority communities. It also proved the sincerity of the British desire to withdraw from India as early as possible. (29) It was an imaginative variation of the favourite British devise of federation. But neither Party could achieve its whole objective although the statement presented a 'practical and flexible' compromise. 'The three-tier scheme . . . was an intellectual tour de force but it was impracticable in the environment of a deadly struggle for power.' The plan would have brought 'Pakistan in through the back door by the group scheme, and would have maintained the facade of a united India'. (30)

Conservative Attitude to Cabinet Mission Plan

Winston Churchill made, on behalf of the Conservative Party, some general remarks without committing himself at that stage. He made the position of the official Opposition clear and said that they were committed to the Cripps offer by which Dominion Status of Westminster type with the ultimate right of secession was offered, subject to certain provisions, i.e. agreement between the main parties and provision for obligations towards minorities and the states. He said that they stood by Amery's statement of 14 June 1945 made in a purely Conservative Government. It was a surprise to


Churchill that the object sought for by Indians during the negotiations was not Dominion Status with the subsequent and consequent right of secession, but direct and immediate independence. He took exception to the Cabinet Mission plan because the proposals shifted the onus of deciding the constitution from Indian parties to His Majesty's Government who produced a scheme. He thought that it went beyond the purpose and the mandate of the Cabinet Mission. He reminded the House about their obligations to the minorities and the states. (31)

Leopold Amery in a letter to The Times held that the Cabinet Mission plan suggested 'so limited a scope for the central Government of India that a Pakistan formed by a group of provinces would, in fact, enjoy most of the attributes of national independence including . . . the right to frame its own tariff'. Amery wanted the British Government to declare that they would deal with the Indian Government like any other foreign government and that the Governor-General should act constitutionally. (32) In fact, the statement was recognized 'as a genuine and ingenious attempt to reconcile conflicting aims and as unmistakable evidence of the British Government's desire to bring British rule in India to a peaceful end'. (33)

The Economist considered it significant that the proposals were talked of, not as an 'offer', but as an 'award'. It implied that the British Government had become so exasperated with the

(32) The Times, 18 May 1946.
repetition of that fruitless situation that it was at last trying to force an issue rather than sitting back to wait for a solution. (34) To the Sunday Times the White Paper represented a gamble, an acceptance of the risk of precipitating an immediate conflict in India in order to avoid even greater danger of indefinite continuation of the prevailing deadlock. (35)

After considering the plan in secret session, the Council of the Muslim League accepted the proposals by overwhelming majority. The Council reiterated that the attainment of the goal of a complete sovereign Pakistan still remained their main objective. However, it declared that having regard to the grave issues involved and prompted by its earnest desire for a peaceful solution, 'in as much as the basis and the foundation of Pakistan are inherent in the Mission's plan by virtue of the compulsory grouping of the six Muslim provinces ... is willing to co-operate with the constitution-making machinery proposed in the scheme outlined by the Mission, in the hope that it would ultimately result in the establishment of ... sovereign Pakistan'. (36)

The Cabinet Mission and the Governor-General during their consultations with the Indian parties were convinced of the difficulties which existed between the parties. Realizing the urgent necessity of a strong and representative interim government, the Governor-General invited fourteen persons to form the interim...
government. (37) The Congress President, Maulana Azad, rejected the proposals for the formation of the provisional national government based on parity of representation between the Congress and the Muslim League. In his letter to Wavell on 25 June 1946, Azad declared that the Congress rejected the interim plan but accepted the proposals relating to the formation and functioning of the constitution-making body. That decision was ratified by the Congress Working Committee on 26 June. The Muslim League on the same day decided to join the interim government. (38)

The acceptance of the Cabinet Mission plan by both the Congress and the Muslim League was a glorious event in the history of the freedom movement in India. It seemed to have meant that the difficult question of Indian freedom had been settled by negotiation and agreement and not by methods of violence and conflict. (39) Gandhi had initially accepted the plan and said that it contained 'the seed to convert this land of sorrow into one without sorrow and suffering'. Gandhi wrote in the Harijan that it was the best document that the British Government could have produced in the circumstances. (40) As the Congress rejected the proposal for an

(37) Ibid., 620-3.

(38) Ibid., 606-11.

The list of names was announced. Jinnah reserved his right to accept it. The Congress would have accepted but for the disclosure of certain letters written by Jinnah in which he had objected to a Muslim being nominated by other parties and that became a major issue of dispute. Hansard, H.L., 142 (12 July 1946) cols. 585-6 and H.C., 425 (18 July 1946) col. 1405a.


