Chapter Four

FROM NON-CO-OPERATION TO CO-OPERATION,
1954-59
INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS, 1934-36

After the approval of the revival of the All India Swaraj Party and its programme by the Bombay Congress (October 1934) Civil Disobedience and Non-co-operation were switched off and the Council-entry programme was switched on. Elections were fought and Congress representatives entered the legislature. Like other parties, Congress was now busy on the constitutional front. This important shift in the Congress policy acted as a challenge for the Socialists to organize.

The publication of the Joint Parliamentary Committee Report on the Indian constitutional reforms and the Congress interpretation that Complete Independence did not exclude free and equal partnership with other nations for mutual benefit, introduced a change in the emphasis of the Congress. In the post-1934 period Complete Independence vs. Dominion Status or isolated and absolute Independence vs. free and equal partnership with Britain no longer remained, it seems, a subject of much interest and discussion for the Congress. The right of self-determination became its main concern. The central demand of the Congress, then, was that India should have freedom to frame her constitution through a national Constituent Assembly. The Congress continued to plead for the replacement of 'British determination' by 'self-determination', of the Government of India Act, 1935, (and formerly proposals contained in the White Paper, and the Joint Parliamentary
Committee Report) by a national Constitution framed by a Constituent Assembly of Indian representatives. This did not, however, mean that the Congress opposed the British connection or that its demand for a Constituent Assembly was an indication of its intention to sever that connection. Congress leaders like Dr. H.A. Ansari continued to cite the examples of other Dominions and to reiterate that if self-determination was conceded, it would possibly result in "honourable relations (1) between England and India."

The discussion on the Joint Parliamentary Committee Report in the Legislative Assembly, in February 1935, clearly expressed the attitude of the Indian political leaders. None of the speakers expressed any desire for severing the British connection. The Congress leaders like Govind Ballabh Pant, while opposing the Joint Parliamentary Committee Report, declared that they would be satisfied if the work of devising "a scheme for self-government for this country" should be left (2) to the Assembly. Mr. S. Satyamurti explained that the demand for a Constituent Assembly did not mean that the Congress had "repudiated the right of British Parliament to draw up the

(1) Dr. Ansari on the Congress demand and Constituent Assembly. The Hindu (Madras), 6 February 1935, 7.

(2) See Legislative Assembly Debates, 1 (1935) 262-313 and 457-579.

(3) C.D. Pant's speech, 7 February 1935. Ibid., 539. Similar views were expressed by Bhulebai J. Dosi, leader of the Congress Party in the Assembly. See ibid., 273.
Indian Constitution." The British Parliament would, he said, be called upon to "implement" the decision of the Constituent Assembly. He even suggested a number of other alternatives and "the Dominion Constitutions of other countries, \( \ldots \) and the Nehru Report" were among them. If the British Government conceded India's demand, Mr. Doop Narayan Singh saw no difficulty why Indians and the British "should not meet ... as equals and friends." "If England says yes," he emphatically declared, "even today, she will find India's hand of friendship stretched across the seas, willing to give and take, willing to guard British lives and British property even as her own." At another place Mr. Bhulabhai Desai reiterated that "a free India can enter into any relationship with Great Britain, political or economic" and expressed the hope and possibility of India's association with Britain.

All this indicates that the Congress demand was for a Dominion type Constituent Assembly whose decisions would be referred to the British Parliament for approval and implementation, however formal it might be. There were even Congressmen

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(4) Ibid., 551.
(5) Ibid., 548.
(6) Ibid., 486.
(7) In an interview with a representative of The Hindu, The Hindu, 11 May 1935, 11.
who, believing that the Constituent Assembly was a distant prospect, were not hopeful and quite earnest in its demand. Indeed, a member of the Working Committee, Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, is reported to have said: "To talk of the latter (the Constituent Assembly) in our retreat is to cover it up with undue hope, if not bluff."

Right-wingers like Dr. B.S. Moonjo openly discarded complete independence, that is breaking from the Empire, and openly advocated equal partnership in the Empire. Dr. Moonjo argued that for the progress and prosperity of the Empire during the last 120 years India had made heavy sacrifices in men and money. It was not therefore wisdom to give up our claim to ownership and partnership in the Empire and forego our right to rule and administer the affairs of the Empire ....... He believed that the Empire should be administered through an Imperial Assembly of representatives from each constituent partner, and the representation should be on the basis of their respective populations.

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Ownership and partnership thus offers greatest advantage to us than even complete independence (he said). Thus, I would insist on ownership and partnership in the Empire and if the other partners were then to desire dissolution, I would oppose it to the last drop of my blood. (10)

Mr. C.R. Reddy agreed with Gandhiji in finding no difference between "Swaraj" and "the substance of Independence." Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya also openly favoured British connection. At the Faispur Congress in December 1935, he frankly stated: "We want the friendship of Britain. If Britain (12) wants our friendship, she can have it." Similar views were expressed with equal clarity by many other Congress leaders and a vast majority in the Congress was in favour of India's equal partnership with Britain in the Commonwealth.

CONGRESS SOCIALISTS

From the above one should not, however, conclude that the Congress was unanimous and that there was no opposition to British connection. There was indeed a section, a minority but influential, opposed to this view. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru is considered by many to have belonged to that section.

(10) Ibid.


