INTRODUCTION
In order to provide a historical setting for the study of the problem from 1930, it is necessary in this introduction to study the general attitude of the British people and political parties towards the Indian problem, with an emphasis on the attitude of the Conservative Party in particular. Important constitutional changes were introduced in 1833 and the introduction of the Western system of education in the same year led to the growth of political consciousness in India. It widened the Indian horizon, developed an admiration for English literature and institutions, and brought about a revolt against some customs and aspects of Indian life and a growing demand for political reform.

Lord Macaulay made it clear that the British Parliament had no time to discuss details of Indian administration and looked forward to the day, 'that having become instructed in European knowledge, they may, in some future age, demand European institutions... whenever that day comes, it will be the proudest day in English history.' (1)

After the Great Rebellion of 1857, the Government of India was taken over by the British Government. The 1858 Act marked the end of one era and the beginning of another. It marked a change in the form of Government but made no difference in the substance of its power. The Mutiny showed that the Government of India had been out of touch with Indian opinion. The Indian Councils Act of 1861 altered the system of legislation to a very large extent and

provided for the enlargement of the Governor-General's Executive Council, and reconstituted and likewise enlarged the provincial councils. Since most of the non-official members thus chosen were Indians, the Act of 1861 may be said to have introduced the representative principle into the Indian Constitution. It cannot be called strictly a concession of the representative principle as the members were nominated by the Governors. In spite of the narrowness of their scope, valuable advice and assistance was offered to Government by the nominated Indian members. However, it was not intended to be a representative law-making body in the normal sense of the words. (2)

The function of the enlarged councils was limited to legislation and they were nothing more than 'committees for the purpose of making laws' and they could neither criticize nor discuss the executive Government and were akin to the durbars by means of which the Indian Princes acquainted themselves with the views of their subjects. (3) The main interest of the Act of 1861 lay in the gradual construction and consolidation of the mechanical framework of Government. The principle of representation of the people was applied cautiously and only partially, but the effect of the Act was to direct the political development of India towards the goal of democratic government by a representative legislature. (4)

(2) R. Coupland, *The Indian Problem, 1833-1936* (London, 1943) 21,

(3) R. Coupland, *The Empire in These Days: An Interpretation* (London, 1935) 118-19,

During the second half of the nineteenth century there was a rising British feeling of pride over the Empire, best expressed in Conservative Prime Minister Disraeli's presentation to Queen Victoria in 1877 of the title of Empress of India. 'Behind him both within and outside Parliament stood the British commercial interests who knew they had found in India the safest field of investment and trade in the world.' (5)

THE INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS AND THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT

The newly-born national aspirations of the Indian people, however, could not be satisfied with the existing system. India was changing swiftly. Social and religious reforms paved the way for the growth of political consciousness, which was symbolized by the emergence of the Indian National Congress in 1885. The political awakening was largely due to Western education, the influence of the Press and the influx of the new ideas from the west. The constitutional development was powerfully influenced by the rise and growth of a strong national movement spearheaded by the Indian National Congress.

As the growth of the national movement was in turn responsible for constitutional development, they have to be studied together. As time passed, the demand for political reforms and for a share in administration became more and more vocal. Since its inception, the Indian National Congress had demanded expansion of the legislative council and an increase in their powers. As European knowledge had created a demand for European institutions,

Macaulay's vision seemed to be taking shape.

**Indian Councils Act of 1892**

Realizing the necessity of reforming the legislative councils on the lines suggested by Indian leaders, the then Viceroy and Governor-General, Lord Dufferin, sent a despatch to the British Government on constitutional reforms. The main principles on which the despatch was based were decentralization and increasing association of Indians with administration while maintaining the supreme British control in tact. Dufferin actually prepared the ground for the Indian Councils Act of 1892 and recommended a liberal policy so far as admitting Indians to legislative councils, the method of representation and the expansion of their functions were concerned. He, however, repudiated any desire to introduce parliamentary institutions. (6)

