CHAPTER VII

FROM BONDAGE TO FREEDOM - Last phase of the British Rule

The War and the Indian political scene:

The outbreak of the Second World War on September 2, 1939 had its own impact on Indian politics. Though India was not the actual theatre of war, the war as such had its own repercussions on India too, as in other parts of the world. The reaction to the War from different sections of the Indians was bound to be varied and mixed. It was not always a favourable one anyway. If the Indian National Congress, for example, took the extreme step of coming out of the office in 'the Congress Provinces' in protest against committing India to the war without consulting them; the Muslim League gave its support to the British on the War. Not that the Congress was not for fighting the evil forces of Nazism and Fascism, but its policy was: 'India should not be committed to any war without the consent of her people or their representatives, and that no Indian troops be sent for service abroad without such consent'. 1 Such a policy was understandable, in so far as they never wanted Indian troops to be used by the British to suppress freedom movements elsewhere.

In this particular War no such risk was, however, involved. The war was in defense of democracy, and was against the Nazi and Fascist upheavals. Even the Communists had to join the war, of course, for their own reasons. The Congress, therefore, should not have thought of such a serious step as coming out of office.

As pointed out in the foregoing Chapters, this decision of the Congress to oppose the War-efforts in such a vehement manner was a great mistake, that only antagonised the British. On the other hand, the League came to be 'pampered' further, and as Mr. V. P. Menon looks at it: "In return for Muslim support for the war, they (the British) were willing to do almost anything that the League desired." If only the Congress had continued in office in the Provinces, the party could have bargained with the British from a position of great strength. Once the Provincial Ministries resigned, the position of the Congress was weakened. The younger generation among the Congressites that constituted the left wing, chose the very situation for gaining Indian freedom by resorting to extreme steps. This pragmatic approach was voiced forcefully by Subhas Chandra Bose, who even escaped from the country and organised the Indian National Army. Such an extreme step by an important
leader of the Party put the Congress in a very awkward position. The Government could not but view the situation with great concern and decided upon a more cautious policy. Any other form of protest, short of resignation by the Congress Provincial Ministries, would have been justifiable. Such steps and developments could only convince the British that the Hindus were intransigent on the constitutional problem of the country. The Congress gave an impression to this effect further, when it launched the Civil Disobedience Movement during 1940–41; rejected the Cripps Offer, in March, 1942; and asked the British to 'Quit India' forthwith. The 'Quit India' campaign of August, 1942 and the formation of the Indian National Army by Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, though were exciting enough to the Indians; to the British, they were a grave threat to their existence in India. Above all, these events came at a time when 'the British had their backs to the wall in Europe' in the War. Commenting on the Congress attitude during this crucial period of Indian politics, Mr. V. V. Menon has this to say:

...it must be said that the resignation of the Provincial Ministries as a means of protest was a wrong step. It is a supreme example of that unrealistic, negative politics in which we are all too prone to indulge, and the outcome of
which is, sometimes, very disconcerting, and even disastrous. The control of eight Provincial Governments, covering half the country, had put the Congress in a position of great strength and bargaining power. The Congress should have thought many times before voluntarily abandoning such an advantage. Actually, the outcome of the resignation of Provincial Ministers in 1939 was by far more unfortunate than could have been foreseen, for, among the more serious consequences of this monumental error, must be reckoned the later partition of the country. 3

The policy of the Congress to oppose the war-effort was, perhaps, shaped on two considerations: (a) the reward they had received from the British for the co-operation they gave during the First World War of 1914-18. As we know, the promised Dominion Status was not granted and the British chose to give self-government in instalments, which was not acceptable to the Indians.

(b) Secondly, the Congress, on the basis of the events of the War in the beginning, had somehow gained the impression that the War would culminate in defeat for the British. Of course, if the British were to be defeated, the Congress-strategy would have worked well and succeeded. A negative approach, like the one they adopted, would have yielded fruits. It is interesting to read, even now, some of the declarations by important personalities in the Congress including Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, who had said that it was not at all their intention to exploit the situation of war for attaining freedom. They pointed out that the Congress opposition to the War and refusal of co-operation in it, was emanating out of a theoretical and ideological commitment. The Congress policy of non-violence and anti-colonialism was reiterated in the resolutions of the Congress on the subject during this period.