(12) Ibid., 1936, II, 234.
Certainly, one may say that Jawaharlal Nehru was against the British connection and Dominion Status; many extracts from his writings and speeches can be culled in support of this argument. India's independence must mean "the severance of the British connection," Nehru had written in 1933. In 1937, he advised Congressmen that the Independence Pledge "must hold and we must labour for the severance of the British connection." Again, in 1938, he pleaded for "separation from the British Empire." But such extracts represent only a half-truth. For a full understanding of Nehru's attitude, it should be noted that he claimed to be primarily a Socialist and an internationalist. "I am a Socialist," he confessed, and "I work for Indian independence not only because the nationalist in me cannot tolerate alien domination ... but even more because for me it is the inevitable step to social and economic change." Again


(14) Presidential Address, All India National Convention, Delhi, 19 March 1937. The Indian Annual Register, 1937, I, 210.


he asserted: "My very nationalism is based on an interna-

(18) tionalism ...." (18) Nehru thought that national isolation was neither a desirable nor a possible ideal in the present day world and, therefore, he advised his countrymen "to discard a narrow nationalism in favour of world co-operation and real internationalism." This was the main reason for Nehru's opposition to the British Empire which, he thought, was based on exploitation and imperialism. Because he could "see no real commonwealth anywhere, only an empire exploiting the Indian people and numerous other peoples in different parts (20) of the world," he regarded the British Commonwealth of Nations as an euphemistical name of the British Empire. He held the view that under cover of these fine and radical words and phrases British statesmen "seek to hide the ugly and brutal face of imperialism and try to keep us in its embrace of death."

He declared that "The British Empire and real internationalism as (21) are on poles apart ...." He believed that the British Commonwealth was essentially an "European dominating group"

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(19) Nehru, no. 13, 22.

(20) The Indian Annual Register, no. 14, 209.

(21) Nehru, no. 13, 22 and 23 respectively.
which, whatever might had been the relations inter se of its self-governing members since the Statute of Westminster,
(22) represents British imperialism.

Because of this concept of the British Commonwealth which he had in mind, the idea of India becoming a Dominion (23) seemed to Nehru "a fantastic idea." "The whole conception of Dominion Status," he wrote in 1936, "seems to me to be an acceptance of the basic fabric of British imperialism." Nehru could not entertain the "idea of Dominion Status in any shape or form" because he feared that "under cover of that phrase, the tentacles of imperialism will creep up and hold us in their grip . . . ."

The striking feature of Nehru's numerous pronouncements on the subject of Indo-British relations is the sharp distinction he always made between Britain as an imperialist and the ruling power in India and Britain as an equal. Being primarily opposed to imperialism, he was opposed to British imperialism and as a consequence opposed to the British connection. But with a Britain free from imperialism Nehru was, it seems,

(22) *The Indian Annual Register*, n. 14, 203-10.


(24) Nehru, n. 18, 20.

willing to co-operate. This statement may be supported even at the risk of excessive quotations by the following extracts from Nehru's writings and speeches.

In 1933, he said that "because Britain today represents imperialism, our freedom can only come after the British connection is severed." But, he added: "If imperialism goes from Britain we shall gladly co-operate with her ... not otherwise." At another place Nehru explained:

"It is not a question of an implacable and irreconcilable antagonism to England and the English people, or the desire to break from them at all costs. It is the British rule, the British domination, to which we object, and with which we cannot compromise willingly - not the English people." (27)

While emphasizing further that Indian freedom and British imperialism were two incompatibles, he frankly stated that only "with the elimination of British imperialism from India will conditions be created which permit of real Indo-British co-operation." (28)

When directly asked what was meant by the term 'Complete Independence for India', Pandit Nehru unequivocally replied:

(26) Nehru, no 13, 22.


(28) Ibid., 419.
... defining this phrase simply in its political sense, as it occurs in the Congress Constitution, it means national freedom, not only domestic but foreign, financial, military ... in other words, whatever national freedom usually signifies. That does not mean necessarily that we lay stress on an isolation of India or a breaking away of India from such association as might exist with England or with other countries, but it does mean - the word 'independence' is used especially to lay stress on the fact - that we want to break the imperialist connection with Britain. (29)

He explained that if imperialism survived in Britain, India's connection with her would mean an imperialist domination in India in some form or other.

Therefore in terms of imperialist Britain the independence of India means the separation of India from England. (But he added) Personally I can conceive and welcome the idea of a close association between India and England on terms other than those of imperialism. (30)

Again, in 1938, while pleading for separation from the British Empire, Nehru did not deny the possibility of "friendship (31) with Britain under different circumstances." He believed that "it may be possible in the future for India and England to co-operate together as equals for the common good," but he emphasized that the "Empire will have to be liquidated and India

(29) At a meeting held under the auspices of the Indian Conciliation Group in London, 4 February 1938. Nehru, p. 23, 228.

(30) Ibid.

will have to gain her independence before real co-ordination is possible."

These and many other extracts prove that Jawaharlal Nehru, though seemingly opposed to Dominion Status, was willing to accept a free and equal partnership with Britain, subject to certain conditions. His main condition was that British imperialism and the British rule in India must end. His insistence on British imperialism in all his inimical utterances shows that it was the British imperialism rather than the British connection that he regarded as the chief cause of evil, and that his attack on the latter was based on the assumption that the former was a necessary concomitant of it. Once British imperialism and its domination over India ended, friendship was possible. He was not primarily interested in making India 'independent' of the Empire. "If he believed the Empire were really a family of equal nations, whose individual members had a 'fair share', he would be willing that India should be one of these nations," observed Edward Thompson.


(33) Edward Thompson to Jawaharlal Nehru, 3 January 1957. Jawaharlal Nehru, A Bunch of Old Letters (Bombay, 1955) 211. Mr. Edward Thompson, a friend of Nehru, interviewed him and published the interview in the News Chronicle (London), 2 January 1957, and sent a copy of his observations to Nehru also.
Basically Nehru was with Gandhi. Both were opposed to imperialism, both held that India's partnership with Britain was possible, and emphasized that the partnership was possible only if British imperialism and the British Empire vanished. The difference between Gandhiji and Nehru was that whereas the former had hope and faith in the conversion of the British people so that India, some day, might get real freedom in association with Great Britain, the latter had little faith in such a possibility.