It was the Conservative Government under Lord Salisbury that passed the Indian Councils Act of 1892. Significantly it was Lord Curzon, later Viceroy and Governor-General of India, who, in his capacity as Under-Secretary of State for India, piloted the Councils Act of 1892 to 'widens the basis and expand the functions of the Government of India, to give further opportunities ... to the non-official and native element in Indian society to take part in the work of government'. (7) The Act increased the number of additional members in the Central and provincial legislative councils and it introduced the elective principle in the guise of

---

(7) Ibid., 73.
nomination on the basis of recommendations. Since the recommended candidates were in practice accepted as a matter of course, the process became virtually election. (8)

The Act extended the functions of the councils which were authorized to discuss a financial statement without passing any resolution. During the last two decades of the nineteenth century, the British rulers, with the exception of a few, lost the sense of mission which they had earlier. Both the Liberals and the Conservatives were emphatic in their determination to retain the predominance of the European element in the Civil Service. (9) As the colonial empire expanded, there was a movement for imperial unity to safeguard the British Empire and this desire for unity was shared by British parties. The Conservatives suggested unity among the British Empire and the Liberals attempted imperial federation. From that time, federation was never the property of one political party, but was advocated by both parties. (10)

Morley-Minto Reforms of 1909

The Congress in the beginning had faith in the efficacy of the constitutional method for securing reforms by appealing to the British sense of justice and fair play. After some time the Indians realized that their most reasonable demands were not met by the British. It shook the faith of Indian nationalists in the British


(10) A. P. Newton, A Hundred Years of British Empire (London, 1940) 235-6.
rule and alienated them. (11)

In the first decade of the present century, events in and out of India led young men to question the utility of constitutional agitation, the validity of representation, prayer and moral persuasion. There was religious revival due to the efforts of Swami Vivekananda. The national movement was stirred by the Japanese success over Russia which aroused new hopes and aspirations throughout Asia. It kindled Indian imagination and started a mental revolution which provided the fuel for Asian nationalism. The Japanese victory 'was a great pick-me-up for Asia', and it lessened the feeling of inferiority and nationalist ideas spread more widely. (12) Added to these, the partition of Bengal by Curzon set in motion a movement against the Government throughout the country.

The increased aspirations of Indian nationalists could not be met by the reforms of 1892. The lack of a plan as well as the military success of Japan intensified the bitterness and disillusionment of political India. An influential section of opinion hereafter favoured direct action for attaining constitutional power. The growth of extremism made the Government nervous and it adopted a repressive policy. At least in principle, India was encouraged to look to self-government within the British family as its destiny, though in practice, during the half-century after the Crown took over India, the British were too intent on the immediate efficiency of administration to face the political problems of the future and prepare them for a progressive opening of the field for Indian

(11) Mehrotra, n. 9, 29.

executive and legislative responsibility.

Lord Minto, the Viceroy and Governor-General of India realized that education and national consciousness had created new aspirations which could not be ignored and thought of the necessity to associate Indians in the administration. In 1906 Minto pointed out to the Home Government that the growth of education which they had encouraged had led to the creation of a public opinion which claimed equality of citizenship and a responsible share in framing government policy. He realized that while extremism had to be repressed firmly, there was necessity for further substantial concession to the moderate nationalists. Being anxious to secure the co-operation of the moderates, it was again the Conservative Governor-General, Minto, who became convinced and was able to convince a Liberal Government, that Indian political aspirations were a real and permanent force and one to which some effective constitutional expression must be given. (13) The result was the Morley-Minto Reforms of 1909.

