Chapter Five

INDIA DURING THE WAR AND EARLY POST-WAR YEARS, 1939-47
For quite a long time Congress had not been happy over the developments in Europe and in March 1939 it reiterated its disapproval of British foreign policy and denounced it as a "deliberate betrayal of democracy." In August 1939, the Congress Working Committee declared that it was opposed to any imperialist war and that it was determined to resist all attempts to impose a war on India. The Committee further asked Provincial Governments "to assist in no way the war preparations of the British Government" and said that "If the carrying out of this policy leads to the resignations or removal of the Congress Ministries they must be prepared for this contingency."

Despite the unequivocal nature of the resolution of the Working Committee, there were still some prominent Congressmen who were anxious not to break with Britain. They were prepared to co-operate in the war effort; but they feared that, if they did so, they would lose the initiative to the left wing. "Some of them", says Sir V.P. Menon, "hinted privately that a break could be avoided if only His Majesty's Government would give a

(1) Resolution, 52nd Session, Tripuri, 1939. INC, March 1939 - January 1940: (R), 5.

(2) Resolution, Congress Working Committee, Hardha, (9-12) August 1939. Ibid., 50.
unilateral assurance that at the end of the war full (3)
Dominion Status would be conceded to India."

Early efforts for British-Congress Compromise, 1939-40

Soon after the outbreak of the war the Congress
Working Committee met at Wardha to deliberate upon the
situation. After prolonged discussions the Committee issued
a long statement explaining that though the sympathy of the
Indian people "is entirely on the side of democracy and
freedom ... India cannot associate herself in a war said to
be for democratic freedom when that very freedom is denied
to her." The Committee deferred its final decision and
invited the British Government to state in unequivocal terms
"their war aims ... in regard to democracy and imperialism"
and how they would be applied to India during and after the
war.

Regarding co-operation with the British in the war
there were three divergent views in the Congress. At one end
was Gandhiji who was of the view that the Congress must
offer unconditional moral support and allow the ministries
to function. He had the confidence that through the
ministries, he could manoeuvre "a declaration of Poorna Swaraj

(3) V.P. Menon, The Transfer of Power in India (Calcutta,
1957) 58.

(4) Statement of 14 September 1939. See Appendix II.
or Dominion Status, a declaration of the next step - the
same that Jawahar expected by negotiation. At the other end
were the leftists, notably Subhas Chandra Bose, who openly
declared that Britain's difficulty was India's opportunity.
Men like Jawaharlal Nehru and Abul Kalam Azad were of the view
that India should co-operate with Britain, provided she
conceded India's right of self-determination and independence.

As regards the Indo-British connection the Working
Committee did not explicitly mention it. But a careful study
of the text of the statement leaves the impression that though
it spoke against British imperialism, it did not rule out the
possibility of India's connection with Britain based on freedom
and equality. The phrases "that the interests of Indian
democracy do not conflict with the interests of British
democracy", "A free democratic India will gladly associate
herself with other free nations for mutual defence against
aggression and for economic co-operation" and the like give a
clue to the attitude of the Congress. The subsequent state-
ments of Congress leaders clearly indicate that great majority
of them were willing to keep the British connection. Pandit
Jawaharlal Nehru, the author of the resolution, categorically

(5) B. Pattabhi Sitaramayya. The History of the Indian

(6) Appendix II.
stated that "India wants to forget the past of conflict and wants to stretch out her hand in comradeship."  

In answer to the Congress demand a series of statements were made on behalf of the British Government, both in England and in India. The first link of the series was the Viceroy's statement of 17 October 1939, while stating that His Majesty's Government had not themselves yet defined "with any ultimate precision their detailed objectives in the prosecution of the war", he explained that the constitutional goal of India was "the attainment of Dominion Status." He referred to the differences among the Indian parties and promised a round table conference at the end of the war.  

This greatly disappointed the Congress leaders. Mahatma Gandhi saw the old policy of "divide and rule" in it. Maulana Azad and Nehru commented that "the hand of friendship that the Congress had extended to the British people in this hour of world crisis has been spurned by their Government."

(7) Message to the News Chronicle, 7 October 1939. See Congress and War Crisis (Allahabad, AICC, n.d.) 51. The pamphlet records all the resolutions passed by the Working Committee and the AICC on the political situation ever since the war began, the statements made on behalf of the British Government here and in England, the Indian reaction to these statements as evidenced by the utterances of Gandhiji, the President and the other Congress leaders and etc. etc.

(8) For the text of the statement, see Ibid., 40-50.

(9) Statement on the Viceroy's declaration, 18 October 1939. Ibid., 58.

(10) Joint Press statement. Ibid., 61.
The Working Committee denounced it as "wholly unsatisfactory" and "in every way unfortunate." The Committee regarded the mention of the differences among several parties as "a screen to hide the true intention of Great Britain" and "in the circumstances" refused support and called upon the Congress (11) Ministries "to tender their resignations." Subsequently, (12) after passing the resolution on war-crisis in Provincial Assemblies, all the Congress Ministries resigned.

But this did not mean that the Congress had decided in favour of severance of the British connection. The Congress had demanded no constitutional change during the war. Mahatma Gandhi clearly stated that the Congress "has left the door open." Indeed, there was still a section in the Congress, and perhaps in the majority, which was willing to accept the substance of Independence or Dominion Status, as far as possible in the circumstances, during the war and was favourably inclined to keeping India's partnership with Britain on the basis of freedom and equality after the war.

It is true that the Congress was primarily interested in India's independence and it had almost ceased to talk of

(11) Resolution, 22 October 1939. Ibid., 66.
(12) For the text of the resolution, see ibid., 91.
Indo-British connection and had declared that the question would be decided by the Constituent Assembly. Yet Mahatma Gandhi and most of the other Congress leaders, specially the moderate wing, made no secret of their favourable attitude towards the British connection.

Moving the resolution on war in the U.P. Assembly on 27 October 1939, Pandit Govind Ballabh Pant, while explaining that England had already generated enough bitterness against her in the country, declared: "There is yet room for friendship. There may be even room for partnership, provided we allow reason to prevail against any prejudice and racial arrogance and provided we practice the principle we profess. . . . ." (14) Dr. Khan Saheb was willing to support Britain on the assurance from her that "after the war, our comrade ship will continue on absolutely equal terms and our freedom unconditionally and ungrudgingly be accorded." (15) Pandit Haden Hohen Hulaviya categorically said that if the reasonable demand of India was met, she would be "permanently bound by ties of friendship to England to the advantage of both the countries" and the two combined would be "a powerful factor in promoting peace and

(14) The Indian Annual Register (Calcutta), 1939, II, 156.