Even Subhas Chandra Bose, who pleaded against any compromise with the British Government in 1931, was not unwilling to accept an honourable settlement in 1938. If the British Government accepted India's right "to frame her own constitution," he declared, "there was no reason why India and Britain should not be the best of friends." He did not even rule out the possibility of a close relationship between India and Britain in the future; but that was possible, if at all, only after India got her freedom. He belonged, it seems, to that school which believed that before a partnership could


In the editorial, 'That India Wants', on Mr. Bose's speech, the Paper wrote: "While India is anxious to shake off British control, she is not necessarily averse to keeping up the British connection so long as that can be done consistently with the enjoyment of national sovereignty and self-respect. Whether Britain will seize this opportunity or miss it, we leave it to her statesmen to decide." Ibid., 14 January 1933, 8.
possibly be conceived there must be a period of complete
dissociation. Presiding at the Haripura Congress (1929) Mr.
Bose, while pleading for the sovrenge of British connection
and establishing a federal republic, declared: "But once we
have real self-determination, there is no reason why we should
not enter into the most cordial relations with the British
people." "On this point I have been greatly impressed," he
said, "by the attitude of the President do Valera." That
relationship between India and Britain in the future would or
should be, Mr. Bose was not definite. "That will depend on
a large extent," he said, "on the attitude of the British
people themselves." 

But leaving aside Nehru and Bose still there were some
Socialists in the Congress who were not willing to accept the
British connection. Then, in May 1934, the Civil Disobedience
movement was withdrawn and the All-India Swaraj Party was
revived, these Congress-Socialists, the majority of whom was

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(35) Presidential Address. INC, Report of the 51st:
Session, Haripura, 1938, 172.

Mr. Do Valera was not happy with the phrase Dominion
Status. In December 1933 addressing the Literary and Historical
Society, University College, Dublin, he said that "Our present
Status is not Dominion Status."


And Professor A.B. Keith held the view that "in
itself there is no logical reason against the existence of a
formal republic within the British Commonwealth, under the
headship of the King .... With changing conditions legal
ideas should, and can, expand to accord with emergent situations,"
he said.

A. Borricdalo Keith, "The Irish Free State and the
British Crown," The Indian Review (Madras), 23 (January 1937) 3.
anti-Swarajist, held a Conference at Patna on 17 May 1934
and decided to form an All-India organization of Socialists
in the Congress. Subsequently, the All India Congress Socialist
Party (in short the Congress Socialist Party) was formally
(35) inaugurated at Bombay on 21 October 1934. The achievement of
"Complete Independence, in the sense of separation from the
British Empire" was adopted as one of the objects of the
(37) Congress Socialist Party. Thus the Congress Socialists made
it perfectly clear that the complete independence of India
(38) "must include separation from the British Empire." This was
(39) reiterated many times in the following years. They also asked
the Congress to adopt their definition of Complete Independence
but with no success.

The Congress Socialist Party was against the policy of
compromise and declared that it would not "enter at any stage

(35) For the birth, aims and objects of the Congress
Socialist Party, see P.L. Lethanpal, History of the Congress
Socialist Party (Lahore, 1946).

(37) Constitution of the Congress Socialist Party,
All India Congress Socialist Party, Constitution, Programme
and Resolutions of the 1st Conference of the Party and Report
of the Organising Secretary (Bombay, 1934) 5.

(38) J.P. Narayan, no. 8, 99.

(39) The objective of the Congress Socialist Party was
subsequently endorsed by the 3rd Conference of the Party at
Faizpur (1936), and was reiterated by many Provincial Socialist
Conferences.
into negotiations on the constitutional issue with the British Government. The Socialists had no interest in Dominion Status. They believed that "it is a goal unworthy of India, the Statute of Westminster notwithstanding." Socialists like Purshottam Trikamdas frankly stated that they stood not only for the removal of British domination "but also for a complete break with the Empire." Similar views were expressed by many other Socialist leaders.

But the Congress Socialists were in a small minority within the Congress and without Mohru had not sufficient

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(42) Purshottam Trikamdas, None So Blind (Bombay, Congress Socialist Party, 1938) 4. (Pamphlet)

(43) Acharya Narendra Dev, Jaya Prakash Narayan, Sampurnanand, Dr. Remmenchar Lohia, U.R. Usmani, Purshottam Trikamdas, Achyut Patwardhen, Sri Prakasa and Mrs. Kanladevi Chattopadhyaya were among the top leaders of the Congress Socialist Party.

(44) Jawaharlal Nehru though regarded as a great leader of the Indian Socialist movement never formally joined the Congress Socialist Party. So was the case with Subhas Chandra Bose.
influence to challenge the leadership and influence of Mahatma Gandhi and his staunch followers. Though Mahatma Gandhi formally left the Congress in 1934, it lessened in no way the leadership and influence of either. The Gandhiites continued to be at the helm of affairs of the Congress during the post-1934 period. Even during the years when Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose were the Presidents, the predominant leadership of the Congress was in the hands of the old guard. The Gandhiites were always in a majority in the Working Committee and AICC and thereby continued to guide the policy and programme of the Congress. So much so that when in 1939 Subhas Chandra Bose tried to exert his influence and openly oppose the Gandhian group, he had to resign from the presidency, and was subsequently disqualified from being a member of any elective Congress Committee for three years.\(^{(45)}\)

This event is very important because it proved beyond doubt the great influence and domination of Gandhi over the Congress. Because Gandhi's support was always available to the Gandhian group, its influence was great, far greater than that of any other group or groups in the Congress.