The reforms doubled the size of the existing councils with a non-official majority in all the Provinces, while retaining an official majority in the Central legislative council. The principle of election was introduced and the members were empowered to move resolutions and to divide the council, both on matters of public interest and on the budget. An Indian was appointed to the Governor-General's Council for the first time, and careers in the officer ranks of the army were opened to the Indians. A large measure of control over legislation was acquired by the legislative

councils. The principle of election was formally recognized both at the Centre and in the Provinces. (14)

The main function of the legislative bodies was to influence the government in financial and administrative matters without exercising any constitutional control over them. The conception of a responsible executive was not yet admitted. The Government of India was still a benevolent despotism 'willing to consult to a limited extent the wishes of its subjects, but unwilling to resign any fraction of its power. . . . On the one hand Indians had received an increasing share in the administration of the country and increasing opportunities of influencing and criticizing the government; on the other hand they had no real political power and consequently no reason for political responsibility.' (15)

The reforms proved to be a bridge between the old paternal system of government in India and the elementary type of parliamentary system sought to be introduced by the 1919 reforms. They provided for separate communal constituencies for Muslims and thus 'recognized the fact that communal divisions transcended a sense of national unity. Thereafter communal consciousness was strengthened . . . the two communities were not only culturally but also politically distinguishable.' (16) A political barrier was created round the Muslims, isolating them from the rest of India and reversing the unifying and amalgamating process which was going on and was likely

(14) R. Coupland, n. 2, 25.


to be speeded up by technological developments. At first it was a small barrier; with every extension of franchise, it grew and affected the whole structure of public and social life. (17)

The reforms did not provide Indians with a share in the administration, and however well-intentioned they might have been, it was natural that they should inflame rather than appease agitation and tend to breed agitators rather than statesmen. (18) The expansion of the councils and their increased powers of criticism and interpretation stimulated and gave direction to Indian political activity.

In the discussions on the Morley-Minto scheme of 1909, Curzon had pointed out that the seeds of parliamentary government were being sown. (19) However, the desirability of introducing a parliamentary system in India was denied by both the parties. The authors and their critics, Liberal as well as Conservative, declared categorically that India was not qualified for a parliamentary system and denied that the reforms had this as their objective. (20) Disclaiming parliamentary system, they held that they should spare no efforts to rally to the support of the Crown against the growing forces of anarchy the loyalty of the upper classes of India. (21)

(17) Jawaharlal Nehru, The Discovery of India (Calcutta, 1946) 422.
(20) Lord Morley declared: "... If it could be said that this chapter of reforms led directly or necessarily up to the establishment of a parliamentary system in India, I, for one, would have nothing to do with it." A.C. Banerjee, n. 6, 166.
They were driven to devising, not so much a coherent plan, as a series of expedients to meet the particular and admittedly difficult situation. 'A sop to impossible ambitions' was Minto's description of the reforms, and Morley, in Parliament and in private, maintained that he did not think it 'desirable or possible or even conceivable to adapt English political institutions to the nations who inhabit India'. Thus, down to 1909, 'lacking clarity of mind and directness in approach', the British Government in India followed 'a confused, uncertain policy towards Indian nationalism, most of the time assuming an attitude of coolness and inflexibility — which really concealed its perplexity — varied on occasion by a retreat from position to position, each move being made a little too late to satisfy the bulk of educated Indian opinion. Just as the East India Company had overrun India whilst condemning schemes of conquest, so also the British Government took Indians towards a kind of parliamentary government whilst disavowing the possibility,' (22)

As stated in the final despatch from the India Office, the scope and purpose of the reforms were to enable 'the Government the better to realize the wants, and sentiments, of the governed, and on the other hand to give the governed a better chance of understanding, as occasion arose, the case for the Government against the misrepresentations of ignorance and malice'. The strength and unity of the executive power was to remain entirely subordinate to parliamentary control. (23) After 1909, the transition of India had been from representation to responsibility and British policy entered

---

upon the conversion of a vast democracy into a self-governing nation. (24)

**FIRST WORLD WAR AND THE DECLARATION ON RESPONSIBLE GOVERNMENT**

The First World War (1914-18) gave a great fillip to the Indian national movement. It forms 'the portal through which India entered the stage of the modern world from the hall of Victorian India, Edwardian India forming, as it were, the vestibule between them'. (25) The part played by India in the war stimulated its self-confidence and it intensified the demand for constitutional advance during the period 1915-16. The movement consolidated itself in favour of self-government and the Government of India sent its proposals for Indian reforms by October 1916. The war brought India on to the international stage, fighting side by side with other nations, 'sharing in their suffering and achievement, acquiring a new consciousness of nationhood and a new claim to its recognition'. India's share in that conflict and 'the demands which were addressed to her ... made the inconsistency of denying her full share in the conduct of her own affairs even more pronounced'. (26)

