CHAPTER I

THE ROUND TABLE CONFERENCE 1930-1932
By the late 1920s, Indian nationalists, even the moderates, were unhappy and had almost lost faith in British sincerity and honesty because of the appointment of the all-White Statutory Commission, and political discontent ran high through the entire length and breadth of the country. Meanwhile, accepting the challenge of the Conservative Secretary of State for India, Lord Birkenhead, to produce a constitution acceptable to all parties, Indian nationalists called an All-Parties Conference and produced a report containing proposals for the future constitution of India, which aimed at the establishment of full responsible government both at the Centre and in the Provinces. It provided for 'Dominion Status'. The Calcutta Congress of 1928 accepted the All-Parties Report and warned the British Government that if it did not agree to that constitution within a year, the Congress would revert to the demand for complete independence. (1) Jawaharlal Nehru commented: 'It was an offer of a year's grace and a polite ultimatum. The resolution was no doubt a come-down from the ideal of independence.'

(1) The Calcutta Congress passed the following resolution:

'This Congress, having considered the constitution recommended by the All-Parties Committee Report, welcomes it as a great contribution towards the solution of India's political and communal problems . . . Whilst adhering to the resolution relating to complete independence passed at the Madras Congress . . . this Congress will adopt the constitution in its entirety if it is accepted by the British Parliament on or before December 31, 1929, but in the event of its non-acceptance by that date . . . Congress will organize a non-violent non-co-operation movement and would fight for complete independence.' The Indian Quarterly Register, (Calcutta) (July-December 1928) 359-54.
for the All-Parties Report did not even ask for full "Dominion Status". (2) Thus the Congress pleaded with the British Government for the acceptance of a constitution as outlined in the All-Parties Report by the end of the year 1929.

THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL'S PRONOUNCEMENT OF 31 OCTOBER 1929

Lord Irwin, the Viceroy and Governor-General of India, wrote to the Secretary of State for India that political conditions in India had so deteriorated that a drastic treatment was required. He was impressed 'with the possibility of the problem becoming even more intractable than it is at present, and assuming a shape that would not readily yield to the kind of treatment that the extreme wing of our Party might be disposed to recommend'. (3) Thus, the Government of India realized the necessity to rally moderate opinion by means of some concession, and the Conservative Governor-General felt the need to display sincerity, along with a show of strength. By associating Indians with the consideration of the proposals of reforms before they were debated in Parliament and by stating the ultimate objective of the British rule, Irwin tried to retrieve lost ground. The one would remedy the harm done by the Statutory Commission and the other would enable co-operation in the future. (4) Irwin thought that the Simon report would destroy his patient mediation and that the

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(3) Lord Irwin: Letters to the Secretary of State for India, India Office Library (I.O.L.), London, Halifax Collection. MSS. Eur., C.152/5, 22.

bitterness aroused by the Indian exclusion would be nothing compared
with the fury the report would produce. He considered that the
moment was ripe for some gesture 'which would stir the imagination of
India, regain the contact that had been lost, and restore faith in
British purpose'. He hoped to get the support of the Labour Government

'Ironically, the aristocratic Conservative Viceroy would soon
find himself in warm alliance with Socialist Labour Ministers
and in pursuit of a policy deeply disturbing to the Conservative
and Liberal Parties.' (5) So, he thought of removing misunderstanding
and distrust by a definite assurance of Dominion Status and India's
right to it. With the main intention of restoring confidence in
British purpose, Irwin suggested to the Labour Government, the two
ideas of a Round Table Conference and a formal declaration of
'Dominion Status' as the goal of British policy for India. (6) But
Irwin did not envisage 'the goal of Dominion Status as being quickly
reached' and it was not his intention 'that the conference should
act as a constituent assembly. Rather did he set it as a meeting
of men of different creeds who would discuss, on equal terms with
the English, the means of attaining the Dominion Status which he
had brought before their eyes.' (7)

(5) The Earl of Birkenhead, Halifax, the life of Lord Halifax

(6) Irwin had discussed these two ideas with the editor of.
The Times, Geoffrey Dawson. Dawson did not consider that Dominion
Status implied anything more than 'Self-government within the
Empire'. He still doubted 'whether Dominion Status has not lately
been interpreted as implying self-government outside the Empire
altogether... That being so, there might be something to be
said for transposing the words into "status of a Dominion" or even
"status of a British Dominion."' Dawson to Irwin, 8 October 1929,
I.O.L. MSS. Eur. C.152/23, 60-1. See also his letter dated
31 October 1929, Ibid., C.152/18, 360-1.

(7) Birkenhead, n, 5, 270.
The Labour Secretary of State for India, Wedgwood Benn, wished to be satisfied that they were not going behind the back of the Statutory Commission. John Simon, Chairman of the Statutory Commission, finally agreed to the idea of the Round Table Conference and exchanged letters with the Prime Minister, though he was sceptical of the wisdom and propriety of the declaration of Dominion Status before the Commission reported. (8) Irwin wisely discussed the plan with some important Conservative members of Parliament, including the leader of the Conservative Party, Stanley Baldwin. Baldwin had no objection, provided the plan was supported by the Statutory Commission, and by all the parties. When he came to know on 23 October that the Simon Commission opposed it, he conferred with Birkenhead, Earl Peel, and Lord Salisbury, and decided to write to the Prime Minister that they would not agree to the declaration of Dominion Status before the Commission reported.

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* For a brief biographical sketch see Appendix I.


At first John Simon did not object to the Dominion Status declaration but was very hesitant about the Round Table Conference on the ground that it might affect the status of the Commission's report. A little later, influenced by Lord Reading, he changed his mind and accepted the Round Table Conference idea but opposed the idea of Dominion Status Declaration. Irwin to Salisbury, 3 December 1929, I.O.L. MSS. Eur., C 152/18, 358-9.

Simon said that the then Government authorized 'the issue of the statement without ever consulting the Commission at all'. Irwin had discussed the plan with Simon. It was only when he opposed the declaration on Dominion Status that the Government kept the second part for itself. See Viscount Simon, *Retrospect: The Memoirs* (London, 1952) 152.
Declaration in the changed circumstances. (9) Baldwin wrote to Philip Snowden, Acting Prime Minister, and submitted the Conservative view that a new declaration 'would impair the authority of the Simon Commission, would defeat the intention of Parliament and compromise its liberty of action'. He therefore appealed to him to avert such a disaster and at any rate postpone it until the Prime Minister returned from abroad. The message was transmitted to Irwin telegraphically, but Irwin thought that postponement would be disastrous, as he had already revealed it to some of the Indian leaders. (10) Thus Irwin was well aware of the volume and intensity of the opposition he might expect in due course from his Conservative friends at Westminster. However, with the full support of the Labour Government to his proposals, he had returned to India.


When Dominion Status was mentioned, Winterton, at first, was horrified. On 25 October 1929, Winterton noted in his diary 'that it was dangerous to declare Dominion Status as it had a very special meaning since the Imperial Conference of 1926'. Ibid.

Winterton thought that Dominion Status included, (a) the right of secession, (b) and responsibility in theory, for defence. Accordingly he warned Irwin: 'It seems to me almost unbelievable that the Conservative Party, at any rate (and I should hope that it also applied to the bulk of the electors) would concede such a right as (a) to Indians in any foreseeable future; equally commonsense dictates that (b) could only be conceded with the most rigid reservations'. The desire to declare 'Dominion Status' 'perhaps proceeds from the feeling that the aim thus envisaged is too remote to be realizable in less than two generations, and also from a knowledge of the importance which phrases have for Indians. But both reasons are, to me, in the scale against such an announcement...'. Winterton to Irwin, 28 September 1929, I.O.L., LSS., Eur. C.152/28, 56-5.

In his personal interviews with Indians, Irwin carefully emphasized the distinction between definition of purpose on the one hand and the method by which the purpose was to be achieved. Having been warned against delaying the plan, and without giving due weight to the personal message from Baldwin to withhold the matter and allow more time for consideration, Irwin fearing that postponement would be disastrous, made the fateful statement on 31 October 1929. He announced the decision of His Majesty's Government to hold a Round Table Conference, and declared, 'I am authorized on behalf of His Majesty's Government to state clearly that in their judgement it is implicit in the declaration of 1917 that the natural issue of India's constitutional progress as there contemplated, is the attainment of Dominion Status'. (11) To all outward appearances, 'it was no more than the reiteration of an avowed aim, the repetition of a well-worn phrase'. Such a policy was 'an essential supplement without which in his judgment the conference itself would be from the outset condemned to failure'. He was impressed with the dangers if no formula could be found to identify India's aspirations with Britain's policy. His analysis was calculated to break the political boycott movement in

(11) Maurice Gwyer and A. Appadorai, Speeches and Documents on the Indian Constitution, 1921-47, Volume I (Bombay, 1957) 22-7. This source will hereafter be cited as Gwyer and Appadorai, Documents.

In the proposed statement, Irwin made two alterations in deference to representations made by the Liberal leaders, Lord Reading and Lloyd George. He substituted for the words 'it is implicit in the Declaration of 1917 that the attainment of Dominion Status must be regarded as the natural issue of India's constitutional progress', the words 'it is implicit in the Declaration of 1917 that the natural issue of India's constitutional progress as there contemplated is the attainment of Dominion Status'. The second was to delete the sentence, 'His Majesty's Government have opened the door to a more excellent way', from the last paragraph of his statement. Cabinet paper enclosed to the letter from Benn to Irwin, 14 November 1929, I.O.L. MSS. Eur. C.152/5, 146-9.
India but he failed to gauge the results of the possible British reaction. (12)

Though the announcement was made with good intentions, it was not made at the appropriate time and appropriate manner, for the phrase 'Dominion Status' had acquired a new and definite meaning. (13) At that time there was a minority Labour Government, which was not stable, and any time another Government was expected. In such circumstances, when some of the important members of the Conservative Party, including the leader of the Party had opposed the declaration of Dominion Status, Irwin would have been wise in heeding to the last minute advice of the leader of the Conservative opposition to withhold public reference to Dominion Status. Quite possibly, the result would have been different if Irwin with foresight had announced only the idea of a Round Table Conference, emphasizing that the conclusions at the Round Table Conference would guide the policy of the Government, as he in fact later did. Though the declaration of Dominion Status was made with the best intentions, instead of restoring the trust and confidence of the Indians in British sincerity which it aimed at, it finally led to the increase of bitterness between the two countries.