\(^{(46)}\) See Jawaharlal Nehru, \textit{Where are We?} (Allahabad, 1939) 28. This is a collection of eight articles written during the ten days preceding the Tripuri Session of the Congress in March 1939.
There was no substantial change in the Congress attitude during 1937-39. The attitude of Gandhiji, the 'Permanent Super-President' of the Congress, continued to be one of the basic factors or rather the most important factor in influencing and moulding the attitude, policy and programme of the Congress.

What was the attitude of this permanent super-president during this period? Gandhiji continued to hold the same view which he had expressed at the Round Table Conference in 1931. He was still willing to accept Dominion Status for India. In January 1937, he wrote to Mr. H.S.L. Polak that "so far as I am concerned, if Dominion Status were offered in terms of the

(47) On Gandhiji's position in the Congress Jawaharlal Nehru wrote in March 1939:

"In trying to analyse the various elements in the Congress, the dominating position of Gandhiji must always be remembered. He dominates to some extent the Congress, but far more so he dominates the masses .... And It makes little difference whether he is formally connected with the Congress or not. The Congress of today is of his making and he is essentially of it. In any event the commanding position he has in the country has nothing to do with any office, and he will retain that dominating place in the hearts of the people so long as he lives, and afterwards. In any policy that might be framed, he cannot be ignored. In any national struggle his full association and guidance are essential. India cannot do without him."

"That is one of the basic factors of the situation. The conscious and thinking Leftists in the country recognise it and, whatever their ideological or temperamental differences with him, have tried to avoid anything approaching a split. Their attempt has been to leave the Congress under its present leadership, which means under Gandhiji's guidance ...."

Ibid., 65-68.
Statute of Westminster, i.e., the right to secede at will, I would unhesitatingly accept it." And again, when in June 1937, Capt. Strunk, representative of a Nazi paper, inquired about the content of independence, Gandhiji replied that by independence "we mean ... that we will not live on the sufferance of any people on earth .... " But that independence, he emphasized, "does not exclude voluntary partnership."

The Congress accepted Gandhiji's views. Neither the election manifesto of 1935, nor the Congress representatives in the Legislatures defined complete independence in the sense of separation from the British Empire. And though the Congress rejected the Government of India Act, 1935, "in its entirety," and declared that only "a constitution ... framed by a Constituent Assembly elected on adult franchise" would be acceptable to India, and reiterated and stressed "the demand for a Constituent Assembly," it did not ask for complete separation from Britain.

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(49) D.G. Tendulkar, Mahatma, Life of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (Bombay, 1952) IV, 202.

(50) For the text of the manifesto, see INC, 1935-37: (R), 2-8.

(51) Resolution, 49th Session, Lucknow, April 1936. INC, 1935-36: (R), 77.
In the Legislatures in 1937, the Parliamentary wing of the Congress like its predecessor, the All India Swaraj Party (1935), while pleading for a Constituent Assembly, indicated that the Congress was not averse to keeping the British connection and that its demand was based on the precedents in other Dominions. In the Central Legislative Assembly Mr. Satyamurti pointed out to the Government: "There is yet a chance, so long as Mahatma Gandhi lives, to arrive at a friendly settlement and grasp his Gandhian hand of friendship." (62) In the Bihar Legislative Assembly Mr. Sri Krishna Sinha, Premier, explained the Congress demand, that "India should be given the same right and opportunity to decide her own future as had been conceded to Dominions and other countries within the British Empire." (55) In the C.P. and Borar Assembly Mr. T.J. Kedar stated that they were only "following in the footsteps" of Ireland which fought for a constitution after its linking and ultimately got it.

All those leaders pleaded that the British Government should accept the Congress demand for a Constituent Assembly and expressed the hope that if the demand were conceded, there would be possibly an honourable settlement leading to a free and equal partnership with Britain.

(62) Legislative Assembly Debates, 5 (1937) 1896.
(55) The Indian Annual Register, 1937, II, 200.
(54) Ibid., 257.
But the Socialist group did not fully share this view and had a different concept of the proposed Constituent Assembly. They emphasized the 'sovereign' character of the Constituent Assembly and stated that such a Constituent Assembly would have no connection with any outside authority. Speaking on the Constituent Assembly resolution in the U.P. Assembly, Acharya Narendra Deva categorically explained that "We do not want that this Constituent Assembly should be summoned by the British Parliament," and added that "the Constituent Assembly is a thing which can only be created in a semi-revolutionary situation." Finally, he declared:

We do not make any demand upon the British Government. We simply give notice to the British Government that the Constituent Assembly is going to be our slogan in the future and that it represents the ideals and aspirations of the Indian people. (55)

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru also held the view that the Constituent Assembly would be a sovereign body and its decisions would not require any "reference to outside authority." (55)

The moderates, however, having gained some experience of the new Constitution in the Provincial ministries developed, it seems, a more compromising attitude. This showed itself

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(56) Presidential Address, All India National Convention, Delhi, 19 March 1937. The Indian Annual Register, 1937, I, 211.
particularly over the question of Federation. The resolution (57) opposing Federation and the speeches made thereon by the Congress leaders in the Provincial Legislatures in the early 1938 were conciliatory. The resolution was ridiculed by members from the Opposition benches. Mr. Abdul Hamid Khan, leader of the Muslim League Group in the Madras Legislative Assembly, characterized it as nothing but a "climb down tantamount to the Congress giving up their claim for a (58) Constituent Assembly." Dr. E. Raghavendra Rao, leader of the Opposition in the C.P. and Bener Assembly, felt that the resolution was "full of the spirit of rancorous mendicancy" and stood "in strange contrast with the insurrectionary psychology of the resolution on the Constituent Assembly." (59)

The discussion on the resolution regarding the Constituent Assembly in the Central Legislative Assembly was adjourned sine die on 4 February 1938 at the request of the Congress Party which thought it "inexpedient to go on with

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(57) The resolution moved in the C.P. and Bener Legislative Assembly, and similar resolutions in other Provincial Assemblies, urged the Government of Great Britain to "respect the wishes of the people of India and immediately devise means, even for transitional purposes, to set up a Central Government free from the objectionable features of the Federal scheme of the Government of India Act, to be evolved in consultation with the responsible provincial governments and national leaders." Ibid., 1938, I, 257c.