Thus India's valuable part in the war and the growing strength of the Indian national movement made the British Government

---


reassess their policies, in Liberal Prime Minister, Asquith's words, 'from a new angle of vision'. The aims of war were declared to be to make the world safe for democracy, and the principle of self-determination was proclaimed and given prominence. Indian nationalists took the declarations at their face value and entertained very high hopes. India developed a new sense of self-esteem and hoped for its recognition. In the proclaimed ideals of the war, Indian people visualized a new horizon of hope. The Mesopotamian report brought home to the British public the defects of the Government of India, and the British public realized that a measure of responsible government was necessary to mobilize Indian public opinion in favour of war effort. These factors were also responsible for a favourable British response to satisfy the Indian demand for a declaration of the British policy in India.

The Conservative Secretary of State for India, Austen Chamberlain, attempted successfully to include India at the Imperial War Conference. As India's participation in the Imperial War Conference depended on its self-government, he suggested a formula by which the aim of the policy was to be declared. He defined the British goal in India as developing 'free institutions with a view to ultimate self-government within the Empire'. (27) It was again

---

(27) Austen Chamberlain wrote to his sister on 24 March 1917 about his efforts to include India at the Imperial Conference. His attitude changed due to the change in the world situation. He had well realized the ferment of new ideas generated by the Russian revolution and their effect on India and had gauged the rapid changes that were taking place in India. It was doubtful whether India would have been represented at the Imperial War Conference if Chamberlain had not taken a firm stand. Sir Charles Petrie, The Life and Letters of the Rt. Hon. Sir Austen Chamberlain, 2nd Volume (London, 1940) 73-8, 93.
Austen Chamberlain who took the first step and was responsible for framing British policy towards India. In the summer of 1917, the Governor-General pressed for an early statement and in May 1917 Austen Chamberlain brought the Indian problem to the attention of the Cabinet and sought a decision. 'It is not too much to say,' he wrote, 'that upon a right decision at this critical time depends the peace and contentment of India for years and perhaps for generations to come.' (28) However the Cabinet was busy in matters connected with the war and delayed consideration of Indian problem. Soon thereafter, Edwin Montagu succeeded to the office of the Secretary of State for India. Realizing the necessity of mobilizing Indian public opinion in favour of the war effort, he submitted the same formula as Austen Chamberlain. It was redrafted, interestingly enough, by Curzon of the Conservative Party. (29) The goal of British policy in India was thus defined by one Conservative statesman and underlined by another.

Montagu announced the historic policy statement on 20 August 1917 and declared that 'the policy of His Majesty's Government, with which the Government of India are in complete accord, is that of the increasing association of Indians in every branch of the administration

(28) Ronaldshay, n. 19, 162.

(29) Soon after Montagu succeeded Austen Chamberlain to the India Office, Montagu submitted the same formula as Austen. It was as follows: 'His Majesty's Government and the Government of India have in view the gradual development of free institutions in India with a view to ultimate self-government within the Empire,' it left the type of free institutions open but Curzon was not satisfied and redrafted it as follows: 'The policy of His Majesty's Government, with which the Government of India are in complete accord, is that of the increasing association of Indians in every branch of the Administration, and the gradual development of self-governing institutions, with a view to the progressive realisation of responsible government in India as an integral part of the British Empire.' Ibid., 166-7. Emphasis in original.
and the gradual development of self-governing institutions with a view to the progressive realization of responsible government in India as an integral part of the British Empire'. (30)