(15) Speech on the War Resolution in the Frontier Legislative Assembly, 6 November 1939. Ibid., 195. Dr. Khan Saheb, then a Congress leader, was the Prime Minister of the North-West Frontier Province.
happiness in the civilized world." Mr. S. Satyamurti, Deputy leader of the Congress Party in the Central Assembly, while expressing disappointment at the Viceroy's continuous harping on the differences of opinion in India, stated that the British Government should give "an unequivocal promise of India's independence as a full-fledged dominion at the end of the war." Mahatma Gandhi, along with many others, did not like the term Dominion Status because he believed that it referred to "a commonwealth of whites" who were themselves "pillars of imperialism." But he was in favour of India's partnership with Britain for "the protection of the freedom of all whether black, brown or white." While explaining that India's independence did not mean "a frog in the well status", he said:

There may or may not be an alliance with Britain. My hope is that there will be. So long as I have a share in the attainment of Independence, it will be through non-violent means and, therefore, a result of an honourable treaty or settlement with Britain.

On 10 January 1940, the Viceroy appealed to the Indian political leaders to help to terminate as early as possible

---

(16) Statement, 29 October 1939. Congress and War Crisis, n. 7, 73.


(18) Harijan (Poona), 7 (2 December 1939) 357.

(19) Ibid., 7 (23 December 1939) 386.
the constitutional deadlock in the country. He reiterated
His Majesty's Government's promise of Dominion Status of the
Statute of Westminster variety and added that they would
spare no effort "to reduce to the minimum the interval
between the existing state of things and the achievement of
Dominion Status." He stressed the claims of the minorities,
specially the Muslim minority and the Scheduled Castes. The
Viceroy's speech met with a mixed reception. Many prominent
Congress leaders including Mahatma Gandhi reacted favourably.
They welcomed the British promise of Dominion Status of the
Westminster variety. Bhulabhai Desai, leader of the Congress
Party in the Central Legislative Assembly and a member of
the Working Committee, told the Viceroy that "he himself was
content with Dominion Status; that the difference between
(21)
Dominion Status and Independence seemed unreal." He reiterated
(22)
his views in public also. C. Rajagopalachari, while explain-
ing that Dominion Status was not independence, pleaded that
India should "seize the present opportunity" and accept the
(23)
British promise of "Dominion Status of the Westminster variety."

(20) For the text of the Viceroy's speech, see The
Indian Annual Register, 1940, I, 573-56.

(21) Ibid., n. 5, 73.

(22) See The Hindu (Madras), 4 February 1940, 5.

(23) Public speech, Virudunagar, 31 January 1940.
Ibid., 1 February 1940, 9.
K.I. Munshi, ex-Minister of Bombay, explained: "In seeking independence India does not seek the will-o'-the-wisp of unfettered sovereignty. Her independence implies inter alia her right to secure inter-dependence with Britain on terms which are mutually beneficial." Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, while pleading that India should be allowed to make her choice, categorically stated: "In all probability, a free India may decide to continue the British connection." Similar views were expressed by many Congress leaders.

While Mahatma Gandhi found germs of settlement in the Viceroy's speech, Jawaharlal Nehru, along with many others, struck a note of pessimism by stating that there appeared to be no chance of a settlement of the impasse. Nehru regarded the Viceroy's speech as "totally unsatisfactory and unacceptable." He argued that as a result of the war British imperialism would change and as a consequence Dominion Status would not remain intact after the war. He deplored the attitude of Rajagopalachari and others for their speaking "too compromisingly of Dominion

(24) Speech at the Students' Brotherhood and the Muslim Students' Union, Bombay, 1 February 1940. The Bombay Chronicle, 2 February 1940, 10.


(26) Public speech, Saharanpur. Ibid., 15 January 1940, 6.
Status and the like. The leftists were strongly opposed to Dominion Status. "India wants independence. The talk about Dominion Status is irrelevant," said U.N. Roy. Criticizing the attitude of the right wing of the Congress, he said:

In spite of all talk of independence and interpretations, the fact remains and can no longer be denied that the present leadership of the Congress would accept Dominion Status not only as the substance of complete independence but as complete independence itself, if that is granted by British imperialism. (28)

Jai Prakash Narayan was equally opposed to the policy of compromise. Referring to the attitude of Mahatma Gandhi, he wrote:

I do not know what germ Gandhi has discerned in the offer of Dominion Status, but if he insists on his old interpretations of independence, I should like to tell him frankly and unhesitatingly and on behalf of all young India that we cannot then accept his leadership. For that is not our goal. What he calls the substance of independence is only the gilded form of Empire. There is no basis for a Dominionhood in India. (30)

Similar warnings were given by some other leftists to Gandhi and the right wing of the Congress. In reply to one such warnings Gandhi clearly stated that a Satyagrahi should

(27) Jawaharlal Nehru to Mahatma Gandhi, 4 February 1940, Jawaharlal Nehru, A Bunch of Old Letters (Bombay, 1958) 419.
always be prepared for honourable settlement and his
mission should be "to convert the opponent, not humiliato
and defeat him." Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya strongly criticized
the anti-compromise attitude of the left-wingers. He
explained that a Satyagraha fight always ended "in a
compromise".

The position of Jawaharlal Nehru was slightly different.
He was against British imperialism but not so much against the
British connection on principle, if Britain were to give up her
imperialism. He wanted the declaration of Indian independence
and the recognition of the right of self-determination of the
Indian people. "If this is done", he believed, "the whole-
fabric of British imperialism ... will undergo a vital change
and imperialism itself will be liquidated." He clearly
explained:

When I talk about independence, not necessarily
meaning a final break with Britain, I am thinking
in terms of Britain ceasing to be imperialistic... It is not co-operation with England (he added)
... that is objected to, but it is co-operation
with any structure that is imperialistic. (34)

(31) Harian, 8 (17 February 1940) 2.

(32) Speech, Andhra Conference, Elloro. The Hindu,
11 January 1940, 8.

(33) Jawaharlal Nehru to J. Holmes Smith, 10 January 1940.
Nehru, no. 27, 413.

(34) Jawaharlal Nehru to Krishna Kripalani, 26 February
1940. Ibid., 427.
Though most of the Congress leaders did not like the term Dominion Status, the group opposing India’s connection with Britain on any terms and in all circumstances was in a small minority. And although the negotiations between the Viceroy and Gandhiji in February 1940 failed mainly because the former did not concede the right of self-determination to India, Gandhiji advised Congressmen not to feel disappointed.

Ramgarh Congress, Cripps Proposals and The Quit India Movement, 1940-42

Subsequently, at Patna in February 1940, the Congress Working Committee reviewed the political situation and through a long resolution on 'India and the War-Crisis' expressed the attitude of the Congress. The resolution, which was endorsed by the Ramgarh Congress in the following March, clearly stated that nothing short of complete independence would satisfy India and that "Indian freedom cannot exist within the orbit of imperialism, and dominion or any other status within the imperial structure is wholly inapplicable to India." Regarding India’s connection with Britain the resolution said: "The people of India alone can ... determine their relations to the other countries of the world, through

a Constituent Assembly elected on the basis of adult 
(35) suffrage. Thus the Congress, while expressing its opposition 
to British imperial structure and India's place in it, 
postponed the question of India's connection with Britain to 
be decided by the Constituent Assembly.