(40) Quoted in Ibid., 172.
interim government which had been accepted by the Muslim League, the Government were in a quandary as to the future course they had to adopt. The Cabinet Mission and the Governor-General decided that the Congress decision was an acceptance of 16 May plan and therefore both the Congress and the Muslim League had qualified for participating in the interim government. They postponed further negotiations for the formation of an interim government and announced a temporary caretaker government of officials. Jinnah took strong exception to the postponement of the formation of the interim government but the Cabinet Mission and the Governor-General refused to heed Jinnah's criticism and the Cabinet Mission returned to England on 27 June.

Parliament and the Cabinet Mission Plan

Soon after returning from their Mission in India, Pethick-Lawrence declared in the House of Lords, that the Cabinet Mission had two main tasks, to convince Indians of the sincerity of the British people in offering them independence within or without the Commonwealth according to their choice, and to bridge the unbridgeable chasm separating the two great Indian parties. He told the House that they were successful in their first objective. The Conservative Party's spokesman, Viscount Templewood, made it clear that they were all anxious to help India on its way to full self-government. He thought that there never had been a case in history, in which a Great Power had so insistently and so sincerely attempted to divest itself of government responsibilities. He welcomed and supported the efforts of the Cabinet Mission. (41)

A full-fledged debate took place in the House of Commons on the Cabinet Mission's proposals. Commending the work of the Cabinet Mission, Stafford Cripps, who was one of the members, declared that the Prime Minister's statement of 15 March on Government's India policy went further than any earlier Government policy and made it possible for them to make headway towards a settlement. He said that in 1942 India was promised Dominion Status and on instructions from the Coalition Government, it was expressly stated that if India desired, it would be free to get out of the British Commonwealth. He made it clear that since 1942 conditions had changed and the only hope of a peaceful and friendly change of sovereignty was to offer the Indians complete independence, within or without the Commonwealth.

Winston Churchill, the leader of the Conservative Opposition affirmed that their Party was committed to the Cripps offer but considered that the directions given to the Mission went beyond those which governed the war-time Cripps offer. The Coalition offer was of Dominion Status, which included the clause in the statute of Westminster, 'What we might call the escalator clause, which affirmed the right of secession in the last resort. The offer was also conditioned upon agreement between the principal parties in India so that the offer could not lead to civil war.' Churchill charged that the Government went beyond the 1942 offer in suggesting full independence directly instead of Dominion Status which had left the final decision open to a fully constituted Indian Dominion. He thought that the proposal led to the severance of all constitutional ties uniting the Indian Empire to the British Commonwealth. He registered his dissent from that extension and short-circuiting
the original offer. Churchill considered that short-circuiting or telescoping of the normal and reasonable constitutional processes upon which both parties were agreed did not give the best chance of a happy or peaceful solution of the Indian problem but prejudged the case, in an adverse sense, whether the vast sub-continent of India should remain of its own free will within the Commonwealth. After emphasizing their obligations to the minorities and the States, he made it clear that the responsibility for the change of policy was that of the Labour Government.

A Conservative back-bencher, Stanley Reed, who carried the agreement of a number of Conservative members, declared that in the transfer of power they were witnessing the fulfilment of British aims in India and were carrying themselves back to those distinguished men who had anticipated such a day with pride and confidence more than a century ago. After welcoming the Prime Minister's speech, he concurred with Cripps that if the Mission had not gone out to India to offer either Dominion status or independence, whichever they preferred, no advance could have been made in the solution of the problem. He was ready to welcome India as a Dominion in the Commonwealth, or accept it as an independent nation if it so preferred it. He declared that the outline of policy by the Mission was the only one suited to the special position of India at that time because it preserved the essential unity of India, their great creation, providing security to the Muslims at the same time. Butler, another Conservative member, agreed with the speech of Stanley Reed which was animated by the right sentiments. (42)

The first effect of the Cabinet Mission was to avert an immediate eruption and it remained their responsibility to make unnecessary any war of independence on the part of India and to assist in preparing a framework which would reduce to a minimum the chances of a conflict. The Mission 'did not seek to dictate or to insist. It attempted to guide and to help and it used persuasion not coercion.' Indian leaders for the first time represented their views informally to British authority and that meant suspicions were removed and friendly relations were established. (43)

By a unanimous vote on 29 July 1946, the Council of the Muslim League withdrew its acceptance of the Cabinet Mission's proposals, and by another resolution it decided to resort to direct action to achieve Pakistan. (44) On the Muslim League's decision, the Round Table commented that 'a grievance over the interim government, however, was no sound reason, by standards of statesmanship, for throwing over the long-term constitutional plan . . . The sincerity of the British Government, despite the Muslim League's charges over the Interim Government, has been proved to India and the world . . . And a tentative solution of the constitutional problem was accepted by the two main parties for the first time.' (45) The Times (2 July 1946), which had appealed to the Congress to end the deadlock by naming persons to the interim government excluding Muslims, later in another editorial (31 July 1946) condemned the decision of the Muslim League.