As Montagu himself had claimed, the statement was 'the most momentous utterance ever made in India's chequered history'. (31) Though British policy had been directed to a point where the question of self-governing India was bound to arise, Lord Morley, Lord Crewe, and other leaders had denied it. If there was any doubt, it was cleared in 1917. That pregnant word 'responsible' was written into the draft Despatch by Curzon and the Declaration emanated from a Coalition Government. The Declaration, which formed the preamble to the 1919 Reforms Act, 'was the response to the insistent demand of loyal and patriotic Indians for a goal and a policy: it was no partisan pronouncement, but the matured conclusion of a Cabinet in which all parties in the state were represented'. The broad highway was resolutely staked out, although the British and Indian Governments had reserved to themselves the right to be the judges of the time and measure of each advance. They could not back out without blackening their faces before the tribunal of the civilized world. (32) Reginald Coupland described the phrase as 'a terse and accurate description of the rise of self-governing colonies to Dominion Status'. (33) To The Times it was

---

(30) A.C. Banerjee, n. 6, 201.

'The voice might be the voice of Sir Montagu, but the policy was that which Austen Chamberlain had elaborated during the two previous years.' Charles Petrie, n. 27, 93.


(33) R. Coupland, n. 2, 54.
a fresh landmark in the history of the relations of Britain with India, and the clearest and the most definite declaration of British aim in India since the Queen's Proclamation of 1858. (34) The declaration was really a bold departure from the old policy and it was revolutionary as it promised responsible government.

India was admitted to the Imperial War Cabinet and Imperial War Conference of 1917 and it signed the Versailles Peace Treaty and became a member of the League of Nations. 'It was a recognition of the fact that self-government was India's destiny. It was, so to speak, a payment in advance which India had earned by her extraordinary services.' (35) It brought Indian statesmen into the centre of world politics and it ensured that Indian opinion should not be overlooked and 'it was in itself a sort of guarantee that full Dominion Status was the ultimate objective'. (36) The acceptance of the progressive realization of responsible government in 1917 as the purpose of British rule in India 'marked the beginning of the end', and for all practical purposes 'the days of British rule were numbered; and from 1917 onwards the advance to self-government became more important than the maintenance of good government, and political and constitutional developments dominated the Indian scene'. (37)

When the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms were considered in Parliament, speakers irrespective of party affiliation hoped that

---


(36) R. Coupland, n. 3, 144.

(37) S. Gopal, The Viceroyalty of Lord Irwin, 1926-1931 (London, 1957) 3,
India would become a self-governing member of the Empire, in fullness of time, like the other Dominions. Between August 1917 and December 1919, when the Reforms Act was passed, the principles which were finally embodied in the Act were subjected to a rain of criticism, both hostile and friendly, ignorant and learned. The British Parliament and people felt that in conceding the principle that the goal of Indian political progress was responsible self-government and in delegating to the control of popularly elected legislatures some of the most important departments of administration in the provincial government, they were taking a leap in the dark.

The reforms gave rise to something like the beginning of a federal system for India with the separation of the spheres of the provincial and central governments. The intention was that the Executive, though not responsible to the Legislature, should become 'responsive' to it by giving weight to the majority view; in practice, however, the position had its drawbacks. (38) The 1919 Reforms Act remodelled the Central legislature giving 'a wider application to the principle of election and representation', and the principle of ministerial responsibility was partially introduced. Subject to the wide safeguards, 'a genuine effort was made in the Act to afford a measure of responsible government'. (39)

The object of 1919 reforms was to replace the system of government then obtaining by a machine which would ultimately be

---

(38) John Coatman, n. 4, 42-3. See also Round Table, 32 (June 1941) 377.

(39) A.B. Keith, n. 21, 249.

'It was made clear that the ideal could be attained only in successive stages to be controlled by the governments and that advance must be conditioned by the progress in co-operation received and the confidence inspired.' Ibid., 243.
developed into responsible government. The Act was transitional, as was clearly shown in the provision requiring the appointment of a Statutory Commission on the expiry of ten years to enquire into the working of the government, the growth of education and the development of representative institutions in India. (40)

Some vested interests like retired officials, merchants with direct investments, and some liberals formed Indo-British Association and opposed the reforms, specially the introduction of responsible government in India. The Association worked against the reforms, but the change in the climate of opinion was so great that it did not find it tactical to press hard its opposition. The existence of a Coalition Government with the Conservative Party as a partner made it difficult for those Conservatives to oppose the Act who felt disturbed at the partnership approach to, and at the experiment of Parliamentary democracy in India'. The bulk of the Conservatives acquiesced in the Act. (41)

The reforms introduced dyarchy. The war had intensified Indian nationalism and the spirit of independence in several Asiatic countries made it very hard for Indian patriots to accept the reforms which promised only gradual development of self-government. They could not easily reconcile themselves to the claim of a foreign Parliament to decide whether and where and to what extent Indians had shown themselves fit for self-government.