Contrary to the negative reaction of the Congress, the reaction of the Muslim League to the question of co-operation in the war-effort was a positive one. The Muslim Prime Ministers of Bengal and Punjab expressed their support to the Government and they continued in office. The Muslim League expressed its sympathy and actually took advantage of the situation and made the British feel
that the Muslims were, after all, their reliable friends. Perhaps, the League was guided by more practical considerations. In this context, we should also appreciate the difficulties of the Congress, in so far as it was an organization with an ideological tradition and commitment, unlike the League. No doubt, with the advent of the Mahatma, the Congress had become a mass organization. It is also true that it came under the spell of Gandhian approach to politics. It, therefore, was all along committed to sanctions like non-cooperation, civil-disobedience, based on the fundamental principle of non-violence. Gandhiji was the chief architect of this 'saintly politics' that was an admixture of morals and politics. To the Mahatma, the purity of means was not just important, but it was to be the sole criterion to judge all actions without any concern for the end. So an organisation, that had come under the grip of such an influential mass leader, could not but apply similar standards and sanctions, throughout, in evolving its policies.

On the other hand, the League was not committed to such rigid principles in its approach to politics. It was flexible and pragmatic enough to use a situation for its own advantage. An approach of positive support to the British at a critical time and of increasing intransigence towards the Congress demand for complete independence, enabled the Muslim League to become the most
pampered section in the country. In the meantime, the
two-nation theory had gained sufficient ground and
currency. Mr. Jinnah had magnified the so-called 'atrocities' committed by the Congress Ministries upon the
Muslims. He wanted to take advantage of the resignations
for the purpose, and started insisting that they should
not be allowed to be back into power. His bargaining
capacity went up as he was willing to agree to Dominion
Status, unlike the Congress which was not prepared to
accept anything less than complete independence. So the
Congress launched the 'Quit India' movement to achieve
this object, which had an adverse effect. To quote Mr.
V.P. Menon again: "... it created the atmosphere of
civil war in which the extremist position of the Muslim
League came to be viewed as natural and right, even by
level-headed Muslims. In fact, within a year of the
launching of quit India campaign, the League succeeded in
gathering under its banner the Governments of Assam, and
Jind, Bengal and the North-West Province, that is, all
the Muslim-majority Provinces, except the Punjab. This
meant, of course, a very great increase in its stature as
a party." 4 When it assumed such a dimension, the
League could create more difficulties in Indian politics.
Thus the constitutional deadlock, coupled with the political

stalemate, created a great impasse in Indian politics. It was a crucial period in Indian politics indeed. Subsequent developments leading to the exit of the British should be viewed in this perspective only.

Looking at from the British point of view, they justified their stand of not discussing anything about the political and constitutional changes for India during the War, in view of the gravity of the international situation. A period of war would be naturally a period of great anxiety for any Government, when all ranks will have to be closed up and all energy and attention devoted to the War-effort. Britain could have not only the legal, but also the moral sanction for such a decision. But it was not actually done, though some precautionary steps such as the passage of Government of India (Amendment) Act of 1939, were taken in order to give extensive powers over Provincial Administration. It was rather surprising, how even the Conservative Government that came to power during the crisis under the leadership of a die-hard conservative, Sir Winston Churchill, could agree to negotiate. Even he, who had declared that he had not become the first Lord of His Majesty to preside over the liquidation of the Empire, did not block the efforts to resolve the Indian stalemate. In fact, the period
1940-1946 was a period of intense and hectic political activity and negotiation at all levels that hastened Indian independence.