Men like U.N. Roy, however, were not fully satisfied 
with the resolution and wanted to define complete independence 
as "unconditional severance of all relations with the British 
(37) Empire." Mr. Roy explained that by his amendment he wanted to 
clarify the position of the Congress further "particularly in 
view of the possibility of Dominion Status of the Westminster 
(38) variety being regarded as an equivalent to independence." But 
the Congress with overwhelming majority refused to interpret 
its goal to that effect. And Gandhi emphatically reiterated 
(39) that "compromise is inherent in Satyagraha." It clearly proves 
that the Congress was not averse to the British connection

(35) JNC, March 1940 - September 1946; (R), 2.
(37) Roy's amendment in the Subjects Committee, 53rd 
Congress Session, Ramgarh. The Hindu, 19 March 1940, 5.
(38) Ibid. An Anti-Compromise Conference was organized 
under the presidency of Subhas Chandra Bose who criticized 
the policy of compromise and said that "behind the smoke- 
screen of hot phrases, negotiations for a compromise" had been 
going on secretly in the Congress. For further information, see 
The Indian Annual Register, 1940, I, 542-6.
(39) Speech at the Ramgarh Congress. The Hindu, 
19 March 1940, 8.
and wanted to keep the question open. Mahatma Gandhi was in favour of an honourable settlement, if possible, with India's partnership with Britain based on freedom and equality.

This is confirmed by an examination of the subsequent views of prominent Congress leaders. Commenting on the resolution Gandhiji declared that "If the British Government really mean full-hearted Dominion Status with the right to secede, then they can have no difficulty in accepting the Congress position." On another occasion he explained that the Congress declaration that India should not be 'a unit within the orbit of British imperialism' meant that "full and free extension of democratic rights to India would change the very character of the Empire." "The Congress objection was to an imperialist Britain and not to a democratic British Commonwealth." If the right of self-determination was conceded to India, there would be "nothing dishonourable in a peaceful settlement," said Sardar Patel. Nehru clearly stated: "Indian independence need not necessarily mean a final break with Britain .... If Britain has ceased to be

---

(40) Harian, 8 (16 March 1940) 41.

(41) Public statement, 19 April 1940. The Indian Annual Register, 1940, 1, 62.

(42) Public speech, Patna, 1 March 1940. The Hindu, 2 March 1940, 8.
imperialistic, then there is no reason why we should not (45) co-operate with her in the closest manner." C. Rajagopalachari refuted Lord Zetland's charge that the Congress had rejected Dominion Status and said that the offer was not genuine and the British Government was speaking "with a lot of mental reservations." (46)

It is true that the majority of Congressmen did not want India's goal to be described as Dominion Status. They called it Independence. But this does not mean that they were necessarily opposed to India's partnership with Britain. All definitions of Dominion Status would hang on the interpretations to be given by the British Government. It was an uncertain factor, and none knew what would happen to it after the war. That was why the Congress was sceptical about Dominion Status, they said. Since 1920 the Congress regarded the acceptance of the British connection at any cost as derogatory to national dignity. But it was in favour of India's membership in a free Commonwealth of independent nations, if its conditions were conceded. In May 1940, Mr. Pyarelal, Gandhiji's Secretary, explained the Congress attitude thus:

(43) Public statement. Ibid., 1 May 1940, 9.

(44) Speech at the Progressive Group, Bombay, 21 April 1940. Ibid., 22 April 1940, 6.
Nationalist India has never held that her independence excludes free association with Britain; on the contrary our contention all along has been that it is a necessary step towards it. Britain, by identifying herself with India's cherished political aspiration will not be negating her own ideal of a free Commonwealth of nations, as some British statesmen fear. On the contrary, thus alone can be forged bonds which alone can hold Britain and India together. (45)

In the summer of 1940, as a result of deterioration in the international situation, the Congress resolved to give up non-violence as a policy of defence against external (46) aggression and seemed to reorient "its policy to one of (47) responsive co-operation." The Congress offered its full co-operation to the Government in the war efforts on two conditions: "an unequivocal declaration" of Indian independence should be immediately made and as an immediate step in giving effect to that, "a provisional National Government" should be (48) constituted at the Centre. The attitude of the British Government towards these demands was explained by the Viceroy

---

(45) Harlien, 8 (11 May 1940) 126.

(46) See the statement of the Working Committee, Wardha, 21 June 1940. IUC, March 1940 - September 1946 (R), 70-5.

(47) Press comments on Working Committee's Delhi resolution (July 1940). The Aarita Bazar Patrika, 10 July 1940, 6.

(48) Resolution, Working Committee, Delhi, (3-7) July 1940. IUC, March 1940 - September 1946 (R), 76.
in a statement on 7 August and known as the 'August Offer'.

It reiterated the promise of Full Dominion Status and conceded the claim for constitutional self-determination. But the self-determination of India was made subject to two conditions. The British obligations must be fulfilled and the minority opinions must not be overridden. Instead of a National Government a declaration to enlarge the Central Executive Council and to establish an Advisory War Council was made.

This offer was rejected by Congress because it did not meet its immediate demand for a National Government at the Centre and its ultimate demand for complete independence. Its view was that the two conditions evidently demonstrated the falsity of the whole statement. To provide the minorities and the British Government with a veto was to reduce India's right of self-determination to a farce and nullity, said the Congress critics. If Britain had conceded the Congress demand, commented Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, she would have found in India "a friend entering into partnership with her as an independent nation and party." "It widens the gulf."

(49) For the text of the 'August Offer', see The Indian Annual Register, 1940, II, 372-3.


(51) Sitaramayya, n. e 5, 229.
said Mahatma Gandhi, "between India, as represented by the Congress, and England." The Congress felt badly let down. In the middle of October Individual Civil Disobedience was started under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi and consequently most of the Congress leaders were arrested.

In spite of the rebuff from the British, however, the Congress made no claim for severance of the British connection. The attitude of most of the Congressmen remained more or less unchanged. Many of them continued to harbour the hope that as the fight thickened the British Government would relent and enlist the co-operation of the Congress on Congress terms.

In December 1941 there was further deterioration in the international war situation. With the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbour the war in the Pacific began. Most of the Congress leaders were released. President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Generalissimo Chiang Kai-Shek strongly urged on the British Government that India's voluntary co-operation in the war effort must be secured. In February 1942, Chiang Kai-Shek, during his visit to India, told Maulana Azad, the Congress President, and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru that if the British Government offered self-government with Dominion Status, India would be wise to accept it. In reply, Maulana Azad, on behalf of the Congress, informed the Generalissimo that

---

(52) Tondulkar, n. 35, 396.
"if during the war the British Government offered Dominion Status and agreed that Indian representatives could work with a sense of freedom and responsibility, the Congress would not refuse the offer."