The reforms were passed in a flush of enthusiastic


parliamentary gratitude for the contributions India had made in money and man-power towards the war. Its passage had the misfortune to be sandwiched between two events — the oppressive execution of the Rowlatt Acts against sedition in India and the action of General Dyer in the Jallianwallah Bagh at Amritsar, an event which, in Churchill's words, stood 'in singular and sinister isolation' in the British imperial record and supplied Indian nationalism with all the martyrs it was ever to need. (42) It quickened India's political life and drew Gandhi into politics. For the successful working of the reforms there was need for goodwill and friendliness but there were instead bitterness, estrangement and distrust which led to their dismal failure.

Soon after the publication of the Montagu-Chelmsford Report, the Congress at its special session held at Bombay in August 1918, declared 'that the people of India were fit for Responsible Government' and repudiated the assumption to the contrary contained in the Report. . . . While it recognized that some of the proposals constituted an advance in some directions, it was of opinion that the proposals were "disappointing and unsatisfactory". The Congress, at its session held at Delhi in December 1918, demanded the recognition of India 'as one of the progressive nations to whom the principle of self-determination should be applied'.

The special session of the Congress held at Calcutta in September 1920 decided to carry on non-violent non-co-operation. It was ratified by the Nagpur session in December 1920. (43) The

---

non-co-operation movement turned the national movement into truly a mass movement on a giant all-India scale and gave further impetus to the political agitation and the British rule was shaken to its foundations.

The policy of the British Conservative Party to India was defined by the Party leaders. The leader of the Party, Stanley Baldwin, said that they would guide India to self-government within the Empire and resist any attempt at separation. The progressive grant of constitutional liberties 'must be in proportion to, but not in advance of, the loyalty and capacity of those to whom it is intended to benefit'. (44) The policy of the Party was reaffirmed when Baldwin said that in the eyes of the Conservative Party, 'the welfare of India constitutes one of the greatest and most sacred trusts with which the British Government is charged'. To discharge that trust faithfully, 'a firm and definite policy is indispensable, a policy based on the letter and spirit of the Reforms Bill, promised and guaranteed to India'. But he made it clear that there must be no concessions to unwarranted agitation and no toleration of the methods of the extremists. (45)

THE STATUTORY COMMISSION

The intention of the British Government in passing the 1919 Reforms Act was to make a decisive and distinctive step in the gradual development of self-governing institutions in India. There was a provision in the Act, to set up at the end of ten years a

(44) The Times, 3 May 1924, 17.
(45) Ibid., 16 October 1924, 8 and 15.
Statutory Commission to review the situation in India and to make recommendations for the development of responsible government. The very provision was regarded as proof of their 'experimental and impermanent character'. In spite of agitation for further reforms, there was no prospect of any change of policy. The obstructionists were warned and the Labour Prime Minister, Ramsey MacDonald, was commended for declaring that no British party was to be cowed down by threats of force or by policies designed to bring Government to a standstill. The Viceroy and Governor-General, Lord Irwin, had also warned the Indians that coercion would not move Parliament and pointed out that the future lay in a policy of co-operation. (46)

Significantly, the Conservative Government under Stanley Baldwin sprang a surprise upon the public by advancing the date of the Commission of enquiry and announced the constitution of the Statutory Commission in November 1927. It was to inquire into the working of the Indian constitution and to consider the desirability of establishing, extending, modifying or restricting the degree of responsible government at the end of the decennial period. The Commission included seven members of British Parliament representing all the three political parties, with John Simon as the chairman.¹

Indian nationalists had thought of a Round Table Conference or a Commission of both Indian and British representatives.