Such a policy on the part of Britain was, perhaps, due to certain factors: In the first place, Mr. Leopold Amery, who was Secretary of State for India in Mr. Churchill's Cabinet, was no less an imperialist. But he was more open-minded and liberal on Indian affairs than Churchill. The very fact that he had not opposed the Government of India, Act, 1935, and he was a member of the 'Round Table' group, testifies to his liberal attitude towards India. This was of some advantage in keeping the dialogue on the constitutional problem alive and going. Secondly, the course of events in the Second World War was creating great anxiety among the British, specially, when the Japanese were gaining an upper hand, and when their ships were seen in the Indian Ocean, the British could not remain indifferent to the internal tension and disorder in India. The Indian support and willing co-operation was more imperative at that hour than at any other time. On the eve of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour and other American positions in the Pacific, a conciliatory approach was made by the Government. This enabled the negotiations with the Indians to be continued, despite the War. In the third place, the pressure of international public opinion had its own impact.
on the British policy on India. They had to do something to resolve the Indian deadlock, even at a critical juncture as that. Mention must be made here of the good offices of President Franklin D. Roosevelt of the U.S.A., and Chiang Kai Sheik of China. Chiang visited India in February, 1941, and met the Congress leaders. He urged President Roosevelt to intervene, when he met him on his return journey. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee in the U.S.A., also expressed its disapproval of the British approach to the Indian problem. President Roosevelt thought it proper and necessary to address Mr. Churchill in the matter, which had the desired effect. It is also to be noted here that Roosevelt even sent one Col. Louis Johnson as his personal envoy to be present in India, when Sir Stafford Cripps was on his Mission in India, so that he may do what he could, as a mediator. Finally, the effective demonstration of dissatisfaction in India by the Congress and other parties and individuals forced the British Tories to make another attempt to resolve the deadlock. The outcome of all these forces was the despatch of Sir Stafford Cripps to India by Mr. Churchill, with a view to finding out an agreeable solution to the Indian crisis. In the meantime, the Viceroy also announced the decision "to enlarge the Executive Council to twelve Members, of whom eight would be Indians, but they would not be members either of the Congress or of the Muslim League." As a
The Government also released all the Congress leaders who were imprisoned for the Civil Disobedience Movement, including Pandit Nehru and Maulana Azad. The stage was thus set for continuing the efforts towards a solution.

The War, The Freedom Struggle And The Untouchables:

As pointed out already, the Indian political and constitutional deadlock could not be approached bilaterally and its facets demanded a multi-lateral approach. Besides the Congress and the Muslim League, innumerable other organisations including the Independent Labour Party, the Depressed Classes Conference, the All India Scheduled Castes Federation, the non-League Muslim Organisations, the Hindu Mahasabha and a number of such organisations had their own views on the problem, and also their own demands. Ambedkar had, by then, formed the All-India Scheduled Castes Federation to fight for the Scheduled Castes' interests. Naturally, he could not remain inactive.

The war period was of great significance in the public life of Ambedkar who, on behalf of the Untouchables, lent total support to the British in the war-effort, even though he expressed his dissatisfaction that India had no voice in her foreign policy on war and peace. In early 1941, he exerted himself to the maximum in exhorting his
people to join the army in large numbers and thereby render their service to the Empire at a most critical period of its existence. Here was an unique opportunity for Ambedkar to channelise and exhibit, not only the patriotism of the untouchables but also their fighting qualities, particularly of the Mahars. The Government actually raised a Mahar Battalion under his persuasion. The leader of the Hindu Mahasabha, V. D. Savarkar, commended this effort of his, even though he was opposed to the war itself. To Savarkar, it meant a re-animation of the military qualities of the Hindus. Ambedkar achieved a great success in this task and no wonder his services were appreciated by the Government. He was appointed a Member of the Defence Advisory Committee.