(44) Gwyer and Appadorai, Documents, n. 36, 618-21.

(45) Round Table, 36 (September 1946) 340-8.
The Congress Working Committee regretted to note the Muslim League's decision not to participate in the constituent assembly. Though the Committee noted that there were differences in the outlook and objectives of the Congress and the League, in the larger interests of the country as a whole, it appealed for the co-operation of all the people of India who sought freedom and good of the country. The Committee made it clear that though they did not approve of all the proposals of the plan, they accepted the scheme in its entirety. (46)

THE INTERIM GOVERNMENT

Authorized by the British Government, the Governor-General invited the Congress President, Nehru to form an interim government. Nehru in vain requested the co-operation of Jinnah. The formation of the Interim Government was announced on 24 August and it came into existence on 2 September. (47)

The formation of a popular Government 'marked the end of an epoch and the opening of another'. India entered upon the final stage in its transition to complete self-government and signalled the early end of the greatest experiment ever made in rule over an alien people. (48) To the Daily Express (28 August 1946) it was

(46) Indian Annual Register (July-December 1946) 105.

(47) The Governor-General, Wavell, wished to postpone the swearing-in of the interim government till he had persuaded the Muslim League to join it. He had expected that dogged effort—plus a little Congress generosity—would get them into it. The British Government felt that delay would exacerbate Congress Party and might lead to a break and civil disobedience and Wavell had to give in. See Mosley, n. 28, 48-9.

one of history's watersheds and the greatest of all experiments in voluntary abdication began. 'The new moon rises with a star beside. It is the star of India. May it become the light of Asia!' The assumption of office by the first purely Indian administration was a decisive landmark in the history of India. Britain had given decisive proof of good faith in the transfer of responsibility to Indian hands. The Times Delhi correspondent described the step as a 'major revolution' peacefully brought about, the climax of a long period of Indian nationalist agitation and of constitutional reforms designed to promote Indian self-government and regarded it as the fulfilment of the prophecy uttered by Macaulay in 1833.

The Muslim League later changed its mind and joined the Interim Government on 26 October. It was hoped that the mere fact of facing political problems together would generate a spirit of co-operation that would extend from the Cabinet room to the country. Though Wavell described it as 'a great step forward', it was clear from the course of events and correspondence, 'that the Cabinet was bi-partisan, rather than a real coalition', and the spirit of co-operation was absent.

CONSERVATIVE PARTY'S ANNUAL CONFERENCE AND INDIA

At the Conservative Party's annual conference held in October 1946, Winston Churchill said that they wanted to give India full Dominion Status, including the right to quit the Commonwealth altogether. He charged that the Labour Government handled the

(49) *The Times*, 3 September 1946.
problem in such a way 'as to give the vast masses of the people of India hardly any choice but to become separated from the British crown which has so long shielded them from internal convulsions or foreign invasion. The Government of India has been placed, or I should rather say thrust into the hands of men who have good reason to be bitterly hostile to the British connection, but who in no way represent the enormous mass of nearly 400 millions . . . .' He expressed his forebodings that calamity impended upon that subcontinent. Naturally, he thought that India would become a separate, a foreign, and none-too-friendly country to the British Commonwealth of Nations. (51) Butler conceded the right of India to frame its own future destiny but wanted that that should include the main elements in India's life. He said that a severe strain had been put upon the Muslim League by the events and pleaded for a fair and free government representing the major minorities and interests of the country with the agreement of the states. In conclusion he said: 'If this country can transfer power in the proper way, it will stand before the bar of history as having achieved the greatest act of statesmanship in the history of the world.' (52)

LONDON CONFERENCE AND PARLIAMENT'S DEBATE ON INDIA

There was a difference of opinion between the Congress and the Muslim League as to the meaning of the Cabinet Mission's statement and the League withdrew its acceptance of the plan at the end of July.