¹ The Statutory Commission consisted of seven members with John Simon as chairman. The other members were Lord Burnham, Lord Strathcona, Edward Cadogan, Colonel Lane Fox (afterwards Lord Bingley), Vernon Hartshorn and Clement R. Attlee, all members of Parliament; four of them Conservatives and two Labour. For a brief biographical sketch see Appendix I.

Contrary to this expectation, Lord Birkenhead, the Secretary of State for India, who actually wanted to adhere strictly to the ten year-period, restricted the choice of membership to Members of Parliament on the assumption that the authors of 1919 reforms had a quasi-judicial inquest in mind. His aim seems to have been to exclude Indian controversies and to forestall the possibility of Labour Party members joining hands with Indians in producing the report. (47)

The exclusion of Indians had been supported by the Governor-General and his trusted advisers who were unanimous in thinking that a British Commission drawn from the two Houses of Parliament was the most logical and appropriate plan. They were convinced that if the personnel were confined to Parliament, the criticism on the exclusion of Indians would fall to the ground and that they would be attacked only for having followed a principle which was susceptible of defence. (48)

(47) The date was accelerated to avoid the risk of that chance falling to the Labour government after 1929 elections. Birkenhead in his letter, to the Governor-General, dated 10 December 1925, explained that 'having regard to the political contingencies in this country, we must keep the nomination of the personnel of this Commission in our own hands. In this matter we cannot run the slightest risk. My present view, therefore is . . . that we shall in any event, playing for safety, be driven to nominate the Commission in the middle of 1927.' He also thought that the mere ante-dating of the Commission while it would probably give satisfaction in India, 'would deprive us nothing valuable. We can play with the time as we want'.


(48) From Governor-General to Secretary of State, 19 August 1926, I.O.L. MSS. Eur. C/152/2, 73-80 and 17 November 1926, 153 and from Secretary of State to Governor-General, 23 September 1926, 87-8. See also Viscount Halifax, Fulness of Days (London, 1957) 115-16.
The editor of *The Times*, Geoffrey Dawson commented that the British Government were greatly to blame for the manner in which the Simon Commission was launched. Everyone had been allowed to anticipate a 'mixed' Commission. As the Commission consisted of only British representatives, contrary to the expectations of Indians, it was boycotted by all parties and groups in India.

The exclusion of Indians was justified on the ground that experts on India would not come to agreement and detached investigators would not impose their recommendations. So it should be 'a travelling committee of the Imperial Parliament' representative of all parties and therefore of all possible governments. The procedure adopted for the constitution of the Commission, it was said, was dictated by working constitutional necessity and not by any desire to exclude Indians from having a voice in the decisions of India's political history. The Indian attitude seemed to the British mind 'the height of perversity, throwing away the substance in order to catch at a shadow'.

The Secretary of State for India for some time had kept an open mind, and both he and the Governor-General decided on the Commission after long and anxious thought. There was much in logic to support the appointment of a parliamentary Commission, as the British Parliament was responsible for India's political future and it appeared reasonable that Parliament should send its own delegation to enquire and report to it. Still, there were strong arguments in favour of a mixed Commission. 'Thus, however logically right, the


decision proved to be a disastrous psychological misjudgment. The Governor-General and the India Office were aware that their decision would not be popular, but they had not realized how tender were the susceptibilities on which they had so heavily pressed.' (51)

Thus, it was the Conservative Government which without hesitation decided to go ahead with the policy that had been accepted in 1919 and appointed the Commission. The complexity of the problem of framing a constitution led all the British political parties to refrain from adopting a partisan attitude and to collaborate in the appointment of the Statutory Commission. But the parties rated the importance of a General Election far higher than that of the future of India and restricted their choice to the back-benchers and the result was 'a terribly weak-team', though it did not prove to be 'a one-man show' as was hoped by a few. (52) The Commission entered on its duty as an independent and unfettered body.