The announcement of the Viceroy regarding the expansion of his Executive Council, so as to include the leaders of the minorities, was generally welcomed. But the non-inclusion of the Sikhs and the Depressed Classes came as a great shock to them. The Council was announced in July, 1941. Ambedkar called it 'an outrage and breach of trust'. He called upon his people to continue to join the military forces unabated, despite denial of representation to them in the expanded Council. He laid emphasis rightly on the need of the hour. He told them that 'if the Nazis overran the country, there would not be much
of an Expanded Council left to fight for'. He added:

'he was not prepared for a change of rulers to start the struggle once again for self-government right from the beginning'. Addressing the All-India Depressed Classes Conference at Nagpur in July, 1942, he observed that it was a war between dictatorship and democracy, a dictatorship that was based on racial arrogance. The Nazi dictatorship would be a menace to the future of Mankind. So it must be fought to preserve democracy as the governing principle of human relationship. This explains as to why he exhorted the Untouchable youth to even suspend their studies and get commissions in the Army, as that was the prime need of the hour. After all he was thinking and guiding his people on right lines. He was not, however, acting as a recruiting agent for the British armed forces, as denigratingly alleged by his critics. He was only acting as an honest and sincere champion of a free society.

He also thought that it was not the time to bother the British with any other thing than the War. It would not be just to take advantage of the opponent's troubles, he thought. You can settle your bill with him when he is in a position to do so. This is what Ambedkar reasoned. He was never thinking in terms of taking advantage of the British plight during the War either for the benefit of his people or even for the liberation of the land. He was motivated with a sense of fairplay and generosity and gentlemanly gesture towards the British. How can one
construe this to be the act of a British stooge, passes one's comprehension. We have only to recollect here that the same sense of fairplay and generosity had prompted Gandhiji to render similar service to the British Empire during the First World War. If Gandhiji was not marked for this charge then, why should Ambedkar be branded during the Second World War? He was only driving home the stark realities of the situation, when the choice before the people was not between Swaraj and the British Government, but between forces of democracy and totalitarianism.

Mahatma Gandhi, contrary to his stand during the First World War, chose, on the other hand, to start the Civil Disobedience Movement shortly after the outbreak of Second World War! The Ramgarh Resolution of the Indian National Congress of 20, March, 1940 declared in clear terms, that the Indians have nothing to identify themselves with the British in the war-effort, as it was carried on fundamentally for British interests. The resolution also prohibited Congressmen from helping in the prosecution of the War with men, money or material. It called for resorting to civil disobedience. Ambedkar had his own explanation to offer on this strange behaviour of the Congress. According to him, it was purely a political move on the part of the Congress. In a lengthy
letter to the Editor, *The Times of India*, Ambedkar wrote:

The basis of this sudden call to arms by the Congress lies in its desire to force the Viceroy into abandoning his project of installing the minorities and other non-congress parties in the expanded executive Council... He declared that Congress had no other purpose. "The Congress," he continued, "is fighting to obtain the keys of power in its own hands." It was also not to fight the Defence of India Act, as claimed by the Congress. "If Mr. Gandhi felt that the Defence of India Act had deprived the country of the liberty of speech, why did he not start his civil disobedience immediately after the Act was passed? Why did he wait for a year? Why this revolt after the Viceroy's statement that Government must now be carried on with the help of the representatives of the minorities and other parties in the country?" asked Ambedkar. He concluded thus: "The hardship caused by the Defence of India Act is only an excuse put forth by the Congress to clothe the torpedoing of the Viceroy's plan and to prevent the minorities and others from getting political power..."