(58) Ibid., 169c.

(59) Ibid., 267c.
further discussion of this motion. Indeed, Congress leaders like B. R. Desai suggested that with certain alterations the Federal scheme of the Government of India Act, 1935, would be acceptable to the Congress. There were suspicions floating about in the air that Gandhi or some of his colleagues had expressed themselves in favour of accepting the Federal part of the Government of India Act or even entered into a Pact with the British to work it, says Dr. Sitaramayya. The Congress Socialist Party was opposed to constitutionalism and compromise with the British and the Congress President, Mr. Subhas Chandra Bose threatened "to resign if Federation is accepted by majority in Congress." But even then Congressmen like Satyamurti continued to reiterate emphatically that they would accept Federation if certain amendments were made and "if India is placed in the same position as any other self-
governing Dominion in the matter of foreign affairs."

The attitude of the Congress was fully and clearly explained by Gandhiji to Mr. Steel of the New York Times in June 1939. Independence, said Gandhiji, certainly connoted complete withdrawal of British power from India. But, he categorically stated: "It does not exclude partnership between two nations enjoying equal independent status and terminable by either at will. It need not be different from Dominion Status." He explained that India being ethnologically and politically different from other Dominions like Canada, Australia, etc., Dominion Status won't be a happy term to use for her. But perhaps the term was quite elastic, he added. And if Dominion Status could be so defined as to cover a case like India and if India could come to an honourable agreement with England, he would not quarrel about words, said Gandhiji. "If British statesmen feel it convenient to use the word 'Dominion Status' about India rather than any other, in order to describe that honourable agreement, I will not quarrel." But Mr. Steel pointed out that there were elements in the Congress like Subhas Bose and his group who wanted absolute independence outside the British Empire.

(64) Satyamurti's Press statement criticizing Bose's threat to resign. Ibid., 10 July 1939, 9.
(65) Marian (Poona), 7 (24 June 1939) 173.
It is only a question of terminology[replica
Gandhiji]. I won't admit any difference between
Subhas Babu and myself on this point though we may
use different language. Supposing such free and
equal partnership as I have postulated were feasible,
Subhas Babu won't say 'no' to it. But today if such
a proposition were put to him, he will probably say,
as he may say, it is ruled out for him. For he
would say the British are not likely to yield so
easily as some might think. If he talks to me like
that, I won't combat him, but would say that I
prefer to use the language that I use as being more
suited to my temperament and my faith in the essen-
tial identity of human nature. (66)

Although important amendments were introduced in the
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Congress Constitution in 1934, 1935 and 1938, no attempt was
made to transform 'Complete Independence', as in the constitu-
tion of the Congress Socialist Party, into separation from the
British connection. This seems to be strange specially since
there were within the organization different interpretations
of the phrase. In the pre-1929 period repeated attempts were
made to translate 'Swaraj' into independence outside the Empire.
No such attempts were made in the post-1929 period.

All these facts indicate that the Congress as a body
was not averse to partnership with Britain. Some wanted to
transform the then existing connection into a voluntary and
free partnership, some ventured first to break it altogether, and
after having attained independence, again to re-establish

(66) Ibid., 173.

(67) See N.V. Rajkumar, Development of the Congress
Constitution (New Delhi, AICC, 1949) Chap. VII.
partnership with Britain. At least it is certain that the majority of Congressmen were not actively opposed to such a partnership.

Such was the position of the Congress when the Second World War broke out in Europe and, without any consultation with either the Provincial Ministries or the Central Assembly, India was declared a belligerent country by the Viceroy on 3 September 1939. The Congress made a strong protest against this and demanded for India the right to declare war and peace on the precedents of the Dominions who entered the war in their own right.

Even then the Congress was not unwilling to co-operate with Britain in the war. It asked the British Government to make a declaration of their war aims and how far they would be applied to India. What would be the status of India during and after the war, it asked. Not satisfied with the Government reply, the Congress advised the Provincial Ministries to tender their resignation by the end of October 1939. Accordingly the Congress Ministries resigned and the Congress co-operation came to an end.

OTHER POLITICAL PARTIES

Like the Congress, almost all political organizations in the country expressed their views on the Joint Parliamentary
Committee Report in outspoken, and for the most part uncompromising denunciation. The All India Muslim Conference was the only notable group which did not reject the Committee's recommendations outright. But there was no unanimity regarding the basis for rejecting the Report; there were great differences on the Communal Award which the Muslim League accepted and the Hindu Mahasabha rejected while the Congress remained neutral.

In the post-1934 period the communal problem assumed increasing importance and occupied a central place in Indian politics. It then became the main basis of the political activities of the League and the Mahasabha colouring their political views throughout and causing a rift within the Congress also. The League continued to reiterate its unwillingness to consider any constitutional advance without the communal problems being settled first. Leaving aside the Communal Award and detailed comments, one of the main objections against the JPC Report which recurred from the first in the criticisms of almost all shades of national opinion was, 'the apparently deliberate avoidance of the phrase

(69) See India, India in 1933-34 (Delhi, 1935) 41.