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(13) The Imperial Conference of 1926 defined the position and mutual relation of Great Britain and the Dominions. The Dominion was 'completely self-governing, it owed allegiance to the Crown; and it was freely associated with other self-governing countries, which also owed such allegiance, as a member of the British Commonwealth'. It was maintained that 'the right to secede had been accepted and declared'. Thus 'Dominion Status' acquired a new and definite meaning after 1926. K.C. Wheare, The Constitutional Structure of the Commonwealth (London, 1960) 12.
Reaction in Britain

There was immediate and swift reaction. All the British political parties accepted the suggestion of a Round Table Conference but the Liberal and Conservative Parties disliked, and were opposed to, a categorical recognition and criticized the declaration of the goal of Dominion Status which had acquired a new meaning after 1926. Irwin, Benn, Baldwin and Simon found no barriers to unanimity so far as the first part of the statement, was concerned, but the reference to 'Dominion Status' was met with opposition. The editor of The Times, Geoffrey Dawson, set the position in perspective: 'A three cornered conference had long been mooted and was approved by all parties at Westminster, the Viceroy was primarily speaking on procedure and only incidentally restating the ultimate end; there was ample precedent for using the phrase "Dominion Status" while details were vague.' (14) The Government were now committed to a precise ultimate objective and for consultation with the Indian leaders.

Birkenhead demanded a parliamentary debate in his letter to the Daily Telegraph which supported him in a leader. (15) The Conservative Shadow Cabinet immediately considered the matter. Birkenhead started the criticism and was supported by Austen Chamberlain, formerly Conservative Secretary of State for India. Baldwin did not repudiate and sat back calmly and later obtained a

(14) The History of the Times, the 150th Anniversary and Beyond 1912-1948 Volume IV, Part II; 1921-1948 (London, 1952) 872.

(15) Daily Telegraph, 2 November 1929, 10 and 11, Conservative daily. Absorbed Morning Post, as the Daily Telegraph and Morning Post from 1 October 1937. Here it is referred to throughout as the Daily Telegraph.
letter from the Labour Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald, in which it was made clear that the Governor-General's words meant no change in British policy. (16)

In the parliamentary debate, Lord Reading, formerly Viceroy and Governor-General of India (1921-25), objected to the use of 'Dominion Status' because the Simon Commission was engaged in considering its report and he thought that the declaration imported a change of policy. (17) The opposition of Liberals gave an impetus to that of the Conservative extremist. The Conservative extremists were vehement in their criticism. Birkenhead directed the Statutory Commission to treat the Governor-General's declaration as impertinence. He felt that the Governor-General, 'both in his declaration and his speech', was encroaching upon a field in which he was an intruder and he thought that nothing should be done until the report of the Commission was published. Birkenhead stated 'that there is not the slightest prospect of any Government conceding to India in our lifetime what is known to constitutional lawyers and statesmen all the


(17) United Kingdom, Parliamentary Debates, 5th Series (Hansard) House of Lords (H.L.), 75 (5 November 1929) cols. 372-88.

Reading objected to an immediate declaration on Dominion Status also on the ground 'that he could not see within any measurable distance of time India being put on a footing with the other Dominions and that a statement now would become the text of immediate demands for its fulfilment'. Cabinet paper Enclosed to the letter from Benn to Irwin, 14 November 1929, T.O.L. MSS. Eur. C.152/5, 146-9.
world over as Dominion Status'. (18)

Thus the legal minds of Birkenhead and Reading were outraged that anyone should speak about Dominion Status which since the Imperial Conference of 1926 was a term of which nobody had yet propounded the perfect definition. 'Die-hard opinion was outraged that anyone should venture to speak about India reaching Dominion Status, when she could neither accommodate her own internal communal differences nor defend herself against external menace.' (19)

Winston Churchill charged that the declaration completely prejudiced and destroyed the value of the report of the Statutory Commission and it was an intervention between Parliament and their Commission. He emphasized that the two opposition parties commanded a parliamentary majority in the House of Commons in resisting far-reaching change in India. (20) Thus the new policy pronouncement was attacked by Reading, Lloyd George (former war-time Prime Minister) Churchill and Birkenhead both in the Parliament and outside. 'Their method was not that of a direct frontal onslaught, but rather to make it clear that in their opinion substantial advance in the direction of Dominion Status was so remote and unlikely as hardly


Birkenhead wrote blistering articles in the Press saying that the Simon report had been wantonly short-circuited, and 'that the appetite of the Indians would be merely whetted by the Declaration which would lead them to further and more extravagant demands'. Birkenhead, n. 5, 274.

(19) Halifax, n. 8, 121.

to be worth discussing.\(^\text{(21)}\) Even Neville Chamberlain thought that Baldwin's agreement to the announcement on Dominion Status for India without consulting his colleagues, showed lack of touch with the Party. \(^\text{(22)}\)

Thus the use of the sacred and ritual phrase 'Dominion Status' became the shibboleth that divided Churchill from Baldwin and the extremists from the main body of the Conservative Party. Lloyd George intrigued with Lord Rothermere\(^\text{(2)}\) 'to bring off a treble event - the defeat of the Government, the downfall of Stanley Baldwin and a Coalition'. In Parliament, Churchill did not speak but cheered Lloyd George, 'thus presaging the line which he was to take later' when the conflict in the Party reached its height. The declaration thus led to a great conflict in the Conservative Party and the conflict which arose in 1929 later developed 'into a gale which nearly blew that tough old oak out of the leadership'. The charges and counter-charges between the leader and the Press consummated throughout 1930. \(^\text{(23)}\)

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* For a brief biographical sketch see Appendix I.


\(^{\text{(23)}}\) Winterton, n. 9, 158-61. See also *Saturday Review*, 148 (16 November 1929) 570. *Independent Conservative Weekly periodical*. It ceased to exist from 25 June 1938.

Dawson thought that the rumpus was a relic of the old Coalition intrigue. The combination of Lloyd George, Reading, Rothermere, Beaverbrook\(^\text{(2)}\) and Birkenhead, aided and abetted by Simon and supported by a certain number of Conservatives produced the row. He attributed the main motive power to Lloyd George, that he could get some backing. Rothermere and Beaverbrook, frightened by a Labour Budget wanted Lloyd George as Prime Minister and found an additional attraction in the discovery that the same stunt may damn both Labour and Baldwin. Dawson to Irwin, 31 October 1929 and 3 November 1929, L.0.L. MSS. Eur. C. 152/13, 360-5.
The Press reaction also was very sharp. The *Daily Mail* placed full responsibility on Baldwin and blamed him. The *Daily Telegraph* declared that the proposal of a conference represented no change of direction of spirit in the Indian policy to which all parties subscribed. It found the policy declaration 'a departure from the course of prudence'. It was unwise and unnecessary. The *Morning Post* disliked Dominion status as it was ambiguous and as it was demanded under 'the menace of "civil disobedience" - or in plain language rebellion'. (24) The *Spectator* wrote as many as three 'Leaders' supporting the Governor-General and tried to put the whole Indian problem in its proper perspective. It pointed out that similar phrases had been used hundreds of times by men of all parties including Birkenhead. It argued that India ought to have an equality of position with others, pleaded for a new mental outlook in Britain towards India, reminded the British that a solemn pledge towards responsible government as the goal had been given to India, and called upon them to attune their minds to the thought that India was an equal and that considerations of material advantage must not weigh with them. 'The more one looks into the so-called crisis about India, the more foolish it seems ... Everything has been distorted, either for the sake ... of injuring the Government or for the sake of injuring Mr. Baldwin.' (25) Rothermere wanted the promise of


*Morning Post*, 6 November 1929, 10. Conservative daily. It was incorporated in the *Daily Telegraph* as the *Daily Telegraph* and *Morning Post* from 1 October, 1937.

(25) *Spectator*, 143 (9 November 1929) 652-3; (21 and 28 December 1929) 834 and 966.
Dominion Status not to be confirmed but cancelled. 'British rule in India is irreplaceable, our duty there is not to argue with base agitators BUT TO GOVERN.' (26)

Thus the contention of the Governor-General and The Times that Dominion Status was implicit in the declaration of 1917 and the Instrument of Instructions to the Governor-General did not find unanimous acceptance in Britain. Still the Governor-General had not reckoned with the explosion of anger in Britain and the suggestion that he had done something 'of great danger to British policy and destructive of the Simon Report were to him incomprehensible'. He did not begin to see how the definition of final purpose could be held to queer the pitch of decision as to their immediate policy.

He was certain that the only solid asset that they have in India was 'that our word should be above suspicion, and that we should afford no ground for it being said that we are seeking to wriggle out of hastily given pledges'. (27)

Reception in India

The blessed words 'Dominion Status' combined with Irwin's avowed intention of breaking through the web of mistrust, offered a new hope to all who desired peace and an end to the struggle.