In the following month Sir Stafford Cripps came to India with the proposals of the British War Cabinet, commonly known as the Cripps Proposals. The proposals dealt mainly with the future and only vaguely with the interim arrangement for the war period. It was clearly stated that the right of self-determination and Dominion Status with the right to secede from the British Commonwealth would be granted to India soon after the war. As for the interim arrangement the proposals were not so clear. The proposals were rejected by every party in India. But none raised any objection to the proposed status of India. Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya has observed thus:

... there is no reference anywhere in the spate of literature that has grown up around the Cripps Mission to any proposal of a change to the proposals which related to the status of India. That is to say, Dominion Status with the right to secede is not discussed.


(54) For the Cripps Proposals, see Appendix III.

(55) Dr. B. Pattabhi Sitaramayya's "Invitation" to Y.G. Krishnamurti, Jawaharlal Nehru: The Man and His Ideas (Bombay, 1942) p. xvii.
Though the Congress was opposed to the clauses on 'non-accession' and 'States' people,' the negotiations broke down over the interim arrangement and not over the proposals for the future - certainly not over the future status of India, i.e., Dominion Status. By conceding the right to secede Sir Stafford Cripps made it clear that there was in fact no difference between independence and Dominion Status. And thus the distinction so long made by the Congress between the two terms was bereft of any practical importance. At least one thing is certain. The Congress gave its "tacit consent... to a temporary arrangement under which India would agree to be a Dominion with the right to secede." (55)

The failure of the Cripps Mission led to widespread disappointment in the country. The reaction was strong and bitter in the Congress. It had "no hopes of a settlement with Britain." And out of that deep frustration was born the "Quit India" cry. Gandhiji declared that the time had come "during the war, not after it", for the British and the Indians "to be reconciled to complete separation from each other." "That way and that way alone lies the safety of both and ... the world," he felt. But even in that hour of frustration ... (56)

(56) Sitaramayya, n. 5, 338.
(57) Jawaharlal Nehru, The Discovery of India (Calcutta, 1946) 552.
(58) Harilal (Ahmedabad), 9 (10 May 1942) 148. Place of publication changed from Poona to Ahmedabad.
the Congress was not unwilling to keep the British connection provided its demands were conceded. Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, a member of the Working Committee, clearly stated that India would be "a friend" and that even "partnership" in the British Commonwealth was "possible" provided Britain left "India to Indians in a spirit of fellowship and goodwill." But the Government was unwilling to hear the Congress. Consequently on August 8, 1942, the historic 'Quit India' resolution was adopted by the AICC. This led to the wholesale incarceration of Congressmen and Congress supporters who remained behind prison bars until about the end of the war in 1945. Thus the question of Congress co-operation in the war was closed.

One may ask why no settlement could be arrived at between the Congress and the British. The reason is simple. The British were not willing to transfer power and the Congress was not ready to accept any solution which did not ensure independence. No British promise was straightforward and unequivocal; and promises were conditional - subject to assent of the minorities, British interests, defence considerations and the like. The Congress, therefore, denounced the British promises as deliberately deceitful.

But ever since the outbreak of the war, Congress had pursued, on the whole, a policy of non-embarrassment. The evidence reviewed in the preceding pages proves conclusively that, up to the middle of 1942, the Congress was not averse to the British connection and was quite willing to accept Dominion Status, at any rate, for the war period provided India's right of self-determination was unequivocally assured. In fact the Congress was willing to accept even less if its demands were conceded. And a section, quite influential, expressed the hope that in all probability a contented and free India would like to continue her voluntary membership in the Commonwealth on the basis of freedom and equality.

CONGRESS IN THE EARLY POST-WAR YEARS
1945-47

The 'Quit India' resolution of August 1942 marked the turning point in the history of India's freedom struggle. It swept away at a stroke and rendered obsolete the remnants of the old controversy of Dominion Status vs. Independence. "Unconditional withdrawal of the British Power thereafter became the sine qua non of the settlement of the Indian (60) question," observes Pyarelal. But some Congressmen like

(60) Pyarelal, Mahatma Gandhi: The Last Phase (Ahmedabad, 1953) I, 10.
Rajagopalachari did not agree with the 'Quit India' policy of the Congress. They held the view that the independence of India was delayed because of the differences between the Congress and the League. They wanted the Congress to settle the differences with the League and accept the Cripps Proposals. Soon after the failure of the Cripps Mission, Rajagopalachari resigned from the Congress Working Committee.

During the period of internment of the Congress leaders Rajagopalachari continued to reiterate that India should accept the Cripps Proposals and argued that by accepting them "we shall attract the effective support of the better class of politicians in Britain and America." He thought it necessary that "Indo-British reconciliation should be achieved without waiting for the termination of the war." For the interim period he was willing to accept "all the safeguards necessary for the effectual carrying on of the war-effort", provided at the end of the war "dominion status with right of secession ... should be brought into full effect." K.M. Munshi, who had resigned from the Congress over 'non-violence' issue in July 1941, was in favour of Dominion Status. He, however, wanted the Cripps Offer


(62) C. Rajagopalachari, Reconciliation, Why and How: A Plea for Immediate Action (Bombay, 1945) 3 and 33 respectively.
endorsed by the British Parliament.

As the war situation improved in Europe, the United States thought of directing her greater war efforts against Japan. The war against Hitler was practically over in April 1945, but Japan was still in occupation of Burma, Singapore and Indonesia. In all these areas, India could offer the greatest help. Therefore Indian co-operation was considered necessary for the early defeat of Japan. The Americans renewed their pressure on the British for the solution of the Indian problem. The British Government made fresh efforts for Indian co-operation in June 1945. The members of the Working Committee of the Congress were released and the Viceroy, Lord Wavell, convened a conference at Simla to which leaders of the Congress, the Muslim League and other political parties were invited. The new British proposals, known as the Wavell Plan, were not different in substance from the Cripps Offer. But the circumstances and the political atmosphere had now changed. The Cripps Offer was made when the war situation was against the Allies and the British were in dire need of Indian co-operation. In June 1945, the war in Europe was over and it was hoped that even Japan could not last very long. Maulana Azad, President of the Congress, argued with the Working Committee that "Once the war was over, the British would have no special

(63) See K.N. Munshi, The Indian Deadlock (Allahabad, 1945) 147.
reason to seek our co-operation. It was therefore not desirable for us to reject Lord Wavell’s offer.\(^{(64)}\) The Congress accepted the offer. However, the Simla Conference failed.\(^{(65)}\) "The cause of the failure was communal, not political."\(^{(65)}\) The negotiations failed, not on the basic political issue between India and Britain, which now seemed on the point of solution, but on the question of communal representation in the proposed new Executive Council at the Centre. Thereafter the solution of the communal problem became the main concern of Indian political parties and the British Government.

Soon after the breakdown of the Simla Conference two events - the victory of the Labour Party in the British general elections and the surrender of Japan - transformed the entire scene. The Labour Government was sympathetic to India’s aspiration for freedom. It wanted to effect an early and friendly settlement with the Indian people. In the winter of 1945-46, it sent a Parliamentary Delegation to India to study the political situation in the country. And in March 1946, a Cabinet Delegation came to India to help her to attain her freedom as speedily and fully as possible.