(70) M.N. Malaviya and M.S. Anry were opposed to the Communal Award and when their view was not accepted by the Congress they formed the Congress Nationalist Party within the Congress to oppose the Award. For further information, see The Indian Annual Register, 1934, II, 70-6 and 260-67.
'Dominion Status' and reluctance of the Committee to define in precise terms India's constitutional goal.\(^{(71)}\) The same criticism was levelled against the Government of India Act, 1935.

But despite the dissatisfaction and disappointment over the JPC Report and the Act of 1935, Indian political leaders (except for a section of Congressmen) continued to adhere to the ideal of self-government or responsible government within the British Commonwealth. And no political organization except the Congress demanded a Constituent Assembly for India. Mr. Jinnah, while strongly criticizing the JPC Report, simply asked the Government that "immediate efforts should be made to consider how best to establish in British India alone a real and complete Responsible Government."\(^{(72)}\) The League was opposed to the idea of the Indian constitution being framed by a Constituent Assembly, because it thought that the Assembly, with an overwhelming majority of the Hindu representatives, would not concede the rights and demands of the Muslim community. It feared that its voice would not be heard and that Congress would dominate over the Assembly.

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\(^{(71)}\) India, n. 69, 42.

The Hindu Mahasabha was equally clear in its opposition to the demand for a Constituent Assembly and more frank in its loyalty to the British connection. While admitting that the situation called for a radically different constitutional procedure, it unequivocally declared that "the task of constitution-making for British India should be the concern of the Emperor of India and the Indian people on the lines of the Statute of Westminster and political conventions operating in the case of self-governing dominions." Its leaders believed that there was "no earthly chance of an agreed constitution, being evolved by a Constituent Assembly." The Mahasabha thus left no doubt that it stood for Dominion Status and wanted India to follow the examples of other Dominions within the British Commonwealth.

The Liberals repeatedly demanded that a declaration of Dominion Status as the political goal of India be embodied in the proposed constitutional reforms. But their request was not conceded and the Government of India Act, 1935, "was taken to be a defeat of the Liberals." Disappointment over the Act


(74) Vjiaraghavachariar's speech in moving the resolution. Ibid., 7.

among the Liberals was so great that the President of the Nagpur Session (1935) remarked that "we must reverse the old saying that we should co-operate whenever possible and oppose where necessary. We must now say to ourselves that we should co-operate where necessary, but should oppose wherever possible." (76)

Liberals' firm belief in the ideal of Dominion Status, nevertheless, remained unchanged. They believed that the logic of the situation demanded that India should be a Dominion within the British Commonwealth. It is true that the ideal of Independence had always appealed to sentiment and nations had lived and died for that goal, argued Sir H.V. Joshi.

But Dominion Status is equally a good ideal to strive for. After the Statute of Westminster the partners in the British Commonwealth will be nearer to Independence than they ever were before and will have equal status with the mother country. Moreover, the advantages to this country having an extensive sea coast as also vulnerable land frontiers, and with no air force adequate for its defense against foreign aggression, of being within the ring fence of 8 or 10 states, is very great. That all can unite for a common purpose is enough to discourage foreign aggression. A union of Free States is thus an advantage and whenever India's aspirations to have a Dominion Status is achieved, there will be little difference between India Independent and India a Dominion. (77)

(76) T.R. Venkatrama Sastrî's Presidential Address.
(77) Sir H.V. Joshi's Welcome Address. Ibid., 4.
The Government of India Act, 1935, was a great blow to the prestige of the Liberal Party and henceforward it ceased to function as a political party competing with others at the polls. It "assumed mainly a mediatorial role" in Indian politics and "the names of Sapru and Jayakar became a synonym for peace-makers." Other political organizations like the Justice Party were equally opposed to the Constituent Assembly and remained firm in their loyalty to the British connection.

In 1936, all these organizations, unlike the Congress, offered their dutiful and respectful homage to His Majesty King Edward VIII on his accession to the throne and assured him of their continued loyalty to his reign. After the general election of 1937, however, the changed political atmosphere in the country led most of these organizations to make formal changes in their respective creeds, from self-government or responsible government or Dominion status to independence. Many factors contributed to their change. Party leaders might have realized that the earlier phrases were unfamiliar and unintelligible and did not appeal to the Indian masses while the ideal of Independence, a familiar word having a hoary past, exercised a great influence on the common mind.

The usual criticism of the Congress that it stood for

(78) Shukla, n. 75, 340 and 343 respectively.

(79) See The Indian Annual Register, 1934, II, 287 and 288.
independence while other organizations like the League, the Mahasabha and the Liberal Federation stood for slavery also influenced their decisions to make a change. But it is significant that the change, almost in every case, was only formal - a tactical change to make the organization and its creed more popular among the masses - and the attitude of the organization towards British connection more or less remained unchanged.

Thus, at its Lucknow Session in 1937, the All India Muslim League changed its creed from the attainment of full responsible government for India to "the establishment in India of full independence." The text of the creed resolution was purposely silent on the question of the British connection. But the mover of the resolution, Maulana Hasrat Mohani, clearly stated that "The resolution ... did not shut out the British connection." Moreover, Sir Sikandar Hayat Khan, the Premier of the Punjab, and Mr. A.K. Fazlul Huq, the Premier of Bengal, who were persuaded to join the League at the Lucknow Session, would not have agreed to the ideal of Independence outside the British Empire. And Mr. Jinnah and the League badly needed their support at this juncture. Mr. Jinnah fully knew that without the support of these two leaders the League could not be an

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(80) Resolution, 25th Session, Lucknow, 1937. The Times of India (Bombay), 19 October 1937, 10.

(81) Ibid.
influential party, specially in the Punjab and Bengal. Sir Sikander Hayat Khan and Fazlul Huq were great loyalists and staunch advocates of the ideal of Dominion Status for India. Indeed, the Punjab delegates at the Lucknow Session clearly stated that they were not interested in the verbal controversy about complete independence and Dominion Status because, they explained, "Both are being used today as convertible terms in Indian politics." There were many other leaders whose loyalty to British connection was unquestioned.