Ambedkar's disclaimer to the quit India Movement

5. *The Times of India*, 24-2-1940, under the caption "Dr. Ambedkar on Mr. Gandhi's object".
and his active support to the British were construed to be anti-national and pro-imperialist activities. It was the misfortune of a social revolutionary and political radical like him to be always the target of such insinuations. He was always misunderstood than being understood. Here was an opportunity for his opponents to denigrate him as one, going by the loaves and fishes of office, particularly in the light of the Viceroy's decision to expand his Executive Council. There was a clear indication that only minority leaders would be picked up for the purpose, in which case Ambedkar's claims could not be easily set aside. There could not be much of a justification, however, for the British policy in this respect. They could have kept the offices open for the Congress and the League Members too. Perhaps, the British strategy was different. They wanted to force the Hindus and Muslims to come to an agreement and render co-operation to the British. But it was looked upon by the excluded major communities as a device to placate the minority groups and their leaders, thereby driving a wedge between them and the minorities. Ambedkar and the Untouchables were called as the tools of British Imperialism since they did not join the 'fight for freedom' and were willing to cooperate with the British in the war-effort. Ambedkar accepted that the Untouchables did not take part in the fight for freedom, specially during the Quit India Movement. Of course, in either case the charge was baseless and the
whole controversy was wrongly focussed. It should be recollected here that a large number of Untouchables, throughout the country, did participate in the movement along with others. The more relevant question would have been why Ambedkar chose to lend his active support to the British during the War. Was it purely guided by considerations such as mentioned in the foregoing; or was it to gain the sympathies of the British for emancipating his people? Ambedkar explained elaborately the stand taken by the Untouchables regarding the freedom movement. He tried to remove certain misconceptions in this regard. In his view, the Untouchables participated and also did not participate in the movement. They did not participate alongside the Congress and in the manner the Congress expected them to, because the concept of freedom for which the Congress was fighting was different from that of his. He thought that the Congress was laying emphasis on one aspect of it only, viz., freedom from British imperialism, which was but one step. Ambedkar was actually looking much beyond the viewpoint of the Congress. He stood, no doubt, for freedom from British imperialism, but with proper arrangements for an equal emancipation for one and all, the emancipation of the strong and the weak, the majority and the minorities alike. The emancipatory role of the movement should be an allround one. His reasoning was that the overnight exit of the British under pressure of the freedom movement "... would
establish Hindu domination, which is sure to close to them (the Untouchables) and forever all prospect of life, liberty and pursuit of happiness and that they will be hewers of wood and drawers of water .... to " ... What they insist upon is that free India is not enough. Free India should be made safe for democracy... if no provisions are made in the constitution to cut the fangs of the Hindu Communal Majority, India will not be safe for democracy ...." Ambedkar had real apprehensions as to the Hindu majority-rule that was bound to be established through the Congress after independence. The Congress opposition to the communal safeguards in the name of national unity, he thought, would only enslave all other minorities including the Untouchables. He drew from the policies of the Congress and particularly from the nature of Indian social life, in justification of his belief to that effect. So while the Untouchables were anxious to make India not only free, but also make it safe for democracy, the Congress, though not opposed to democracy, was 'certainly opposed to creating conditions which will make democracy real.' Ambedkar was not in a mood to accept an agreement, in advance, promising safeguards in the future constitution. He, on the other hand, challenged

the right of the Congress 'to arrogate to itself the right to say what should be the constitution of a free India'. Moreover, "... the experience of the world", he pointed out, "does not justify the hope that when the 'Fight for freedom' ends, the stronger elements have shown the generosity to give security to the weaker elements..." 8 The betrayal of the Negroes by the whites after the Civil War in the U.S.A. (1861-65) is a case in point. The Untouchables, therefore, "... cannot forget the fate of the Negroes. It is to prevent such treachery that the untouchables have taken the attitude they have with regard to this 'Fight for Freedom'. What is wrong in this? Are they doing anything more than follow the advice of Burke, who has said that it is better to be accused of timidity than to be ruined by over confident security?" 9 he asked. Ambedkar went even to the extent of branding the freedom fight of the Congress as mere 'tactics'.

The discussion so far brings to the fore certain important points. The controversy centred round one fundamental factor, that is, the factor of proper and appropriate priorities. The Congress, by virtue of its

experience in its dealings with the British, had come to believe that the British did not mean business sincerely. The British were bent upon retaining power, and the so-called difficulties posed by them were not beyond solution. As Mahatma Gandhi had declared at the Round Table Conference, the minorities' problem was a deliberate design of the British, in order to counter the nationalist forces. Once the British quit India, all problems will be automatically settled. The Congress also believed that internal difficulties of differences of opinion, and safeguards for minorities should be settled among the Indians themselves in a free India, and not under the aegis of the British. This attitude of the Congress was due to the suspicions it entertained as to the British intentions. The British, on the other hand, wanted to be there in India so long as the Indians did not come to an agreement.