The Governor-General's pronouncement was well received in India and the response was immediate and impressive. Though Nehru and some youngsters were suspicious of that 'ingeniously worded announcement, which could mean much or very little', Gandhiji and others welcomed


(27) Hickleton Papers, Correspondence with Viscount Halifax, 258. Quoted in Birkenhead, n. 5, 273.
it. Indian nationalists thought that the real test was whether the British meant what they said. Though many were not fully convinced, still there was a glimmering hope. That hope was unfortunately extinguished by the criticism in the British Parliament and Press. If the Parliament had supported the Governor-General's pronouncement, the misunderstandings of an era might have been swept away and a splendid future of constructive collaboration would have been assured. When India awaited the endorsement of the Viceroy's announcement, Parliament interpreted its functions as the Grand Inquest of the Nation to conduct a prolonged and unhelpful post-mortem." (28)

The effect of the opponents' campaign was 'to convince Indian opinion that the British nation was wholeheartedly and permanently opposed to Indian aspirations'. (29) Political India was puzzled and perturbed by the British reaction and the hopes and expectations of the Indians were dashed to pieces. It became clear to them that the influence of the Governor-General was not what they had assumed and that British opinion did not support him. There was no doubt that the attitude of public men in England influenced Indian political opinion at a formative moment and it strengthened the demand for independence. An opportunity to bring about co-ordination in the political thinking of the two countries was lost and blame largely rested upon British shoulders.

The Congress leaders met Irwin on 23 December 1929 and sought clarification as to the functions of the proposed Round Table

(28) Campbell-Johnson, n. 12, 226.

(29) Richard Law, 'A Voyage to India, Support for the Viceroy', Home and Empire, 1 (May 1930) 4. A monthly Conservative periodical, mainly to cater to the needs of the Women's Wing of the Conservative Party. It was started in March 1930 and it continued up to November 1938.
Conference. They wanted an assurance that the purpose of the conference was to draft a scheme for Dominion Status. Moved by the strength of the conviction of the British critics who included the most vocal Conservative extremists as well as the Liberal members, Irwin emphasized freedom of action and liberty of Parliament. He plainly told them 'that the conference was designed to elicit the greatest possible measure of agreement for the final proposals which it would be the duty of His Majesty's Government to submit to Parliament, and that it was impossible for him or His Majesty's Government in any way to prejudge the action of the conference or restrict the liberty of Parliament'. (30) All efforts of Irwin in defiance of his own Party had been in vain. The Indian National Congress retaliated at Lahore and declared that the word 'Swaraj' in Article 1 of the Congress Constitution ['the goal of Congress'] shall mean 'Complete Independence' which it proclaimed as its goal. (31)

The main resolution on Independence was declared carried 'by a curious coincidence', at the stroke of midnight on 31 December

(30) Gleanings and Memoranda, 71 (January-July 1930) 133. It was published from 1912 to 1933 by the National Union of Conservative and Unionist Associations.

Irwin wrote to the Secretary of State, 'that the Congress leaders were impossible and left me more than usually depressed about the lack of political sense that extremist politicians naturally betray. I can't help feeling that the main idea in their minds is that the Indian differences are too deep-seated either to be concealed or surmounted at any conference, and that participation therefore in a conference would leave them with their platform so badly riddled as to be incapable of reconstruction. It therefore seemed better to their minds to invent a reason for not taking part in it and thus maintaining themselves in the position of being able to say that the reluctance of Great Britain to give them all what they wanted at once was again responsible for all the differences of Government and life in India.' Irwin to Secretary of State for India, I.O.L. MSS, Eur. C. 152/5, 185.

(31) Gwyer and Appadorai, Documents, n. 11, 227-8.
1929, as the old year yielded place to the new. Thus even as the
year of grace fixed at the Calcutta Congress expired, the new
decision was taken and preparation for the struggle launched. The
first Independence Pledge was taken on 26 January 1930 and the civil
disobedience movement started shortly thereafter. (32) The Governor-
General replied promulgating Ordinances and followed the dual policy
of pleading for the necessity of Ordinances and a cold appreciation
of Indian nationalism.

THE ROUND TABLE CONFERENCE; FIRST SESSION

According to the pronouncement made by the Governor-General,
Irwin, the Round Table Conference was called to session in 1930.
As most of the criticism was levelled against the declaration of the
goal of Dominion Status and the conservative extremists emphasized
the overwhelming authority of the Parliament and inevitability began
to support the Statutory Commission's report as the basis for further
reforms, Irwin in his address to the Indian Legislature, declared
that the conference would be free to approach its task, greatly
assisted, but with liberty unimpaired, by the report of the Statutory
Commission or by any other documents which would be before it. 'It
is the belief of His Majesty's Government that by way of conference
it should be possible to reach solutions that both countries and
all parties and interests in them can honourably accept, and any
such agreement at which the Conference is able to arrive will form
the basis of the proposals which His Majesty's Government will later

(32) Nehru, n. 2, 201.
submit to Parliament.' (33) When further steps to the Round Table Conference were announced, it quenched momentarily 'the flame of angry recrimination in some right-wing Conservative Party and Press circles about Baldwin and Irwin's position; for no one could find any reason for objecting to the Conference nor to its composition' (34).

Dawson, editor of The Times, disagreed with the Governor-General about excluding the opposition parties at the conference. He thought that the participation of the opposition was essential as otherwise there would be mounting suspicion and criticism in what was a considerable majority of the House of Commons. (35) The Conservative Party insisted on an all-Party representation and it was supported by The Times 'for the sake of the continuity of policy, the

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(33) Lord Irwin, Speeches, From 30th October 1929 to 16th April 1931, Volume 2 (Simla, 1931) 227.

Baldwin sent a telegram to Irwin in which he stressed the Conservative Party's objection to the phrase 'Dominion Status', which according to him was certain to be interpreted in India in a manner not intended by the Viceroy or the British Government, and while recognizing that the Round Table Conference must be 'free', urged that its freedom of discussion should be confined within the framework of the commission's recommendations which made it plain that the ultimate goal could only be reached by slow degrees. This gradualness, Baldwin reminded him, was fundamental to the whole scheme of the Simon report, and was essential if all-Party agreement in England was to be maintained. Telegram from Irwin to Secretary of State, I.O.L. MSS. Eur. C.162/15, 4 July 1930.

The political correspondent of the Daily Telegraph (4 July 1930, 13) reported, that there was a certain amount of uneasiness among Conservative members of the House of Commons regarding Government's attitude to Simon report. 'It is admitted on the Conservative side that the conclusion of the Commission must not be regarded as sacrosanct.' But they wanted it to be the basis of future policy.

(34) Winterton, n. 9, 161.

dignity of the Conference, and the security of its results - the conception of a national delegation held the field. Repeated attempts were made for an all-Party representation. The Unionist Parliamentary Committee on India at its meeting on 14 July, passed a resolution appreciating the great value of the Simon report and expressing its strong opinion 'that just as the Statutory Commission was composed of representatives of all three parties, so all three political parties should be adequately represented at the Round Table Conference'. The Government thought it better to carry the opposition parties with them and considered that it would have certain advantages without affecting the freedom of the Government to formulate proposals. Finally, the Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald decided to keep India out of party conflicts and announced that the parliamentary delegation would include members from all

(36) The Times, 10 July 1930. See also Daily Telegraph, 10 July 1930.

Irwin was opposed to the inclusion of representatives of other parties for the conference as it would be considered by Indians 'a device to obstruct by presenting an obstinate all-Party front to Indian hopes. Later he acquiesced in the inclusion of opposition parties but stoutly opposed the inclusion of Simon. Telegraphic Correspondence of Governor-General with Secretary of State No. 330-S, 7 May 1930 and No. 658-S, 23 July 1930, I.O.L. MSS. Eur. C.152/11.


Wardlaw-Milne wrote that Conservative Party did not support Simon's membership. In spite of the strong diehard view, there was realization of the fact 'that one cannot set the clock back, and that, provided we maintain a strong central control, we must be prepared for mismanagement and mistakes for a time at least in the control of provincial affairs.' Wardlaw-Milne to Irwin, 4 September 1930, I.O.L. MSS. Eur. C.152/19, 167a-b.
parties. (38)

Churchill made a bitter attack criticizing the exclusion of John Simon and expressed his view that it was wrong to encourage false hopes in the Indian political classes. 'They are only a handful compared to the vast Indian masses for whom we are responsible, but they are entitled to be treated with good faith and sincerity. It would be wrong to lure and coax them over here with vague phrases about Dominion Status, when it is quite certain that Indian politicians will not obtain Dominion Status in their lifetime.' Churchill hoped that the Conservative Party would take a clear, firm course at the conference. He looked to their representatives to do their duty unflinchingly to the masses of Indian people and express the resolution of Britain firmly. (39)

To educate the British public and to focus its attention on the conference, the Spectator between 5 July and 15 November 1930

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(38) Gleanings and Memoranda, 72 (July-December 1930) 307.

The Conservatives discussed India in Baldwin's room in the House of Commons on 14 July 1930 and they secured all-party representation in the face of opposition from Wedgwood Benn and Irwin. Once again the Party discussed the matter on 30 July 1930 in Baldwin's house and decided to move an adjournment motion, if they did not get satisfaction to Austen Chamberlain's question on Simon's exclusion. But the bulk of the party was satisfied with all-Party representation, whereas Austen Chamberlain, Winterton and Salisbury were particularly interested in John Simon's membership. The motion was withdrawn. Winterton, n. 9, 161-2.

The Daily Telegraph (30 July 1930, 10) wrote editorially: 'If the Report is to be the main matter before the Conference it would seem to contravene a plain and well-recognized principle if the authors of the Report are represented among those sitting to form a judgment upon it.'