On 15 March, just before the despatch of the Cabinet Delegation to India, Mr. Clement Attlee, the British Prime

\(^{(64)}\) Azad, no 53, 107.

\(^{(65)}\) Ibid., 118.
Minister, unequivocally declared that India would be free to choose her future constitution and her relationship with other countries including the British Commonwealth. However, he expressed the hope that "Indian people may choose to remain within the British Commonwealth" and added that they would "find great advantages in doing so." But if India did so, he explained, "it must be by her own free will." The Cabinet Mission in their scheme of 16 May 1946, known as the Cabinet Mission Plan, expressed the same views and gave full freedom to India to decide her future relationship with the Commonwealth. However, they also reiterated the hope that the "new independent India may choose to be a member of the British Commonwealth." Thus the Congress demand was conceded. Unlike the Cripps Proposals, not Dominion Status but direct and immediate independence was promised and the question of India's relationship with the British Commonwealth was left to be finally decided by the Indian people themselves. The question arises: what was the attitude of the Congress leaders towards this question?

The Congress had declared that the question would be decided by the Constituent Assembly. However, the sympathetic

(66) Statement in the House of Commons. Anil Chandra Banerjee and Dakshina Ranjan Bose, comps., The Cabinet Mission in India (Calcutta, 1946) 17 and 18 respectively.

(67) Ibid., 107.
attitude of the Labour Government to some extent restored
the goodwill and faith of the Indian people towards the British,
and some prominent Congress leaders expressed the hope that
it was not unlikely that independent India might choose to
continue her partnership with Britain in the Commonwealth. In
the middle of April 1946, Maulana Azad, the Congress President,
stated that if the Indian-British negotiations were settled
satisfactorily, "India will have more friendly relations with
the British than with any other peoples." During the negotia-
tions with the Cabinet Mission he told the Mission that "if
the question was left to India, it was not unlikely that India
might decide in favour of continuing in the Commonwealth." (68)
Though Maulana Azad gave the above opinion to the Mission in
his personal capacity, it is not unlikely that he had consulted
his senior colleagues, specially Pandit Nehru, his closest
friend in the Congress. After joining the Interim Government,
Jawaharlal Nehru expressed the hope that in spite of the past
history of conflict, an independent India would have "friendly
and co-operative relations with England and the countries of
the British Commonwealth." (70)

(68) The Amrita Bazar Patrika, 16 April 1946, 5.
(69) Azad, n. 58, 161.
In January 1946 when the Parliamentary Delegation was visiting India, K.N. Huns, who had rejoined the Congress, pleaded that in the context of the international situation in Asia when Russia was within striking distance of India, South East Asia was in a ferment and Turkey, Iraq and Iran were menaced by Russia, the Commonwealth link would be of great advantage to both India and the Commonwealth. "The future of the national independence of India and of the British Commonwealth in Asia cannot be separated .... Neither Britain nor national India can do without a mutual alliance." He suggested that India must be invested with "full independent status under the Westminster Statute in the field of international affairs."

The Congress accepted the Cabinet Mission's Plan and subsequently joined the Interim Government. In December 1946 the Constituent Assembly of India began its work. However, on the eve of the summoning of the Constituent Assembly the Congress at its Loorut Session in November 1946 declared that it stood for "an independent sovereign Republic." In January 1947 the Constituent Assembly adopted Nehru's Objectives Resolution and resolved to proclaim India as an Independent

(71) K.N. Huns on 'India and Britain', The Times of India (Bombay), 17 January 1946, 6.

Soverign Republic. That the Congress and the Constituent Assembly meant by 'Independent Soverign Republic' in regard to India's future relationship with the British Commonwealth will be discussed in the following chapter. For the present, it must be noted that the Congress was willing to accept, and had actually accepted, Dominion Status for the interim period till the new constitution was promulgated.

Late in December 1946, or early in January 1947, when the Constituent Assembly had been discussing the Objectives Resolution, Mr. V.P. Viceron suggested to Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel that a united India under the Cabinet Mission Plan was an illusion and that the Congress should accept Dominion Status as the basis for an early transfer of power. He pointed out that by accepting Dominion Status India would be gaining many advantages. It would ensure "a peaceful transfer of power", "friendship and goodwill" of Britain and smooth "administration of the country". From the defence point of view it would be of great advantage. Moreover, the Princes, with their past associations with the British Crown, would be reassured and be more willing to negotiate. Sardar Patel agreed with V.P. Vicenon and assured him that "if power could be transferred at once on the basis of Dominion Status, he [Patel] for once would use his influence to see that the Congress accepted it."

(73) Vicen, no. 3, 353-9.
(74) Ibid., 359.
In May 1947 Jawaharlal Nehru accepted the 'Dominion Status' plan of V.P. Menon and said that it was very desirable that there should be "a transfer of power as soon as possible on a Dominion Status basis." (75)

After the acceptance of the Cabinet Mission Plan by the Congress and the League differences developed over its interpretation and the League refused to join the Constituent Assembly. Communal riots on a large scale broke out in the country. On 20 February 1947, the British Prime Minister declared that His Majesty's Government wanted to effect the transfer of power to responsible Indian hands by a date not later than June 1948. The declaration intensified the partition riots and the situation in the country became serious. All efforts for a settlement with the League having failed, prominent leaders of the Congress agreed that power should be transferred as early as possible on a Dominion Status basis. On 3 June 1947, the new Viceroy, Lord Mountbatten, announced the final statement of the British Government which contained the plan of the partition of the country and conformation of Dominion Status on India and Pakistan. Within

(75) Ibid., 250. Mr. Krishna Menon was reported to have said that he was the first to have suggested an early transfer of power to India on a Dominion Status basis. See Alan Campbell-Johnson, Mission with Mountbatten (London, 1941) 88. (76) For the texts of the statements of 20 February and 5 June 1947, see The Indian Annual Register, 1947, I, 142-3 and 143-6 respectively.
a few days of the announcement of the Plan, the Congress Working Committee and the AICC formally accepted it. However, it was made clear that the acceptance of Dominion Status was "without prejudice to the Republic Resolution" adopted by the Constituent Assembly. On 15 August 1947, India became a Dominion with Lord Mountbatten as Governor-General.

OTHER POLITICAL PARTIES

The war proved a blessing in disguise to the Muslim League. Like the Congress, it made its co-operation in the war effort conditional, but in a different way. While the Congress demanded a declaration of independence and its application as far as possible during the period of war, the League pleaded for an assurance of Pakistan after the war and a substantial and equal share in the governance of the country during the interim period. The Congress was concentrating on the demand for independence and relegating the communal settlement to a secondary position; the League had made this settlement a preliminary to all talks about interim and long-range arrangements.