Mr. Jinnah, President of the Session, explained that the League stood for "full national democratic self-government for India." Referring to the various phrases, Purna Swaraj, self-government, responsible government, Dominion Status and

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(82) In 1937 elections the Muslim League made a very poor show and won less than a quarter of the Muslim seats in the provincial elections, particularly its showing in the Muslim majority provinces, viz., Bengal, the Punjab, North-West Frontier Provinces, and Sind, was almost unimpressive. It did not have a majority of its own even in these provinces. Hence the Muslim League could not form its ministry in any of the provinces. Sir Sikander Hayat Khan and his Unionist Party in the Punjab, and Fazlul Huq and his Proja Party in Bengal were quite influential and the ruling parties. Therefore by persuading those two leaders with the Muslim members of their parties to join the League, Mr. Jinnah, in a way, snatched victories from the jaws of defeat. For the election results, see: The Indian Review, 55 (March 1937) 160-1; also The Indian Annual Register, 1937, 1, 168(a)-168(p).

(83) The Times of India, 16 October 1937, 14.

(84) AHU, Presidential Address by H.A. Jinnah, Lucknow Session, October 1937, 5.
complete independence, he said that a great deal of capital was being made of such phrases "more for the consumption of the ignorant and illiterate masses," and added: "Those who talk of complete independence the most, mean the least what it means." On another occasion he said that the Congress criticism that it stood for freedom and the Muslim League for slavery was absolutely untrue and that there was no difference in the ideal of the Congress and that of the League. "If there was any doubt in their aims and objects the historic session of the Muslim League at Lucknow had made it quite clear (86) that we stand for freedom and full freedom," he added.

That proves that the creed of full Independence did not indicate League's opposition to British connection. The League's attitude was not adversely affected in any way. Indeed, the creed was adopted for the consumption of the ignorant and illiterate masses and the League continued to adhere to the ideal of Dominion Status as before.

For much the same reasons the Hindu Mahasabha adopted "the attainment of Prana Swa, i.e., absolute political independence for Hindustan" as its creed in December 1937.

(85) Ibid., 3 and 4 respectively.

(86) Presidential Address, All Bengal Muslim Conference, Darbhempur, 23 October 1937. The Indian Annual Register, 1937, II, 418.

No reference was made to the British connection. Subsequently, its leaders stated that the Mahasabha aimed at equal partnership in the British Empire. The President of the Bengal Hindu Sabha, Mr. B.C. Chatterjee, in a press statement clearly stated that the Mahasabha stood for the ideal of partnership in a federated British Empire and accepted the criticism that it did not subscribe to the ideal of Independence outside the Empire. Replying to critics he argued:

...that as things have been shaping India cannot divorce herself from the British Empire just to place herself at the mercy of those who are on her East and on her West. The Hindu Sabha believes that instead of doing anything so silly, India should press steadily and unceasingly for attaining the goal of equal partnership in a federated British Empire. (88)

In December 1938, even the Justice Party changed its objective from "Dominion Status" to "Independence." But it was only on paper and involved no change in its loyalty and attitude to the British connection. It should also be noted that there was practically no controversy regarding interpretation of independence within any of these organizations. Within these organizations there was no influential opposition to the ideal of Independence within the British Commonwealth.

The Liberal Federation did not change, even formally, its creed of Dominion Status. Though the Liberals also felt the

(88) Ibid., 5 December 1938, 4.

humiliation of being governed by a foreign country, they believed that in the existing state of India's defence she could not afford to go out of the British Commonwealth. They argued that without the protection of the British Naval and Air Forces India would fall a prey to some imperialistic nation of the West or the East. "Our immediate goal, therefore, of Dominion Status under the Statute of Westminster (90) is more sensible and practical," they said.

When in 1937 the Congress reiterated its demand for a Constituent Assembly, these organizations again opposed the move. In place of a Constituent Assembly the Muslim League (91) wanted "a convention or a conference." League leaders believed that Britain "may give India a form of Dominion Status, some form of diluted Dominion Status, but ["not"] complete independence ... without a desperate struggle." They warned the Congressmen: "Don't be under the delusion that you can drive out the Britisher and deal with the Muslims in any (92) way you like." Jinnah characterized the Congress demand as

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(92) Maulana Zafar Ali Khan's speech in support of Jinnah's amendment. Ibid., 1900 and 1901 respectively.
"the height of all ignorance", and emphatically declared that to ask the British Government to convene such a body before even the communal problem had been solved was "like putting the cart before the horse." The League wanted the communal problem settled first to the satisfaction of the Muslim community before a Constitution was framed.

Leaders of the Hindu Mahasabha considered the demand "to be a mere make-believe and a sham." They believed that in the face of the existing Government and with no unanimity between the Hindus and the Muslims "the proposal of a Constituent Assembly ... is a grave political blunder." The Liberals were convinced that to demand "a Constituent Assembly under present circumstances is to ignore realities."

The opposition to the demand for a Constituent Assembly by implication shows that those organizations did not think of independence outside the Empire as a practical goal and were favourably inclined towards the ideal of equal partnership in the British Commonwealth.

(93) Presidential Address, 26th Legislative Session, Lucknow, 1937. M.A. Jinnah, Some Recent Speeches and Writings (Jamil-ud-Din Ahmad, coll. and ed., Lahore, 1942, 3rd edition, 1943) 31 and 33 respectively.