(39) The Times, 7 November 1930.
wrote as many as four 'Leaders' and expressed its deep sympathy for the Indian people's aspirations to control their own future and recognized that if Indians decided to remain in the Commonwealth, that had to be by their own free will. While assuring the Indian people that there was wide sympathy with their legitimate aspirations to freedom and self-government, it urged the British people to curtail their references to the right of the British Parliament. It characterized the language of the Daily Telegraph and that of Churchill repudiating the goal of responsible government, as reckless and hoped 'that the opportunity of this momentous detente is not going to be thrown away again by mischievous party jiggery-pokery at home'. It said that 'Indian consent, and not British non-party consensus of opinion, is the essential factor, if any scheme is to be workable'. It wanted the confirmation of equality of status, as distinguished from equality of function, and suggested to the Government to include India in the Balfour formula. (40)

The Conference Meets

The first session of the Round Table Conference was inaugurated by the King, on 12 November 1930. The representatives of the British political parties, the rulers of Indian States, and the representatives of British India attended the conference. It was an attempt to show that Parliament and the three British political parties were honestly endeavouring to meet the Indian expectations. They did not meet to frame a constitution for India but to agree upon the principles that should be applied to Indian Government. The Indian National Congress did not participate in the conference in

(40) Spectator, 145 (July-December 1930) 5, 72-3, 329-30 and 712.
accordance with the decision taken by it at its Lahore Session. The
session of the conference was a unique event in that for the first
time representatives of both British India and the States met
together to discuss their common problems. For the British, it was
an education in Indian problems. The summoning of the Round Table
Conference brought about a change in the British attitude to India.

An important delegate representing British India, Sir Tej
Bahadur Sapru, demanded a status of equality for India with other
Dominions, pleaded for an all-India federation, and invited the
Princes to join and support the scheme. The Princes of the Indian
states accepting the challenge of the situation promptly responded
and declared their willingness to join British Indian Provinces to
form an all-India federation and they categorically stated that they
would federate only on the basis of a responsible government at the
Centre. The Muslims also favoured the federal system. (41)

The influence of Indian delegates was most effective. 'It
not only shook Conservative faith in diehardism, but it led the
Liberals to think that they really could not, in decency to their
own traditions, adopt the Reading attitude.' (42) Thus, Reading, who
had earlier opposed Irwin's announcement, now said on behalf of the
Liberal Party, that they supported the policy of conferring
responsibility at the Centre with adequate safeguards. In his
concluding address of the session on 19 January 1931, the Labour

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(41) Indian Round Table Conference: 12th November 1930 -

(42) Wedgwood Benn to Irwin, 21 January 1931, L.O.L., MSS,
Eur. C.162/6, 337.
Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald announced that His Majesty's Government would place the responsibility for Indian Government upon Central and Provincial legislatures with necessary safeguards which were to be so framed as not to prejudice the advance of India to full responsibility for its government. (43)

Achievements of the Conference

Three important and distinctive features of the plan emerged from the conference and all of them were backed by a substantial measure of agreement. The principle of all-India federation as a practical programme emerged. 'Not a single member opposed it as the basis of the future Government of India.' Provincial autonomy was another principle that emerged. Responsibility at the Centre with reservations and safeguards was the third feature of the plan that emerged.

The conference made it known to the British public that all shades of moderate opinion in India were united in their demand for real responsibility in the Central Government as well as in the Provinces. That was a demand, said The Economist, which the great majority of British subjects in Britain and the Commonwealth were disposed to recognize as just in principle. (44) The conference convinced the British delegates and public opinion outside, except some narrow circles, that the time had come in India when definite and irrevocable breach must be made with the old type of empire. The British representatives declared that the time had come for the transfer of primary responsibility for Indian Government from the

(43) Guyer and Appadorai, Documents, p. 11, 229-31.

British to Indian shoulders with certain safeguards and reserved powers. The unanimous declaration of the British delegation, Conservative no less than Liberal and Labour inside and outside Parliament, was that, provided a workable constitution could be framed, responsibility for Indian Government should pass to Indian control in the Centre as well as in the Provinces, subject only to safeguards in the interests of justice, to minorities and stable government. It was inconceivable to The Times that Parliament, which had the final responsibility, should disregard the unanimous conclusions of a representative body of British and Indian leaders. (45)

CONSERVATIVE PARTY ATTITUDE AT THE CONFERENCE

The epoch-making declaration of the Princes to enter the federal system turned the whole discussions in a new direction and most profoundly affected public opinion in Britain. It made it turn far more readily towards a federal solution. (46) Peel, leader of the Conservative section at the conference, declared that he could not conceive the setting up of a unitary government in such a vast and diversified country. The idea of a federal union had grown rapidly and that was a 'tremendous gain because it is very difficult to see how it is possible to get an organized unity in India except on some federal basis'. He made it clear that they were all united in the goal though differed as to the pace or rapidity to attain it.

(45) The Times, 12 November 1930, 15.
(46) Indian Round Table Conference, Cmd. 4238 (1933) 88.
and viewed the idea of a federal union as a tremendous gain and thought it to be fruitful. (47)

At the plenary session, Peel, explaining the attitude of the Conservative section of the British delegates, said: 'The most outstanding fact of the conference . . . has been that great change in opinion has brought the conception of a Federal India from the realm of dreams to a state of reality . . . Our aim has been to sketch the main outlines of a constitution at once so flexible as to meet the differences of the federal units and so firm as to create a strong cement of unity in the centre for the manifold diversities of Indian social and political life.' They were anxious to have the Central legislature, 'so composed that the tie with the Provinces should be firmly impressed on their constitution, and that while making laws for all-India they were acting as the agents and interpreters of provinces and of states'. They suggested the introduction of an immediate self-governing system for the Provinces and categorically declared, 'If the safeguards can be made effective with care and good-will, and if our practical problems can be met in a workmanlike spirit, as I believe they can be, then we shall not hesitate to accord our assent to a new constitution because it involves a transfer of new powers and responsibility to Indians.' (48)

Sir Samuel Hoare, one of the Conservative delegates (later Secretary of State for India, 1931-35), maintained a non-committal attitude. He opposed direct election and doubted the wisdom of imposing the British theory of cabinet responsibility on India, as

(47) Gleanings and Memoranda, 72 (July-December 1930) 485-6.

(48) Cmd. 3378, n. 41, 446-50. See also Gleanings and Memoranda, 73 (January-June 1931) 93-4.
he feared that the attempt would end in slurring responsibility and weakening the Governor-General's position and making the position of the Central Government awkward at a time when they were introducing the two great experiments of an all-India federation and provincial autonomy. He wholeheartedly supported an all-India federation, but wished it would start under the best possible conditions. (49)

Thus, both Peel and Hoare, the Conservative delegates, appreciated the progress made in the elucidation of the difficult problem and expressed their readiness to co-operate with sympathetic and unprejudiced minds in its further investigation. It is true that the Conservative delegates reserved their opinion on safeguards, but as their speeches showed, they were deeply impressed by the unanimity of the Indian delegates on the question of an all-India federation and were fully aware of its possibilities. They realized that an autonomous political unit of this kind would bring far greater stability than could be expected if British India were to stand alone. (50)

Earl Winterton, another Conservative delegate, said that they supported an all-India federation as the best, and indeed the only principle to give effect to the eventual self-government for India and expressed their willingness to consider the proposals to that end when they assumed a proper shape. (51) The Marquess of Zetland of the Conservative Party (later Secretary of State for

* For a brief biographical sketch see Appendix I.

(49) The Times, 7 January 1931, 12.

(50) Round Table, 22 (March 1932) 282-3.

(51) United Kingdom, Parliamentary Debates (Hansard), 5th Series, House of Commons (H.C.), 247 (25 January 1931) cols. 725-34.
India, 1935-40), stated that his agreement with the conference scheme of provincial autonomy and all-India federation, with responsibility of the federal government to a Central legislature, was dependent, as was that of the Conservative delegation as a whole, upon the reservations and safeguards being made effective. It was inconceivable to him that they should not proceed with the work of the Round Table Conference. (52) As Hoare himself said: 'Among the Conservative members of the delegation, there was a measure of general agreement . . . substantial measure of acquiescence.' (53)

The Conservative Party's broadly representative attitude at the conference was expressed clearly by Peel and Hoare by their insistence that no suggested solution of India's problems should be endorsed until it was certain that the foundations had been well and truly laid. As the Conservative Party's monthly Home and Empire put it: 'Sympathy with Indian aspirations, a high regard for the good faith of our own country, a recognition of the realities and complexities of the situation, and a wise insistence on the critical problems of order and security were expressed in their speeches.

Only in this spirit, and on these lines, will it be possible to work out a lasting settlement. Though the Indian problem was still far from its solution, it was something that the conference mapped out a "main ground plan" in which both courage and caution had their part.' (54) The Conservative Party was satisfied at the non-

(54) Home and Empire, 1 (February 1931) 1-2.
commital attitude of their delegation and did not like to have a row between Baldwin and Churchill.

Right-wing Opposition

A small section of the Right-wing Conservatives opposed the very idea of a conference and all that the conference did. Churchill, an important member of the Right-wing section, criticized it 'as an unauthorized constituent assembly that proceeded to draft... a Federal constitution with Indian ministers responsible to an all-India Assembly'. He was 'very much surprised and amazed' at the impression created, that all the three parties were in agreement, in principle, to set up a federal constitution under Indian ministers responsible to an all-India Assembly. Churchill repeated that the spirit of defeatism was spreading far and wide and that the Conservative Party should be united to govern Great Britain and the British Empire. (55)

Speaking under the auspices of the Indian Empire Society*, Churchill criticized Government's India policy openly and declared that all the pretensions for Dominion Status and Independence were dangerous and that the proceedings created a wrong impression that self-government would be given to India. Though he represented the views of a small extremist group, he proffered himself as a spokesman of the nation and stated that the British nation had no intention of relinquishing effectual control of Indian life and progress. He

* The Conservative extremists opposed to constitutional changes in India, formed a body, called the Indian Empire Society to project their opposition to Government's India policy. The Society started a journal, The Indian Empire Review, in November 1931, through which opposition to Indian reforms was projected. The publication was discontinued in December 1939.