During the whole of the war period, the League continued to plead for the acceptance of its ever-increasing

---

communal demands as a condition precedent to its co-operation with the Government in the war effort. In September 1939, on the outbreak of the war, the Working Committee of the League asked that the Federal Scheme of the Government of India Act, 1935, should not only be "suspended", but must be "abandoned completely" and the British Government should accede to the Muslims "justice and fairplay in the Congress-governed provinces." The Committee further expressed the League's opposition to majority community rule under the guise of democracy and parliamentary system of government and asked for an assurance that no declaration on constitutional advance for India or a draft constitution should be made without the consent and approval of the League. The Working Committee expressed partial satisfaction with the Viceroy's reply of 17 October 1939, and pointed out that its demands had not been "precisely and categorically" met.

In March 1940, the All India Muslim League at its Lahore Session, while endorsing and strongly reiterating the demands raised by the Council and the Working Committee, categorically declared that no constitutional plan would be acceptable to the Muslims unless it was designed on the

(78) Resolution, 18 September 1939. AML, Resolutions, December 1938 - March 1940, 26-8.

(79) Resolution, 22 October 1939. Ibid., 29.
principle of partition of India into Muslim and non-Muslim majority zones constituting independent states. The Lahore resolution was commonly known as the Pakistan Resolution. As regards the problem of the future constitution of India, the August Offer (1940) had "on the whole practically met" the demand of the Muslim League for "a clear assurance to the effect, that no future constitution interim and final, should be adopted by the British Government without their approval and consent." Yet the League declined to co-operate with the war effort because its demand for a 'fifty-fifty' share had not been conceded. While sticking to the eventual partition that of India, the League now had demanded the representation of the Muslim India on the proposed War Council and the Executive Council of the Governor-General "must be equal to that of the Hindus if the Congress comes in otherwise they should have the majority"; that in the provinces where Section 93 of the Act had to operate, "the majority of the Non-Official Advisers should be the representatives of the Mussalmans"; and that the representatives of the Muslim India "should be chosen by the Muslim League." The Cripps Plan which by recognizing the

(80) For the text of the Lahore resolution, see The Indian Annual Register, 1940, I, 511-2.

(81) Resolution, Working Committee, 2 September 1940. ALL, Resolutions, March 1940 - April 1941, 9-10.

(82) Jinnah to Viceroy Lord Linlithgow, 1 June 1940. The Indian Annual Register, 1940, II, 252-3.
principle of partition had conceded the substance of the
League demand was rejected by the League because Pakistan was
not "unequivocally" accepted. And the Simla Conference which
had conceded the League demand for a 'fifty-fifty' share
broke down because the Viceroy, Lord Wavell, had refused to
concede Jinnah's demand that "all the Muslim members of the
proposed new Council shall necessarily be
members of the Muslim League." At the end of the war the
League, after first accepting and then rejecting the Cabinet
Mission proposals, finally accepted the Mountbatten Plan "as
a compromise." It was not happy over the partition of Bengal
and the Punjab. On 14 August 1947, the League celebrated
the birth of a new Dominion of Pakistan, with Qaid-o-Azam
Muhammad Ali Jinnah as Governor-General.

Though Mr. Jinnah and the League as such had not
cooperted in the war effort, the majority of its leaders,
the League Ministries and the Ministries dominated by the
League members in the Provinces had been fully co-operating.

(83) Resolution, League Working Committee, 11 April 1942.
Ibid., 1942, I, 253.

(84) Lord Wavell to Jinnah, 9 July 1945. Ibid., 1945,
II, 140.

(85) See resolutions, All India Muslim League, 6 June and 29 July
1946. Benerjee and Bose, no. 66, 150-52 and 353-3 respectively.

(86) Resolution, All India Muslim League, 9 July 1947. The Indian
Annual Register, 1947, I, 253.
The League had allowed them to co-operate with the British and after the August 'Quit India' movement, the co-operation had become still closer. The latter helped the League to form ministries in Bengal, Assam, Sind and the North-West Frontier Provinces. Whatever had been the policy of the League, its members remained loyal to the Government. Their loyalty was never doubted by British rulers.

During the whole of the period from October 1939 to August 1947, neithor the League, nor its acknowledged leader, Mr. Jinnah, nor any other prominent leader had ever made a demand for India's independence. They had never thought of severance of the British connection. No objection was ever raised to the goal of Dominion Status as proposed by the British. A careful study of the League's resolutions and the statements of its prominent leaders, including Jinnah, on India's constitutional problem leaves no doubt that the League had accepted the goal of Dominion Status and was opposed to Independence. The League had accepted all the British offers of Dominion Status made during the war. While Jinnah preferred, for tactical reasons, silent acquiescence in Dominion Status, the majority of the League leaders made no secret of their firm

(87) For further information, see: Ram Gopal, Indian Muslims: A Political History, 1868-1947 (Bombay, 1953) 273-92; and Hilford Cantwell Smith, The Muslim League, 1942-45 (Lahore, 1945) 24-5.
loyalty to the British connection. On the outbreak of the war, the Ministries of Sir Sikandar Hayat Khan in the Punjab and Fazlul Huq in Bengal, while offering unconditional support to Britain, asked the British Government for an assurance that at the end of the war Dominion Status, as defined in the Statute of Westminster, would be granted to India. Sir Sikandar Hayat Khan, a top leader of great following, believed that "the future destiny of India lay in accepting a position of freedom within the British Commonwealth." It would be "a criminal folly for India to cut adrift from the Commonwealth," he declared. India could not defend herself against external aggression without the protecting arm of the British Navy and the Commonwealth, he said. He repeatedly asked the British Government for the assurance that "India shall have the status of full and equal partnership in the British Commonwealth within a reasonable time after the war." And after the Cripps Mission he pleaded that India should accept the British promise of Dominion Status. A.K. Fazlul Huq, another pillar of the

---

(88) See The India Annual Register, 1939, II, 186 and 118 respectively.

(89) Statement in the Punjab Legislative Assembly, 11 March 1941. Ibid., 1941, I, 245.

(90) Press interview, 3 October 1941. Ibid., 1941, II, 24.

(91) See Press statement, 24 April 1942. The Times of India, 27 April 1942, 7.
League, agreed with Sikandar Hayat Khan and emphasized that "India's safety" was bound up "with the safety of the British Commonwealth."

The League leaders looked upon independence as an impracticable proposition. Ridiculing the Congress demand for a declaration of independence, Mr. Jinnah said that no country had ever won its independence by the declaration of a foreign power. "Independence... can only be wrested and captured." And India was not capable of that, he said. Many others argued that independence was not feasible because India lacked "unity, financial stability and the completest possible safety for defence... the three vital prerequisites of independence."

Even the Pakistan scheme did not rule out the possibility of the British connection. Mr. Jinnah clearly stated that "it does not rule out continuation of relations with Great Britain with necessary adjustments." "Our aim," he explained, "is that those areas where Muslims vastly outnumber Hindus shall become a separate Dominion or even

(92) Address at the Public Relations Committee, Calcutta, 14 July 1941. The Statesman (Calcutta), 15 July 1941, 8.