(95) Sir Chimanlal Setalvad's Presidential Address. NLF, Report, n. 90, 23.
then in the late 1938 and early 1939 the clouds of war had begun to hover on Europe, the leaders of these organizations assured Britain of their co-operation to stand by the Empire in the event of war. Many came out openly while others thought it advisable to remain silent. All were sympathetic with and loyal to the British cause. The Muslim League deliberately refrained from expressing its official opinion till the war actually broke out. Jinnah, being a great tactician, did not want the League to assure Britain of its loyalty and help till the Muslim demands were conceded by the Government. Among other things, the League wanted the Federal Scheme of the Government of India Act, 1935, dropped because it believed that the Scheme allowed "a permanent hostile communal majority to trample upon their [Muslims'] religious, political, social and economic rights." On the eve of the war, on 27 August 1939, the Council of the All-India Muslim League discussed the question of the Muslim attitude in the event of war. After criticizing the British Government's policy towards Muslims, particularly Indian Muslims, it declared that "in these circumstances, if the British Government desires to enlist the support and sympathy of ... Indian Muslims, in future contingencies, it must meet [their] demands ... without delay." It deferred a decision by saying that "The Council

(96) Resolution, Council of the All India Muslim League, New Delhi, 27 August 1939. The Indian Annual Register, 1939, II, 348.
considers it premature at present to determine the attitude of Moslems in the event of a world war breaking out."

But stalwarts like Sir Sikandar Hayat Khan and Fazlul Huq categorically and openly assured Britain of the loyalty of the Indian Muslims. On 26 September 1933, Sir Sikandar Hayat Khan made a ringing appeal to the Indian people "to stand by the Empire in the unhappy event of war ... and not to stoop to any mean spirit of bargaining in such an hour of crisis." Criticism of the Council of the League that his views did "in no way represent the views of the Moslems of India," failed to move him and his followers from their firm loyalty to the British. A similar appeal was made by Fazlul Huq in August 1939. He asked the Muslims to forget their grievances against the Government and to "stand solidly behind the Empire in its hour of crisis and severe trial." A hint of the attitude of the League to the British was given by Jinnah

(97) Ibid.
(98) The Times of India, 28 September 1933, 12. He repeated the assurance of loyalty again in August 1939. See ibid., 28 August 1939, 8.
(99) Resolution of the Council of the AIML, (27-28) August 1939. But there was no unanimity on this point. The Unionist Party members and their supporters voted against the resolution. Sir Sikandar Hayat Khan was not present. The Indian Annual Register, 1939, II, 549.
(100) The Statesman (Calcutta), 26 August 1939, 10.
in December 1938. He said that the League was not going to be an ally of anyone, "but would be the ally of even the devil if need be in the interests of Muslims." After pausing for a moment he added: "It is not because we are in love with imperialism; but in politics one has to play one's game as on the chess-board." (101)

This clearly shows that the League wanted to be friendly and loyal to the British and it wanted to keep the status quo. When the Congress Ministries resigned, the Ministries of Sir Sikandar Hayat Khan and Fazlul Huq continued to function and co-operate with the British.

The Hindu Mahasabha was strongly opposed to the move to divide India and to the policy of bargaining pursued by the League. Consequently it pleaded that in spite of its defective and unsatisfactory character, the Federal scheme "should be worked" so as "to secure and maintain the integrity of the entire country." (102) The Mahasabha knew that success in its mission could be achieved easily with the help of the Government. It, therefore, wanted to gain the favour of the British. It seems that the League and the Mahasabha were competing against each other for British favour.

(101) Presidential Address, 26th League Session, Patna, 1938. Jinnah, n. 93, 76.

(102) Resolution, 20th Session, Nagpur, 1939. The Indian Annual Register, 1939, II, 387. A resolution to this effect was adopted also at the 19th Session, Ahmedabad, 1937.
The Liberal Federation remained firm in its loyalty to the British and the international situation strengthened its belief in the ideal of Dominion Status. Mr. P.N. Sapru in his forthright and forceful Presidential Address (1933) explained the advantages of Dominion Status vs. Independence. He admitted that India, like any other country, had a right to aspire to be independent. "But Dominion Status which is a dynamic conception is hardly distinguishable for any practical purpose from virtual independence." He argued that in a world full of menace to the democratic states "the British Commonwealth ... can provide the base for a system of collective security." Certainly "It would give to India a sense of security which an entirely independent existence cannot." He refuted the plea of Jawaharlal Nehru that British foreign policy was not democratic and that therefore India must seek her salvation outside the Commonwealth. He emphasized that the Liberals were no supporters of Chamberlain's foreign policy. "But the present British Government is not eternal," he argued. Moreover, the nature of the Commonwealth was such that it gave to the Dominions the right to determine for themselves the extent, if any, to which they would participate in any war in which England might find itself involved, he added. He concluded on a prophetic note by asserting:

"We are as determined as any other political party in the country that our country shall be free, but we feel that this full freedom which we seek is reconcilable with loyalty to the objective of an Indo-British Commonwealth of Nations to which we may have something distinctive of our own to contribute than we have reached our political maturity." (103)

(103) MLF, Report of the 20th Session, Bombay, 1933, 16.
These were the lines along which the several political parties in India clarified their thinking and its public expression in the five years preceding the outbreak of the Second World War. The Congress persistently demanded a Constituent Assembly, though its spokesmen, almost always, explained that they had been following the examples of the other Dominions and that the Congress while interested in independence did not necessarily seek it outside the Commonwealth. Only the Congress Socialist Party pleaded for breaking the British connection. Gandhi was still willing to accept Dominion Status with freedom to secede at will. The other parties opposed the demand for a Constituent Assembly. And although the League and the Lichasabha had changed their respective creeds to independence, this was a paper change only. They continued to adhere to the British Connection. The Liberal Federation remained firm in its belief in the ideal of Dominion Status.