(55) Churchill, n. 20, 38, 53 and 89.
denied that the conference had any power to frame a constitution for India and emphasized that the agreement would not authorize the framing of a new Government of India Act. He revealed the true mind of the extremists when he said: 'The cause of all this change in Indian opinion is not a change of facts in the problem of India, it is the apparent lack of will-power and self-confidence exhibited by the representatives of Great Britain.' He made it clear that Britain had no intention of relinquishing her mission in India and 'no intention of casting away that most truly bright and precious jewel in the Crown of the King which, more than all our other Dominions and Dependencies, constitutes the glory and strength of the British Empire. The loss of India would mark and consummate the downfall of the British Empire. That great organism would pass at a stroke out of life into history. From such a catastrophe there could be no recovery.' (56)

A strong supporter of Churchill, Lord Lloyd* held that the procedure adopted by the Government, namely, negotiations with Indian parties at Round Table Conference, was wrong and unwise, and he gave three reasons: it committed Parliament in advance of discussions; it misled Indian public opinion; and it neglected the interests and welfare of the vast masses of the Indian people. He felt that negotiation with political leaders having no responsibility was not likely to lead to a successful outcome, but would almost certainly degenerate into a process of buying goodwill by concession.

* For a brief biographical sketch see Appendix I.

(56) Ibid., 35-47. See also Cleannings and Memoranda, 73 (January-June 1931) 12.
Even when Parliament approved the policy, Lloyd remained convinced of the wrongness and unwiseom of the policy in spite of the fact that the Parliament had approved it. His only consolation (as that of all extremists) was 'that discussions and hostilities in India would prevent the formation of the Federation and that central control would not, therefore, pass from the hands of Parliament for a long time', (57)

The Indian Empire Society became the medium through which the Right-wing extremists carried on their propaganda against Indian reforms. Sir Francis Younghusband characterized Churchill's speech as mischievous. Haden Guest in a letter to The Times said that Churchill's speech represented the old stem of 'Little Englandism engrafted with the new bloom of continental Hitlerism'. (58) The Times said that Churchill's views were no more a representative of the Conservative Party and that his speech would not influence British policy towards India. Its broad effect, it continued, was nothing more than to damn the whole course of British policy for the last dozen years. (59) As one of Churchill's biographer has observed 'Churchill's attitude at that time was opposed to the broad liberal sentiment of the nation which favoured a fair and generous settlement. The diehard Tories regarded the conference as a shameful device for handing over the Indian Empire to Gandhi and the Hindu agitators, and Churchill found himself at once lined up with the diehards.' (60)

(58) See The Times, 13 December 1930.
(59) Ibid.
(60) Malcolm Thomson, The Life and Times of Winston Churchill (London, 1945) 200
In the House of Commons debate, Churchill conceded that he spoke solely as a member of the House and said that the time for extension of self-government for India was premature and that the facts were adverse. 'Dominion Status had always been contemplated as the ultimate goal, but no one had supposed ... that that principle and policy for India should be carried into effect in any time which it was now reasonable or useful for us to foresee'. Churchill said that the action of the Princes had brought about 'a hysterical landslide of opinion in Britain'. He suggested immediate steps to be taken on the lines of the Simon Commission's report to develop provincial government. (61)

Baldwin's Support to the Conference Results

Stanley Baldwin, the leader of the Conservative Party in the House of Commons, said that the whole situation was altered by the attitude of the Princes and that light had been thrown on the possible creation of a federal system of all India. He said that if they came to power, 'we have only one duty and that one duty is to try to implement ... what has been done in the conference'. Though he acknowledged that very little had been agreed upon by the conference, the agreement in principle for a federal system was a striking fact. 'I should consider it to be my duty, so far as I were able ... to use every effort in my power to bring about that federal constitution.' (62) The dissident speech of Churchill was openly disowned by Baldwin and the breach was 'open and unconcealed' and Churchill

(61) Hansard, H.C., 247 (26 January 1931) cols. 689-703.
(62) Ibid., cols. 744-8; and Cables and Memoranda, 73 (January-June 1931) 164-5.
resigned from the Shadow Cabinet. *The Economist* commented that 'in endeavouring to annul the work of the Round Table Conference, he is making a futile attempt to put back the hands of the clock which has been wound up by the co-operative efforts of the three British parties'. (63) Even Neville Chamberlain thought that Baldwin 'fumbled badly from the Party's point of view' and did not emphasize the safeguards. He also noted that Hoare had told him that Baldwin stirred all extremists who had been satisfied with his own account of Conservative official position. (64)

On 9 February Baldwin attended a meeting of the Unionist India Committee and expressed his entire agreement with the attitude of the Conservatives at the conference. He welcomed the development of the idea of an all-India federation for a British Indian constitution and at the same time made it clear that the Party was 'entirely uncommitted to any specific proposals' and that safeguards formed 'an integral part of any complete scheme'. Many members who attended the meeting thought that there was 'a definite difference of opinion in the Party regarding the method of approaching the problem and at the pace at which the developments should take place' and many members were impressed by Churchill's arguments. (65) It was a policy of maintaining a free hand and the Conservative Party was in no way committed and insisted on seeing the completed picture before it came to a decision. That was obviously a wise suspension of judgment. The mass of the Conservative Party agreed that the

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(63) *The Economist*, 112 (7 February 1931) 286.

(64) Macleod, n. 22, 139.

(65) *Daily Telegraph*, 10 February 1931. See also *Daily Mail*, 10 February 1931; *Daily Express*, 10 February 1931. Independent Conservative daily. It is one of Beaverbrook Group of Papers.
conference having been held, the results could not be discarded. There were, however, some who felt that the whole plan of Indian self-government was unwise or that they were going ahead much too fast with it. (66) The Central Council (67) of the National Union of Conservative and Unionist Associations at its meeting on 24 February 1931 unanimously passed a vague resolution calling up on the Party to take a strong stand upon law and order in India. (68)

GANDHI-IRWIN FACT

The British Government now thought of taking some earnest steps to associate the Congress, the largest Indian political party, in the further deliberations of the conference. Prime Minister MacDonald's friendly speech at the end of the Round Table Conference

(66) Wedgwood Benn to Irwin, 9 February 1931, I.O.L, MSS. Eur. C.152/6, 357. See also Morning Post, 10 February 1931, 11.

(67) The Central Council is the governing body of the National Union and meets at least once a year normally in London. It includes the Leader of the Party and other principal officers and officials of the Party, representatives from Constituency Associations and Provincial Area Councils, all members of the Houses of Parliament in receipt of the party whip and prospective candidates officially selected by Constituency Associations.

In practice, it becomes a smaller and briefer version of the annual Conference of the National Union and provides 'a half-yearly opportunity for the representatives of the Constituency Associations to ventilate their opinions on any matter and hear reports from the Leader of the Party. It tends to be representative of the more militant elements in the Party, and it is unlikely to reflect a cross-section of Conservative voting support in the country. On occasions it played an important, if not a decisive role in the affairs of the Party. When the Conservative Party is in office, the Council would not hesitate to advise the Government on legislation and policy. When the Party is in opposition, the Council has sometimes assumed the right to instruct the Party in Parliament.

(68) Conservative Party Central Council Minutes, 288.
contained an implied appeal to the Congress to give up its critical attitude and join the happy throng. The civil disobedience movement was still going on, though it had been toned down owing to negotiations with the Government. The Indian Government relaxed its stringent measures and released many important leaders including Gandhiji. After protracted negotiations and on some agreed principles for mutual benefit, the Gandhi-Irwin Pact was signed on 5 March 1931. The Pact approved the federal basis and accepted the idea of safeguards. The All-India Congress Committee approved the Pact and appointed Gandhiji to represent the Congress at the next session of the conference. (69)

Before the Pact was signed, the Gandhi-Irwin negotiations were objected to by the sub-committee of the Conservative M.P.s. on India who wanted the Leader and Winterton to protest against the negotiations. The parliamentary correspondent of The Times reported that Wedgwood Benn's statement did much to steady opinion in the Conservative Party and members of the Unionist Committee on India, who had urged Baldwin to come out openly denouncing the negotiations between Irwin and Gandhiji, were profoundly thankful that their advice was disregarded. He had promised to deal with it at the Newton Abbot speech. 'None had then realized how the situation would have changed but the effect had been to rally support in a remarkable degree to Baldwin's policy of trusting the "man on the spot".' For the moment, in fact, Churchill seemed to have lost most of his followers. Hundreds of M.P.s. sent a cable to Irwin

congratulating him for the Pact. John Wardlaw-Milne, Chairman of Conservative India Committee, thought that the Governor-General had opened a new era for India. (70) The Yorkshire Post said that the agreement procured an atmosphere in which calm deliberation might replace violent opposition in principle to the proposals from the British side. (71)

The agreement was welcomed by all the British political parties and the public as opening a bright prospect of a satisfactory settlement of the Indian problem. It was hailed as 'an honourable agreement substituting reasoned discussion and negotiation for intransient resistance and the repressive measures consequential upon it'. (72) The Conservative extremists, however, started a campaign against the negotiations. It was alarming and also nauseating to Churchill 'to see Mr. Gandhi, a seditious middle temple lawyer, now posing as a fakir of a type well known in the East, striding half-naked up the steps of the Viceregal Palace, while he is still organizing and conducting a defiant campaign of civil disobedience, to parley on equal terms with the representative of the King-Emperor'. He charged

* For a brief biographical sketch see Appendix I.