(52) Ibid., 14-15.
To resolve the deadlock, the Indian leaders were invited to a conference in London early in December for the purpose of discussion and common understanding between the two major parties to proceed with the work of the constituent assembly. The conference failed in its main purpose to arrive at a decision. At the end of the conference, the British Government issued a statement and declared that according to legal advice, as was meant by the Cabinet Mission, 'the decisions of the sections should . . . be taken by a simple majority vote of the representatives in the sections'. The Muslim League had accepted that view whereas the Congress had held a different view. The British Government appealed to the Congress to accept its interpretation. The statement also said that if a constitution was framed by a constituent assembly in which a large section of the population had not been represented, then the Government would not contemplate forcing such a constitution upon unwilling parts of the country. (53)

On a demand by the Conservative Party, there was a debate in the Parliament on India policy. In pressing for a debate on India, Churchill was putting forward a considered view of the Conservative Party's 'Shadow Cabinet'. (54) However, on the eve of the debate, the Daily Telegraph declared that it should not be assumed to mark

(53) Full text is to be found in The Indian Annual Register (July-December 1946) 301-2.

In fact, though the conference had been held to smooth the path for the meeting of the constituent assembly and the working of the Cabinet Mission plan, the British Government's declaration of 6 December 'killed plan', invited Jinnah to stand fast, and spelled the doom of a united India . . . the British Government had yielded to Nehru in constitutional discussion (by assuring him that the Cabinet Mission plan would not be altered by the London Conference; and had yielded to Jinnah in the matter of constitutional decision (by virtually assuring him Pakistan). Brecher, n. 28, 327; Emphasis original.

(54) The Times, 12 December 1946.
any cessation of the discretion which had so far been observed by the Opposition. There was no wish in any quarter to revive the past controversy and all parties were at one in desiring that the transfer of power should be effected in a peaceful and promising manner. (55) Defending the Government's India policy, Cripps declared that the happenings were not the outcome of some sudden action or reversal of policy but were conditioned by the logical carrying through of the policies which had been pursued by successive Governments for many generations. The object of Government's India policy, he said was to lead India eventually to freedom and that that objective had been pursued more rapidly some time, more slowly at other times, but the direction had been constant.

**Conservative Party's Attitude to India**

Explaining the Conservative Party's attitude, Churchill acknowledged that there was a general measure of consent throughout Great Britain to the final transference of power from the House of Commons to Indian hands. He considered that such a transfer must be based on the agreement and co-operation of the principle masses and forces among the Indian people. He declared that agreement was the basis, the indispensable condition and foundation of the Cripps offer and the key-note of the Cabinet Mission plan, but there was no agreement. He thought that the formation of an Interim Government by one party was a cardinal error. He suggested to the House that there were three choices before the British Parliament: (1) To proceed with ruthless logic to quit India, (ii) to assert

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(55) *Daily Telegraph*, 12 December 1946, 4.
the principle that the King needs no unwilling subjects, that the
British Commonwealth contemplated no compulsory partnership, and
that in default of real agreement, the partition of India must be
faced, (iii) otherwise, to prevent anarchy and massacre, that an
imperial administration responsible to Parliament should be set up
to maintain the fundamental guarantees of life, liberty and the
pursuit of happiness to the millions. He was doubtful of pursuing
the last alternative and plainly told the Government that whatever
might happen, they should not allow British troops or officers to
be used by one group against the other.

Supporting the broad outlines of the Government's India
policy, the Conservative member, Stanley Reed thought that the
Government had approached that great problem with courage, wisdom
and imagination. The seeds had been sown a century ago, he said,
and there was a steady movement to representative government and
that was the spirit which they had created and which was finding
expression in the task which confronted them that day. He declared
that Pakistan was such an inexorable geographical fact that it
could not be a practical administrative proposition apart from its
economic aspect. Stanley Reed held that the Cabinet Mission's
grouping of Provinces did produce the only possible solution in an
otherwise perfectly impossible situation. He said that Churchill
did not suggest a constructive alternative to the Government's
scheme.

Likewise Butler welcomed the statement and supported the
policy of the Government but wanted a fair treatment for the
minorities. Godfrey Nicholson, the Conservative member, supported
the Government of India's policy and thought it to be the logical
development of the policies of the previous Governments. He made
it clear that there was a great upsurge of national self-consciousness in India and that it should emerge as a free and equal member of the comity of nations. Another Conservative member, John Anderson, said that all the offers definitely and quite clearly marked the stages in a process which had brought them to the culmination of a very long progression. It served to show that one community democratically organized and ruled could not indefinitely hold in subjection another community ripe for self-government. That attitude reflected a growing opinion among some of the influential members of the Conservative Party and it led them finally to support the Government's India policies.