(93) Speech at Muslim Students Conference, New Delhi, November 1940. M.A. Jinnah, Some Recent Speeches and Writings (Jamil-md-Din Ahmad, coll. and ed., Lahore, 1942, 3rd edition, 1943) 177.

(94) Sir Ali M. Khan Dehlavi's public speech, Surat, 19 April 1940. The Times of India, 22 April 1940, 8.

(95) M.A. Jinnah, India's Problem of Her Future Constitution (Bombay, 1940) Preface.
In April 1947, he was reported to have offered the Viceroy, Lord Mountbatten, Pakistan's membership in the Commonwealth. His views were shared by other League leaders. There was hardly any opposition to Dominion Status. In fact, the British connection was inherent in the demand of Pakistan. The League leaders were well aware that Pakistan could be established, if at all, only with the help of the British. In a free and Independent India, Pakistan would be an impossibility. Moreover, they believed that in the united India independence would mean "Hindu raj and Hindu domination" over the Muslims. "The talk of independence before Pakistan is ... a great fallacy", said Jamil-ud-Din Ahmad, a member of the All India Muslim League Council. Jinnah warned the British Government not to grant independence and "throw the Muslims at the mercy of the Congress or the Hindus." "They will rue the day if they do so," he declared. The Muslim League was in favour of continuation of British rule in India till Pakistan was established. It was opposed

---


(97) See Campbell-Johnson, n. 75, 60.


(100) Speech at Muslim Students Conference, New Delhi, November 1940. Jinnah, n. 93, 177.
to the 'Quit India' demand of the Congress and raised the
'Divide and Quit India' cry instead.

The Hindu Mahasabha had on the whole extended general
support to Britain in the war. It condemned the spirit of
bargaining and of taking advantage of the prevailing crisis
for the promotion of purely communal interest at the expense
of national well-being. It recognized that the task of
defending India from any military attack was "the common
concern" to England and India and that as the latter was not
in a position to carry out the responsibility unaided, there
was "ample room for co-operation" between India and England,
and with a view to make such co-operation effective, the
Mahasabha, inter alia, urged "the introduction of responsible
government at the Centre."

The Mahasabha was strongly opposed to the Muslim
League's claim for Pakistan, 'parity' of representation between
the Muslims and the Hindus, and its prior consent for any
constitutional advance, interim or final. It repeatedly asked
the British Government to make a definite declaration that
such claims of the League would not be accepted and that the
integrity and indivisibility of India should be maintained.

(101) Resolution, Working Committee, 10 September and
21st Mahasabha Session, 30 December 1939. The Indian Annual
Register, 1939, II, 344 and 341 respectively.
The British offers were not fully acceptable to the Nehasabha mainly because they conceded the demands of the League or they were vague. The August Offer conceded 'veto' and the Cripps Proposals the principle of Pakistan. The Simla Conference, to which the Nehasabha was not invited, conceded the principle of 'parity', and finally the Mountbatten Plan conceded Pakistan. But in spite of the rebuffs from the British Government the policy of the Nehasabha had been, on the whole, one of "responsive co-operation" during the period of war.

As regards India's constitutional goal, the Nehasabha repeatedly and clearly stated that though its ultimate goal was complete Independence, it was willing to accept Dominion Status as an immediate step towards that goal. In fact, over since the war the Nehasabha had been persistently demanding a declaration that Dominion Status as defined in the Statute of Westminster should be conceded to India "at the end of the war at the latest." It considered the British promise of

(102) See, for instance, speech of C.M. Saptarshi, President of the Maharashtra Hindu Nehasabha, 21st Nehasabha Session, 30 December 1939; Presidential address of V.D. Savarkar, 24th Nehasabha Session, 29 December 1942; and the latter's statement on the policy of the Nehasabha, 22 March 1940. See ibid., 1939, II, 341 and 1942, II, 266; and The Hindu, 25 March 1940, 7 respectively.

(103) Resolution, Working Committee, 19 November 1939. The demand was reiterated by the 21st Session, 30 December 1939 and by the Working Committee, 18 May 1940. See: The Indian Annual Register, 1939, II, 344 and 1940, I, 334 respectively.
Dominion Status made in the August Offer and in the declarations made till then as "vague, inadequate and unsatisfactory" and urged the Government to make a definite and unequivocal declaration that Dominion Status of the Westminster type "shall be conferred on India within one year of the termination of the war." In March 1942, after the fall of Singapore, the Mahasabha urged the immediate grant of "full independence and co-partnership equal with Great Britain in the Indo-British Commonwealth." Such a step, it declared, would counteract the defeatist shock and rouse the Indian people with proper spirit in the crisis. However, it welcomed the Cripps Proposals for "the promised grant of equal co-partnership with Britain." In December 1944, the Mahasabha urged the British Government to take "immediate steps to implement the Cripps Scheme shorn of clauses giving power of secession to provinces." The leaders of the Hindu Mahasabha believed that in the prevailing circumstances independence was not possible and the only practicable proposition was Dominion Status. The only thing

(104) Resolution, 22nd Session, 29 December 1940. Resolution to this effect was adopted by the Working Committee also, 25 September 1940. See ibid., 1940, II, 275 and 267 respectively.

(105) Resolution, Working Committee, 1 March 1942. Ibid., 1942, I, 337.

(106) Press statement of V.D. Savarkar, President of the Mahasabha. The Times of India, 9 April 1942, 7.

(107) Resolution, 26th Session, Bilaspur, 1944. The Indian Annual Register, 1944, II, 203.
India could compel the British to give, they said, was
(Dominion Status. Moreover, "internal as well as external
situations imperatively demand that we should, for the
present, be satisfied with Dominion Status of the Westminster
(109) type." India was not thought fit to stand by herself. And
they were convinced that in the interest of the Hindus
themselves, they must ally themselves "with the British in
the common cause of defending India from an alien aggression
(110) or from internal anarchy."

Though Dominion Status was stated to be only an
immediate step towards the final goal of complete Independence,
the Mahasabha leaders did not rule out the possibility of
Independent India's partnership in the Commonwealth. Syama
Prasad Hookerjeo did not contemplate that "India would be
prepared to sever the British connection if Dominion Status

(108) See, for instance, V.D. Savarkar's Presidential
address, 21st Mahasabha Session, December 1939 and Dr. Syama
Prasad Hookerjeo's speech, 22nd Session, December 1940. See
ibid., 1939, II, 322 and 1940, II, 281, respectively.

(109) Sir Hemanta Nath Mukerji's Presidential Address,
Bihar Hindu Mahasabha Session, Amritsar, 19 October 1940.
Ibid., 1940, II, 222.