(70) See The Times, 6 March 1931.

Conservative M.P.s. did not sign the cable but Wardlaw-Milne and others were ready to sign but on tactical grounds did not sign it. He wanted that it should be sent by the House as a whole. Conservatives such as Wardlaw-Milne, Winterton, Neville Chamberlain, privately expressed their satisfaction to the Secretary of State for India. Telegram from the Secretary of State to Irwin, No. 820, 5 March 1931, I.O.L. MSS, Eur. C.152/11, 320. See also Manchester Guardian, 6 March 1931.

(71) Yorkshire Post, 5 March 1931. Conservative Provincial daily.

(72) The Economist, 112 (14 March 1931) 547.
that the Labour Government was preparing for another conference to nullify the safeguards and called upon his party men to dissociate themselves from any complicity in the weak, and unfortunate administration of India by the Labour Government and the Governor-General. He announced his determination to marshal British opinion against a course of action 'which would bring, in my judgement, the greatest evils upon the people of India, upon the people of Great Britain and also upon the structure of the British Empire itself'. (73)

Churchill was supported by the Daily Mail, Lloyd, Michael O'Dwyer*, Sir Henry Page Croft* and others. The Times accepted the complete sincerity with which Churchill set out to marshal British opinion in support of a policy of repression, but said, 'It is certain that if India is to be saved to the Empire — as it would infallibly be lost if the Churchill school of thinkers were ever to have control — it can only be by the way that Baldwin broadly hinted in that very speech in the House of Commons for which he has been most abused'. (74)

Welcoming the Gandhi-Irwin Pact Baldwin said, 'It was a victory of common sense, — a victory rare enough in India and rare enough at home.' (75) The very idea of a British Governor-General closeted with Gandhi, the leader of the disobedience campaign, infuriated the extremists 'whether Conservative or Liberal' and

* For a brief biographical sketch see Appendix I.

(73) Churchill, n.s. 20, 26, 90-4 and D.C. Tendulkar, Mahatma: Life of Mohandas Karamachand Gandhi Volume Three 1920-1934 (Bombay, 1952) 68. See also The Times, 24 February 1931, 16.

(74) The Times, 5 March 1931. See also Evelyn Wrench, Geoffrey Dawson and Our Times (London, 1955) 287.

(75) Hansard, 249 (12 March 1931) col. 1422.
gravely disturbed many experienced Indian officials. So great was the prejudice against the talks that the full scope of the agreement never received due credit. (76) Excepting the few extremists, the Conservative Party generally supported and welcomed the Pact. But strangely enough, the British Labour Government 'expressed in private their dislike of the acceptance of the unique and semi-sovereign position of the Congress'. (77)

On 6 March, at Newton Abbot, Baldwin seized the occasion to make a very pointed and a very welcome statement on Conservative policy in regard to India. He denied that he was committed to a policy of withdrawal and surrender in India and declared that none of them had the remotest intention of repudiating any of their Indian obligations and of shuffling out of any of their essential responsibility, and wished to bring about a closer union than they ever had before. He stated the official Conservative attitude at the Round Table Conference and he was careful to welcome the idea of an all-India federation; he also stressed the need for safeguards. As the leader stressed the safeguards welcoming the idea of federation at the same time, the Conservatives supported him. Neville Chamberlain and Leopold Amery publicly expressed their support. (78)

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(76) Templewood, n. 16, 55.

(77) Telegram from Secretary of State to Viceroy, No. 80, 4 March 1931, cited in S. Gopal, n. 4, 113.

CONSERVATIVES AND INDIA

During February 1931, the Conservative India Committee in Parliament, considered the Indian problem, and held that all the issues of the first session of the Round Table Conference, should be cleared up, before the Government summoned another session. Baldwin was present at the meeting. The Committee decided that the Conservative Party could not participate in the conference if it was held in India. The resolution was made public on 9 March 1931. Churchill twisted this decision to mean that the Conservative Party had nothing to do with the conference. (79) The Right-wing Press also added fuel to the fire. The Daily Telegraph (10 March 1931) placarded the resolution to the effect that there would be 'no Conservative representatives at the renewed Round Table talks.' The Morning Post described it in headlines as 'A Momentous Decision, Ban on Proposed Conference, Mr. Baldwin Assents.' 'It was resolved, after a sitting lasting two hours, that the Conservative Party cannot be represented at any further Round Table Conference to be held in India as now suggested by the Government.' The terms of that resolution were twisted into an announcement that Baldwin had changed his attitude, had moved in the direction of those who were doing their utmost to fling the Indian question into Party controversy and had decided against further Conservative participation in the work of the Round Table Conference. (80)

(79) W.S. Churchill, n.s. 20, 107,
(80) Morning Post, 10 March 1931, 11. Emphasis in the original.
The hue and cry raised by the extremists led to a good deal of confusion as to the attitude of the Conservative Party. The general impression that the Conservative Party had decided not to be represented gained currency. The Conservative India Committee explained that they were not opposed to a conference in principle and wanted only an understanding that a reasonable settlement with safeguards would be reached. It was authoritatively stated that the position of the leaders of the Conservative Party was that, while they were not opposed to another conference, the time was not appropriate and that the Party could not take part in any such conference until the whole series of questions left over were cleared up. (81)

The confusion created by the different interpretations of the extremists about the Conservative Party's attitude was cleared and Baldwin categorically defined the position of his party in a speech which, as The Times of 13 March 1931 put it, knocked the bottom out of the debate in the House of Commons on 12 March 1931. He reminded his colleagues that in the world of evolution, India alone was not static and those who thought India should be an exception should never have planted in it the seeds of Western ideals. He announced that the inter-party co-operation on Indian policy was not broken. Continuing, Baldwin said that there was difference of view between the Party and the Government as to the procedure to be followed at a particular moment. The Government had suggested an inter-party delegation to India to resume the conference. He had replied that the Government itself must fill in more fully the picture sketched.

(81) Ibid., 11 March 1931, 11.
at the London conference, but that the Conservative Party was ready at all times to be consulted, and viewed without prejudice the resumption of the conference in London later. He staked his position as leader of the party to tell the truth as he saw it. (82) Churchill made a moderate speech. He was subdued and hardly raised 'a curse or a cheer'. Winterton and Edward Cadogan reflected the views of the rank and file of the Party, and they supported their leader. The Conservative spokesmen's views in the debate in the House of Lords did not deviate from Baldwin's policy of co-operation with the Government in future Round Table negotiations.

The India debate 'has had among other effects that of finally clearing the air of feverish misunderstandings and mischievous misrepresentations brought about at the opening of the week'. Baldwin's speech was a plain-spoken and unanswerable vindication of his consistency and a firm re-affirmation of the policy for which the Conservative Party stood. The Unionist India Committee on 16 March passed a resolution by a very large majority approving Baldwin's policy as stated by him at Newton Abbot on 6 March, and in the House of Commons on 12 March 1931. (83)

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(82) 'The Empire ... is a living organism; that the Empire of to-day is not the Empire of first Jubilee of Queen Victoria ... It is no dead matter. It is organic and alive in a constant process of evolution ... And it cannot be supposed that, in this world of evolution, India alone is static ... If there are those ... who would have ... forced out of their reluctant hands one concession after another, if they be a majority, in God's name let them choose a man to lead them. If they are in a minority, then let them at least refrain from throwing difficulties in the way of those who have undertaken an almost superhuman task, on the successful fulfilment of which depends the well-being, the prosperity and the duration of the whole British Empire,' Haggard, H.C., 249 (12 March 1931) cols. 1417-26. See also Gleanings and Memoranda, 73 (January-June 1931) 261. Times, 13 March 1931.

(83) Gleanings and Memoranda, 73 (January-June 1931) 261. See also Daily Telegraph, 13 March 1931, 12.
Thus, the rank and file of the Party and a very large majority in Parliament supported Baldwin's India policy. But Churchill and his extremist colleagues continued their opposition to the policy. On 18 March, Churchill said that he was against all that 'surrender to Gandhi' and that it was futile to hold out the hope of full Dominion Status which he could not conceive for generations to come. He advocated responsibility in the provincial governments and wanted Indians to be given ample opportunities to try their hands at giving capable and good government in those Provinces. The extremists believed in the preservation of the sovereign power intact of the Central Imperial Executive as the sole guarantee of impartiality between races without any derogation from its responsibility to Parliament. Again on 26 March Churchill expressed his determination to oppose the Indian policy of his Party and that of the Labour Government. He tried to misinterpret the policy as that of the Labour Party and he declared 'I wish to make it perfectly clear that I am going to attack the Socialist [Labour] policy on India. Nothing will turn me from it, and to that end I have cheerfully and gladly put out of my mind all idea of public office.' (84)

At the half-yearly meeting of the Central Council held on 30 June 1931, the Conservatives discussed the Indian problem. Addressing the Council, Hoare declared that safeguards were the fundamental and unalterable basis of any constitutional settlement and that the discussion of the independence of India apart from the

(84) Clearings and Memoranda, 73 (January-June 1931) 262 and 343. See also The Times, 29 March 1931; Morning Post, 26 March 1931.
British Empire was outside the scope of the conference. He declared that the Conservatives "would go into the conference again with a determination to guard British prestige, as it was gained in the past, by keeping their word, by facing the facts, by sticking to their friends, by looking to the future, though at the same time proud of their glorious past". (85) After hearing the elucidation of the Party's attitude by Roare, the Council passed a resolution unanimously and insisted upon a clear assurance from the Government that the proposals for an Indian constitution were subject to the real safeguards to be exercised by the Imperial Parliament and any resolution on complete independence was outside the scope of discussion. In other words, the Council supported the results of the first session of the conference pressing for safeguards at the same time. (86)

THE ROUND TABLE CONFERENCE: SECOND SESSION

The second session of the conference met from 7 September to 1 December 1931, and Gandhiji as the chief spokesman of the Congress, participated. The complexion of the atmosphere had by then changed on account of two important events. The Labour Government had been replaced by a National Government, still headed by Ramsay MacDonald, but dominated by the Conservatives. The editor of The Times, Dawson, observed that the change of Government had enhanced rather than diminished the weight of the British

(85) Samuel Roare, India: A Re-statement of Conservative Policy No. 3285 (July 1931) 3-5 and Gleanings and Memoranda, 74 (July-December 1931) 89-90; Morning Post, 1 July 1931, 12.