All parties in India condemned and boycotted the Commission. To appease Indian sentiments without curtailing the powers of the Commission, Simon suggested that the evidence that came before the Commission should come before a 'Joint Free Conference' consisting of British commissioners and representatives from the Indian legislature. There are good grounds to believe 'that if Irwin had recommended and Parliament adopted this procedure [associating Indian representatives] from the outset much of the hostility to the Commission, particularly that of the Hindu and Moslem moderates,


(52) S. Copal, n. 37, 20. See also *History of The Times*, n. 50, 865.
would have disappeared'. Irwin later regretfully concurred with that view. (53) The Times considered the change as over-generous. The Indian leaders rejected the offer without hesitation. The Joint Free Conference could not take the place of the Commission which alone could report to Parliament and whose recommendations alone would have value. As A.B. Keith said: 'The matter was mismanaged from the first, and the Indian authorities were induced to share the Congress attitude of unreasoning hostility.' (54)

Statutory Commission's Report

The Statutory Commission submitted its report on 27 May 1930. Full provincial autonomy subject to certain restrictions was suggested and the main conclusion reached by the Commission was that the Indian constitution must ultimately be federal and be attained by continuous evolution. The recommendations failed to satisfy Indian opinion and the Commission failed to give a definite lead on more than one critical question. Anyhow, the report was noteworthy for two of its conclusions. It concluded that the Provinces were ripe for full responsible self-government including law and order and that British India alone was unsuited for any permanent system of self-government. In the Commission's opinion, an all-India federation was the only ultimate solution of the problem and it was to this that all the marshalling of their facts and arguments irresistably pointed. (55)

The Times laid special emphasis on the fact that the Simon


(54) A.B. Keith, n. 21, 288-9.

(55) L.S. Amery, n. 13, 216-17.
report would be found to be 'without dissenting minute' which implied 'that there will be no divergence in Great Britain about the essential features of the problem to be solved'. It summed up the achievement of the Commission as setting 'a new course toward the goal by translating mere ideas into a definite scheme of federal union'. (56) Deprecating the criticism about the absence of any mention of Dominion Status, the Spectator explained that Dominion Status was not a concrete thing but was a condition of co-operative independence within the British Commonwealth and declared that the report provided not only the apparatus but also the unanimous sanction of experienced men of all parties for an unlimited advance in Indian self-government. (57)

The proposals were of a conservative character and such innovations as they contained had already been discounted by moderate opinion both in England and India. 'Never did so massive a document . . . cause so slight a ripple. Born under an unlucky star and faced with the unparalleled prejudice in India, the Commission presented an unanimous report.' (58) The answer of the Congress to the appointment of the Simon Commission had been a comprehensive one in that it not only boycotted the Commission with substantial success but also drafted an alternative report.

(56) Evelyn Wrench, n. 49, 223-4.


(58) S. Gopal, n. 37, 25, 90.

During the last stages of the Statutory Commission's Report, it is said that one of the Commissioners, Lord Burnham intended to resign but for the intervention of the King. Harold Nicolson, King George V, His Life and Reign (London, 1952) 504-5.
The Statutory Commission's recommendations were treated with dissatisfaction by Indian nationalists and with little respect by the British Government. The recommendations failed to satisfy Indian opinion and the Commission failed to give a definite lead on more than one critical question. (59) The Government of India, committed by the Governor-General to the objective of Dominion Status, still based their hopes on a Round Table Conference and both British and Indian Governments declared that such a conference would be free and would in no way be bound or circumscribed by the report. (60) In fact, the Simon report had been outstripped by events. 'In its insistence on the old method of slowly ripening progress it now seemed to the Indians like a prehistoric monster moving in the wrong geological age.' It was brushed aside with impatience. (61) The recommendations of the Statutory Commission could not please the Indians and also offended the British Conservative opinion who considered them as over-generous, 'their solid value is proved by the fact that, though the report seemed to be discarded with indifference, much of its substance is embodied in the reform scheme [Act of 1935].' (62)


(60) The Times, 3 July 1930. See also S. Gopal, n. 37, 293.

(61) Birkenhead, n. 51, 286.

(62) A. B. Keith, n. 54, 293.