(110) V.D. Savarkar, President of the Mahasabha to the
Governor of Bihar, 25/20 September 1941. The History of
Bhagalpur Struggle: The 23rd Session of the All India Hindu
Mahasabha, 1941 (Bhagalpur, 1942) 20.
is granted to her." V.D. Savarkar believed that it would ensure the willingness even of an Independent India in future to continue a co-partnership in the Commonwealth on equal terms." N.C. Chatterjee believed that the Uhasabhaites advocated "Dominion Status", because they believed that India's membership of the Commonwealth was "in her own interest".

Dr. B.S. Moonje was strongly in favour of India's continued membership in the Commonwealth. He reiterated his old argument that having spent so much in blood and money for the expansion of the British Empire during the last 125 years, India would not be wise to give up her claim of being a co-ruler and co-owner of the Empire. He was hopeful that India should be free and the Empire would be reconstructed after the war. He was specially attracted by the proposals of Mr. J. Curtin, the then Prime Minister of Australia, for a Supreme Empire Council. He believed that the representation


(113) Address at Hindu Students' Conference, Burdwan, 30 November 1941. N.C. Chatterjee, Hindu Politics. The Message of the Uhasabha: Collection of Speeches and Addresses (Calcutta, 1944) 78.

(114) For Mr. Curtin's proposals, see Nicholas Hensorgh, ed., Documents and Speeches on British Commonwealth Affairs 1931-1952 (London, 1953) 1, 562-5.
in the Empire Council, which should govern the affairs of
the entire British Empire, would be on the basis of the
populations of the units within the Empire. "This Council
will then be dominated by India and the British Empire will
then be automatically changed into the Indo-British Empire," (115)
Dr. Moonje argued. Moreover, the war had given an impetus
to Indian industries and India had become Britain's creditor
instead of debtor.

In these circumstances, he said, India may emerge from the war not as a kind of an annexe to
the British Empire but as a huge power within it
... India may choose to become peer of Australia, New Zealand and United Kingdom within the Common-
wealth ... The bogey of the Imperialism will disappear and the Empire's creative achievement
will endure. (116)

However, the British policy of appeasement of the
Muslim League, the changed world situation and perhaps the
meagre or no hope that the British Empire would be changed
into the Indo-British Commonwealth, brought about a change
in the attitude of the Mahasabha. The Simla Conference gave
a great shock to the Hindusabhaites and consequently anti-
British feeling grew among them. The idea of equal partnership
in the Commonwealth seemed to have lost all attraction for
them. In the memorandum to the Cabinet Mission, the Mahasabha

(115) Presidential Address, Mahakoshal Hindu Mahasabha
Conference, Bilaspur, January 1944. The Indian Annual Register,
1944, I, 201.

(116) Ibid.
urged for an immediate declaration of India's independence and clearly stated: "... it is alliance on equal terms with, rather than membership of, the British Commonwealth of Nations, that will be in tune with the time-spirit, and will also prove beneficial to both in the long run." (117)

The National Liberal Federation, which was no longer of much influence, continued to adhere to its creed of Dominion Status. Year after year it had been pleading for a clear declaration that Dominion status of the Westminster variety should be conceded to India soon after the conclusion of the war. It considered the British promises as "quite unsatisfactory" because they implied "the postponement of the advent of Dominion Status to an indefinite and distant future" and demanded "a definite time-limit" within which India would attain that status. In 1940, after the August Offer, the Liberal Federation urged that Dominion Status should be accorded "within a period not exceeding two years after the conclusion of the war." And in March 1945, the period was

(117) Banerjee and Bose, n. 66, 83-4.


(119) Resolution, ILF Council, 25 August 1940. The Indian Annual Register, 1940, II, 315.

(120) Resolution. ILF, Report of the 22nd Session, Calcutta, 1940, 55. The demand was reiterated at the next Session. See Report of the 23rd Session, Lucknow, 1941, 55.
reduced to "one year" after the war.

The Liberals repeatedly advanced their old and familiar arguments in favour of Dominion Status vs. Independence. The war had given further support to their cause. Dominion Status was not different from Independence, and the former should be preferred because India needed British connection for her defence, orderly progress and world understanding, they said. The Liberals believed that "India's comparative safety for the present and also its liability to danger in future are dependent on the British connection." Independent India without British connection would fall "an easy prey to any conqueror". They held the view that by remaining in the Commonwealth "we can assist in bringing about ultimately a world understanding which will gradually abolish aggressions and aggrandisements at the expense of weaker and smaller nations." "It affords an opportunity for association of independent states." They strongly refuted


(125) Ibid., 52.
the charge that domination and exploitation of British imperialism would continue if India accepted Dominion Status. Dominion Status was not inconsistent with fullest freedom, argued P.N. Sapru. "It will mean not the perpetuation, but the end of British imperialism in this country. It will mean the transformation of an Empire into a Commonwealth of free nations." The Liberals realized that after the Statute of Westminster there was "no practical distinction" between Dominion Status and complete Independence. Moreover, while membership of the British Commonwealth was "a source of strength", it was attended by "no disadvantages", they said. While admitting and criticizing that Britain had not acceded to India's demands for freedom and had so often exploited India for promoting her (Britain's) own interests, and had encouraged the growth of communal cleavage, and had filled the minds of many in India with resentment and distrust, the Liberals believed that the policy of severance of the British connection was "a counsel of despair" and could only lead India "from the frying pan into the fire."

(126) P.N. Sapru's speech on the resolution on India's Constitution. NLF, Report of the 23rd Session, Madras, 1941, 67.
(129) Ibid., 7.
The leaders of the Justice Party, which hardly exercised any influence in Indian politics in the post-1939 period, remained firm in their loyalty to the British. They believed that Dominion Status of the Westminster Statute variety was "complete independence" and could not conceive of "a secure and free India apart from Great Britain."

To sum up the argument of this chapter it may therefore be said that during the Second World War, India remained divided in her loyalty to the British. The two major political organizations, the Congress and the League, were not willing to offer unconditional co-operation in the war effort. While the first demanded a declaration of independence and self-determination, the second pleaded for the acceptance of its communal demands and the Pakistan scheme. Neither felt fully satisfied with the British offers made during the war. Consequently, the League was partially 'in war' and the Congress remained entirely 'out'.

The Congress was willing to accept the substance of Independence or Dominion Status or even less for the war-period, provided Britain conceded its demands. The question of India's future relationship with Britain was left to be decided by the Constituent Assembly. However, there were

some prominent Congressmen who were not unhopeful that the
British connection would continue. The advent of the Labour
Government in Britain to some extent restored Congress' faith
in end goodwill towards Great Britain. Moreover, after the
war the circumstances were so changed that the partition and
the Dominion Status were accepted by the Congress.

The League did not want the British to leave India
unless Pakistan was conceded. It was opposed to India's
independence because that was considered as a death-knell to
Pakistan. The Hindu Mahasabha accorded general support to
Britain in the war and continued to plead for Dominion Status.
However, the British policy and the changed circumstances
after the war changed the attitude of the Mahasabha. It
rejected Commonwealth partnership in favour of alliance with
Britain. The Liberal Federation believed that independence
outside the British Commonwealth was not only impossible but
undesirable also.