(86) Conservative Party Council Minutes, 231-2 and Gleanings and Memoranda, 74 (July-December 1931) 82-3.
delegation. (87) The panic that had struck the American stock exchanges and the London economic crisis which broke the Labour Government, greatly diminished the importance of Indian affairs. It was borne in upon the Indian delegates that they would be brought into contact with the Conservative point of view in the shaping of their future. The advent of National Government did not fundamentally affect the Indian situation. In effect the composition of the National Government did not alter the situation purely from the point of view of the British delegation. The British point of view at the conference remained unaltered. (88) Meanwhile Lord Willingdon had succeeded Irwin as the Viceroy and Governor-General of India; the temper of the Indian Government was altered and rigid repression took the place of conciliation.

When the British General Election was held in October 1931, the Conservatives were told clearly that the Party's policy towards India as explained by Baldwin and Hoare in Parliament unmistakably showed that as regards the policy enunciated by the Prime Minister at the close of the Round Table Conference, there was no difference in broad principle between the three parties of the State, and that position had been since maintained. It was emphasized that the Conservative policy was definitely crystallized during the year and had been expounded on various occasions by Baldwin and Hoare. (89)

(87) Evelyn Wrench, n.s. 74, 296.
(88) Birkenhead, n.s. 5, 316. See also 'New Light on India', Saturday Review, 152 (12 September 1932) 318.
(89) Election Notes for Conservative Speakers and Workers, General Elections, 1931 (October 1931) 352-3.
In the General Election, the Conservatives won 473 seats and became the strongest single party in the House of Commons.

**India at the Conference**

At the second session of the conference, Gandhiji made it clear that the Congress represented the whole of India, and all interests. It represented the spirit of rebellion but adopted a novel method of civil disobedience. He described himself as the only spokesman for the whole country which implicitly challenged and repudiated the decisions of the first session of the conference. His claim was disputed by other Indian representatives. After a futile attempt to solve the communal problem, Gandhiji urged the Government not to hold up the work of constitution-making, but the minorities insisted 'that their claims must stand as a connected whole'. (90) Nehru charged that although the communal issue loomed large, 'it was political reaction that barred all progress and sheltered itself behind the communal issue'. (91)

Disunity about the aim in their attitude was very much there and, as the main principles were about to take shape, communal fears and suspicions became more acute and the Muslims seemed to leave the Central Government, in which federation would place them in a minority, unreformed. The Conservative extremists were quick to make capital out of the fundamental breach in the plan of an all-India federation without communal agreement or at least a communal modus vivendi. They said that the proposed reforms would be impracticable, and there was demand for their postponement till the communal

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(91) J. Nehru, n. 2, 234.
settlement. (92) The Spectator told the Government to make clear that "diehardism" would not be permitted to deflect the British people from carrying out the oft repeated promise of giving India responsible government, and that Britain would genuinely seek to make the 'transition period' as short as possible. (93) The session failed to solve the communal problem and ended on 1 December 1931. Still much had been done to fill in the framework of the previous year and the structure of the federal judiciary had taken shape. There was no agreement still on the composition of the federal legislature and the fitting of the States into the federation.

BRITISH POLICY TOWARDS INDIA

At the close of the session, the British Prime Minister announced the acceptance by the National Government of the policy laid down in his earlier pronouncement of January 1931. The Government reaffirmed their belief in an all-India federation as offering the only hopeful solution of India's constitutional problem. MacDonald said: 'They intend to pursue this plan unwaveringly and to do their utmost to surmount the difficulties which now stand in the way of its realization.' (94) Though the new Government did not disown the work of its predecessor, 'there was a fresh resonance in its language, a new impatience with bargaining, a new emphasis of the divisions that bedevilled India, and of the rights of minorities.' (95)

(92) Templewood, n. 16, 60-1.
(93) Spectator, 147 (7 November 1931) 586.
(94) Gwyer and Appadorai, Documents, n. 11, 236.
(95) Birkenhead, n. 5, 316.
The policy statement was circulated to the Parliament as a White Paper for its approval.

Commending the White Paper, the Prime Minister declared that the Princes' readiness to join the federation changed the whole outlook and put the question of a central federal government with executive and legislative responsibility and authority on to a new foundation. He explained that the power foreshadowed in the White Paper would not put India under the Statute of Westminster, though that was not barred either. The new Secretary of State for India, Samuel Hoare, told the House that an all-India executive and legislature, autonomous Provinces and safeguards were the objectives of the White Paper. He appealed to the House to throw the whole weight of their unprecedented authority behind the attempt to reconcile the British and Indian points of view. Labour's Clement Attlee welcomed Prime Minister's reaffirmation of the principles.

A Conservative member, Edward Cadogan, thought that provincial autonomy with indirect election to a Central legislature, which would contain within itself the power to evolve self-government, was the right line of advance. Another Conservative member, Wardlaw-Milne, had no doubt that a condition of self-government quite equal to that of any of the dominions was the eventual aim and object of the policy. Though the words 'Dominion Status' were not used, the object was that eventually there would be self-government within the Empire on the same basis as the other self-governing parts of the Empire. John Simon made it clear that the White Paper was prepared by the united and deliberate decision of the whole Cabinet and the issue was whether or not the House was prepared to affirm that statement representing the views of the Government. *If you want honestly to
pursue the achievement of responsible government in India, you must place the responsibility for departments of government which are difficult and which are open to criticism and attack, upon the shoulders of those to whom you wish responsibility to be given.'

The leader of the Conservative Party, Baldwin, explained that the great secret of their political strength was that from their own political experience they maintained a flexibility in meeting situations as they arose. He accepted that there were extremists on both sides and there were men who even regretted the 1919 reforms and would try to put the clock back if they could. Baldwin said: 'Not only the bulk of the House, but the bulk of the country, are with the Government in the course they are pursuing.' He asked the House 'to give us our mandate tonight, and wish us all well in the most difficult task that anyone in this Empire has ever tried to undertake'.

Opposing the Government's India policy, Churchill moved an amendment, with a view to preventing the House from committing itself to the establishment of a Dominion constitution of the Westminster type, as well as for the purpose of opposing prejudicial trade discrimination and pleading for the ultimate responsibility of Parliament for the peace, order and sound Government of the Indian Empire. He said that responsible government had no meaning if all those safeguards were effected. He thought that the White Paper meant different things to different people. He alleged that Parliament was asked to take a decision without examining the merits and character of the Round Table Conference scheme or the scheme of the Statutory Commission. He opposed bitterly the transfer of power at the Centre.
Supporting the amendment, Reginald Craddock, a Conservative member, thought that the granting prematurely of any system of self-government to India would be disastrous and that democracy was an absolute impossibility in India. Another Conservative member, Page Croft, said that the White Paper represented a new policy and suggested a great plan of economic unity between Britain and India. Colonel Moore opposing the reforms said that there was no future for India if authority in the Centre and autonomy in the Provinces were transferred to Indians at the same time. Alfred Knox expressed his agreement with Churchill. (96)

The House of Commons rejected the amendment of the Conservative extremists with a shattering majority of 369 as against 43, and it was later noted by Churchill 'as a sad milestone on the downward path'. (97) The House of Lords accepted after a debate the statement of policy by a handsome majority. From the debate held in the Parliament for two days, it became clear that it stood by the National Government in its India policy. The House of Commons, fresh from the close contact with the constituencies, expressed almost the unanimous voice of the people. This new re-statement of determination to proceed with the policy came from a Government and a Parliament in which the Conservatives dominated. 'The policy thus received in striking manner the endorsement of Parliament, irrespective of party, and had thus become beyond all possibility of

* For a brief biographical sketch see Appendix I.

(96) All the above references, Hansard, H.C., 260 (2 and 3 December 1931) cols. 1101-1218, 1287-1413.

challenge the policy of the nation.' (98)

Meanwhile, the Government of India under Willingdon adopted repressive measures and broke the spirit of the Gandhi-Irwin agreement. As a result, the civil disobedience movement that had been called off after the Gandhi-Irwin Pact, was resumed. At the end of the second session of the Round Table Conference, Gandhiji said that they had 'come to the parting of the ways', and the truce was broken before he got back to India. The conflict was resumed, 'another campaign of civil disobedience on the one side, another course of repression on the other'. (99) When Willingdon ordered the arrest of Gandhiji, the efforts of Irwin continued by Hoare for keeping him at the Round Table Conference, ended. There is some truth in what Hoare said 'If Gandhi and Willingdon had understood each other, it would have been a miracle'. (100)

It is an irony that a Conservative Governor-General, Irwin, was very judicious in his approach and liberal in understanding the realities of the problem, treated Indian nationalists with due respect without any inhibition, and at the same time adopted a firm policy in checking the national movement without provocation. On the other hand, Willingdon, a liberal, non-party man who had been appointed by a Labour Government, did not show the liberal outlook or understanding of the problem in its true perspective. He lacked the elementary courtesy of discussing the problem with the

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(100) Templewood, n. 16, 66-7.
nationalist leaders before they were arrested en masse and provoked the people by declaring all the national organizations illegal.