On behalf of the Government, A.V. Alexander said that the Government's action had obtained the support of all parties in that House, which had received the approbation of all well-informed opinion throughout the world, and had proved the goodwill of Parliament and of the British people towards India. (56)

In the House of Lords, the Marquess of Linlithgow, former Conservative Governor-General of India, said that they were pledged to hand over power to a properly constituted authority and that, as they could no longer supply the necessary impulse to wait till such an authority emerged, he advised that they should frankly reshape their policy, renounce their pledges and having given a date, march out of India. Viscount Templewood, former Conservative Secretary of State for India, denied that they desired to cling to power and said that much of the trouble in India was due to the fact that they were in the process of divesting themselves of

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their power. He thought that the Government should have taken the
Opposition into confidence. (57)

In reply to the debate, the Secretary of State for India
considered that whatever might be the criticism of the details,
there was almost complete unanimity throughout the country on the
main issue, namely that the time had come for Indians to have
independence whether within or without the Commonwealth. Pethick-
Lawrence also reiterated that the presence of both major political
parties in the constituent assembly was essential to the success
of the Cabinet Mission plan. (58)

Though the British Government had implied the possibility
of some sort of Pakistan solution, it still hoped to be able to
transfer power to a united India. In this attempt, it was supported
by the Conservative Opposition. Churchill still maintained in
Parliament that power should be handed over only to a united India
and Britain should stay in India until such time as agreement was
reached between the two main parties. (59)

The debate which took place in the Parliament was demanded
by the Conservative Opposition for three reasons, (i) to point
out to the nation the full implications of the Indian policy of
the Labour Government; (ii) to place before the country the
alternatives that existed in regard to India; and (iii) to state
clearly where the Conservative Party stood when the momentous
events were unfolding in India. The Conservatives thought that

(57) Ibid., B.L., 144 (16 December 1946) cols. 954-72.
(58) Ibid., 987-92.
(59) Michael Edwardes, n., 14, 132.
the Government committed blunders in authorizing the Congress to form an Interim Government and allowing the meeting of the Constituent Assembly without prior agreement between parties and charged that the Government had thrust before India the alleged 'choice' between independence within and without the Empire. They held the view that the damage had already been done when the Muslim League joined the Government and that the League did so as a communal block without committing themselves to the doctrine of Cabinet responsibility. Churchill accepted that Dominion Status implied the right to contract out of the British Empire, but still wanted India to pass through such a stage and to see whether India under Dominion Status would have used the escalator clause or not. As a result of the elimination of that clause, 'no fair chance has been given to the people of India to express themselves in a calm atmosphere and under proper conditions, upon the question whether, having obtained full self-government they would wish to leave British Commonwealth of Nations or not'. (60)

Meanwhile, the constituent assembly met as scheduled on 9 December. The absence of the Muslim League was widely regretted. However, the session was postponed to 20 January 1947 to enable the representatives of the Muslim League and of the Indian States to participate in the Constituent Assembly.

At its emergent meeting held on 5-6 January, at New Delhi, the AICC considered the situation arising from the British Government's statement of 6 December 1946. The Congress was anxious that the Constituent Assembly should proceed 'with the work of

framing a constitution for free India with the goodwill of all parties concerned and with a view to removing the difficulties that have arisen owing to varying interpretations, it accepted the British Government's interpretation in regard to the procedure to be followed in the sections. (61)

The Congress accepted it in the hope that the Muslim League would join the Constituent Assembly. However, the League interpreted the Congress decision differently and demanded the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly. (62) Provoked by this decision, the Congress members of the Interim Government urged the Governor-General to dismiss the Muslim League members from the Interim Government, unless the League participated in the Constituent Assembly. Thus there developed a great constitutional crisis in the Indian political scene and there was need for some drastic change of policy on the part of the British authorities.

Thus, at the end of the war, Britain had pledged itself to give independence to India and political parties were alike committed to it. With the full support of the Conservative Party, the Labour Government despatched a Cabinet Mission to India to resolve the problem. The Conservatives had realized that India had become an adult, a solution was inevitable and urgent. Though Churchill charged that the Mission went beyond the mandate, other Conservative members supported the Cabinet Mission plan. The Conservative Party fully supported the Government's India policy and they insisted that power should be handed over to a united

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(61) The Indian Annual Register (January-June 1947) 114-16.
(62) Ibid., 147-51.
India. However, about the interpretation of the Cabinet Mission plan, there developed a crisis between the two major Indian parties, and the situation demanded a new initiative from the British authorities for resolving it.