**India at the Party Conference**

The question of Indian reforms was discussed at the annual Conference of the National Union (101) held on 6 October 1932. Churchill sent a letter opposing the reforms and said that the scheme was not accepted by any important body of Indian opinion. 'Yet, it is to this absurdity and catastrophe that we are being led step by step, inch by inch, not by Indian pressure, but by a kind of intellectual obstinacy which has obsessed our leaders. . . .' He wanted that British responsibility for the Central Government to be kept intact; in other words he did not want Britain to hand over control of India. (102) Edwin P. Newton* moved a resolution congratulating the Government and the Governor-General upon strong measures and recorded that the proposals must embody safeguards. He said that the subject was one of the greatest importance, especially to people engaged in the Lancashire cotton trade. The resolution was formally seconded and carried with acclamation.

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* For a brief biographical sketch see Appendix A.

(101) The National Union of Conservative and Unionist Associations is a federal organization to which some 542 constituency associations throughout England and Wales are affiliated. Scotland and Northern Ireland have separate bodies. It is established on a representative and democratic basis, and is enabled by a chain of constituency, area and national councils and conferences to bring all sections of the organization into direct touch with the Leader of the Party. The Annual Party conference, which consists of members of the Central Council and additional representatives from all constituency organizations, is organized by the National Union. The conference reviews the work of the year, and motions on matters of policy and organization are submitted and the decisions arrived at are afterwards conveyed to the Leader of the Party.

(102) The Times, 6 October 1932, 15.
Another resolution opposing the foundations of a responsible government for all-India was moved by Mrs. C.C. Chisholm* and was supported by Alfred Knox and Duchess of Atholl*. To this resolution, an amendment was moved by W.M. Kirkpatrick* and was seconded by H.H.E. Holson*, expressing satisfaction at the procedure of the Government allowing free expressions of all points of view before any Bill was introduced in the Parliament. Hoare told the conference that there was general agreement about the need for some change in the Indian constitution and pleaded with the conference to give its authority to the National Government to proceed in a cautious broad-minded and statesmanlike way to deal with one of the most difficult problems that had ever faced the British Parliament*. The amended resolution was carried by a large majority. (103)

THE ROUND TABLE CONFERENCE: THIRD SESSION

The third and final session of the conference began on 17 November 1932 and it was a rather formal conference. The Opposition Labour Party and Indian National Congress did not take part. On the understanding that a White Paper would be submitted to Parliament on the basis of the discussions of the conference, the reports of the Committees were considered.

Direct election to the federal lower house and elections by the provincial legislatures to the federal upper chamber were decided. Special powers and responsibilities of the Governor-General and Governors were defined. The British Parliament was vested with

* For a brief biographical sketch see Appendix A.

(103) Minutes of Annual Conference (October 1932) folios 16-17.
See also Cleanings and Memoranda, 76 (July-December 1932) 318, 360; "Conservative Party's Conference", Home and Empire, 3 (November 1932) 110-11.
the power of amending the constitution and dealing with the sovereignty of the Crown and the control of the foreign relations and armed relations. The Government preferred to leave the choice of the Defence Minister to the Governor-General with the suggestion to consult other ministers on defence matters.

It was clear that by the time of the third session of the Round Table Conference the enthusiasm for federation had lost its fire and the Princes were hesitant to abide by their original decision without further guarantees. The conference ended without any high hopes with which it was started. It achieved a great thing in that it put the aspirations of Indian nationalism to the test of practical politics and all the problems were dealt with fully and exhaustively on an equal footing.

Since the National Government was dominated by the Conservatives, 'there seemed to have been a certain stiffening of attitude under pressure from the small but powerful diehard group on the extreme Right'. At the third session, the British Government felt that there was no prospect of Parliament's approval to the constitutional reform unless provisions for the exercise of effective control by representatives of the Crown were included. (104) The first two sessions were concerned with the main principles of policy. But the third session formulated some programmes on the basis of the deliberations of the conference. Most of the Indian delegates disbelieved in the necessity of, and disliked, the safeguards but accepted them as the quid pro quo which they were to concede as the

(104) R. Coupland, n. 99, 131. See also The Economist, 116 (25 March 1933) 624-5.
price of responsible government. (105) The third session of the Round Table Conference confirmed the principles agreed upon at the first two sessions and worked them out in greater detail. Like the earlier sessions, it was consultative and did not bind Parliament to any given course of action.

The Scheme of Reforms

The Government's India policy was the setting up of an all-India federation, with federal and provincial governments responsible to elected assemblies, subject to overriding safeguards which were designed to preserve the authority of the British Parliament. The Government would not proceed with the implementation of the federal scheme except on two conditions: (i) 'That a substantial proportion of Indian States in the new Indian Parliament will ensure the maintenance of a strong block of Conservative opinion, which, together with the votes of the Moslems and other minorities should counter-balance Hindu extremism.' (ii) The Government would insist on the establishment of a Reserve Bank to preserve currency and Indian credit. The Government never hustled and hurried the process and tried their best to carry the whole nation with them with a special eye on the Conservative Right-wing. The usual procedure, in any case, would have been to put before the Joint Select Committee, not a White Paper, but a complete bill actually drafted. In this case, however, the Government felt 'that the problem of India was so vital and so complex that the fullest possible opportunity should be given to Parliament and to the country to form,'...

and to express, their opinion on it. So the conclusions were incorporated in the White Paper. (106) 'Fact-finding' commissions were sent to India and a communal award was published but gave satisfaction neither to the Hindu majority nor to the Moslem and other minorities. (107)

Soon after the third session of the conference, as the Government formulated the proposals in the form of a White Paper, the Right-wing critics intensified their efforts to win over the rank and file of the Party against the Government's India policy. Churchill expressed his determination to fight the Government's India policy and said that the whole of India policy as developed by the Round Table Conference was sheer folly into which people were led by weakness and defeatism. He charged the Government that the Tory Party had swallowed, lock, stock and barrel, the policies of the late Labour Government about the Indian constitution. (108) It could not be argued that the policy was the result of a legacy from the Labour Government alone, for the policy was jointly formulated by the Conservative Governor-General and the Labour Government. The Conservative leaders had a prominent share in shaping their proposals. Moreover, even while in Opposition Baldwin had made it quite clear that he would implement any policy to which his delegates at the conference agreed.

(106) Hints for Speakers, 6 (23 March 1933) 9-12.


(108) Morning Post, 18 February 1933, 11.
Conservative Attitude to the Reforms

Meanwhile, Page Croft, a Conservative opponent of the Indian constitutional reforms, moved a private member's motion to the effect that owing to financial conditions and the inadequacy of the proposed safeguards, the transfer of responsibility at the Centre was inexpedient and urged upon self-government to the Provinces reserving justice and security. (109) The debate in the House of Commons on the motion well brought out the attitude of the Conservative Party members towards the Indian reforms. On behalf of the Government, the Conservative Secretary of State for India, Hoare, denied the charge of Churchill and made it clear that the conclusions were reached on the merits of the case and that the proposals were found to be wise in the actual circumstances. Dealing with Croft's motion, he declared that they had no intention of abandoning the Indian obligations and said that there was no change in the position of the Government from its policy at the Round Table Conference. (110) The motion was opposed by 297 as against 42, of whom 41 were Conservatives. The debate ended in a division which showed that the well organized propaganda of the extremist Conservatives against granting responsibility at the

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Page Croft had thought of retiring from politics but not several men who had returned from India and expressed grave anxiety at the policy of the Government which they regarded as disastrous. The history of the Eastern Empire had always thrilled him. He was moved by their anxiety and could not sleep on that night. He heard something which kept him awake and seemed to urge him to keep the keystone of the Imperial arch. Lord Croft (Brigadier-General Henry Page), My Life of Strife (London, 1948) 216.

(110) Hansard, H.C., 274 (22 February 1933) cols. 1799–1808.
Centre had made no headway whatever in Parliament. Still the Morning Post (23 February 1933, 10) safely concluded that a large number of Conservative members abstained from the vote as 'they contented themselves with a cautionary demonstration'.

India figured prominently at the meeting of the Central Council of the Conservative Party held on 23 February 1933. A resolution congratulating the Government on the improved political atmosphere in India and requesting that Parliament should be given the fullest opportunity before the question of an all-India federation was decided upon, was carried by a large majority. Another resolution approved by a large majority requested the Government to take steps to safeguard the Lancashire cotton trade. A third resolution opposing responsible government at the Centre, as injurious to Indian welfare, British trade and empire was rejected after a ballot by 189 votes to 165. (111) As The Times put it, they were the audience to which Churchill looked forward when he called for a deep-throated growl, to 'stop the rot of the Government's India Programme'. The fact that the resolution was not actually carried must be counted as satisfactory. It was widely felt that 'the real test of the Party feeling . . . will be better based on the actual constructive proposals of the Government than on mere rhetorical appeals to prejudice'. (112)

Thus the Governor-General's declaration on Dominion Status initially sparked off a bitter controversy. But at the sessions of the Round Table Conference, British political parties and public

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(111) Conservative Party Central Council Minutes, 252-3; and Gleanings and Memoranda, 77 (January-June 1933) 238.

(112) The Times, 1 March 1933.
started examining the claims of India for freedom in their perspective. The main features of the Reforms scheme, all-India federation, provincial autonomy and responsible government were settled at the conference. The Conservatives shared a major responsibility in formulating the scheme and except the extremists, the Party supported the results of the conference.