Ambedkar, on the other hand, believed in following a cautious policy for the Depressed Classes. He thought, once the British were out from India, the moderating influence they were exerting will be removed, which may be fatal to the minorities' interests. In all his writings he reasoned on the assumption that there was something inherently undemocratic in the Hindu society; and the Hindu religion was known for its graded and built-in inequalities. With the dawn of freedom, therefore, the
the Hindu majority cannot be trusted, once again on the parallel of the Negro experience. So, unlike the Congress, he wanted that priority should be given for settling the question of providing adequate safeguards in the constitution for the minorities before the transfer of power to Indians. Unless an agreement is arrived at on this point, freedom would be a menace to the minorities. So he wanted the British to take necessary steps in that direction. The apprehensions of Ambedkar in this regard were due to the suspicions he had of the intentions of the Congress, which was opposed to putting a veto upon freedom of India in the hands of the minorities. He was also proceeding on the assumption that the British intentions were sincere and they had already 'moved in the direction of fulfilling Indian aspirations'. He pointed out the steps taken by the British through the Reforms of 1919 and 1935. "If from 1939 there has been a halt", he asserted, "it is mainly because Indians are not agreed on the sort of constitution they want for their country." To the Untouchables, India's freedom is like 'property held by a receiver and as soon as the dispute is over and the right kind of constitution is settled, it has been bound itself to hand over the property to its rightful owners, namely, the Indians'. Thus he justified the stand of the Untouchables in as much as they wanted to take advantage of such a situation for their own good. They were to co-operate with the British
in achieving this objective. By opposing them the Untouchables would be jeopardising their own cause. This, however, was not to be misunderstood as an unpatriotic and pro-imperialist and sectional approach, because Ambedkar never hesitated to point out the deficiencies in the British proposals from time to time and refuse his co-operation. It would not be doing justice to him if we are to think that he lent his unconditional support and loyalty to the British always. At this juncture it would be proper to examine his attitude to the Cripps proposals for resolving the constitutional deadlock in the country.

Cripps Proposals and the Communal question:

The British were anxious to resolve the political deadlock in India at a time when their enemies were knocking at the doors of India. A rapprochement was not only intended to enlist positive participation of the Indians in the war-effort but also to bring about 'moral reinforcement' among the Indians. A truce between the Government and the Hindus and Muslims, it was hoped, would really rouse the masses to do their best in obstructing the path of the invading enemy. Above all, Mr. Churchill was also to respond to the pressure of world opinion to come to a settlement with Indians. As the 'August Offer' was rejected already, Mr. Churchill had to make fresh
attempts. He declared in the course of his statement in the House of Commons on March 11, 1942: 10 "The crisis in the affairs of India arising out of the Japanese advance has made us wish to rally all the forces of Indian life, to guard their land from the menace of the invader...." Mr. Churchill explained his desire to refrain from doing anything that would provoke "fierce constitutional and communal disputes at a moment when the enemy is at the gates of India." So instead of setting out his proposals in the form of a declaration, Mr. Churchill proposed to send a member of the War Cabinet to India, to satisfy himself on the spot, by personal consultation, that the conclusions upon which we are agreed, and which we believe represent a just and final solution, will achieve their purpose..." Accordingly, Sir Stafford Cripps, the Lord Privy Seal, who had volunteered to undertake the delicate mission, was despatched with the proposals of the War Cabinet on the Indian problem to "... strive in their name to procure the necessary measure of assent, not only from the Hindu majority, but also from those great minorities, amongst which the Moslems are the most numerous and on many grounds pre-eminent." Sir Stafford Cripps, a genuine friend of India, accordingly came to India on March 23, 1942, and he published the proposals, he had brought, on March, 29 at a Press Conference. The salient points of the Cripps Proposals were as follows, in so far

as they related to the communal questions:

1. The formation of a new Indian Union with Dominion Status with a right to withdraw from the British Commonwealth.

2. A Constituent Assembly to be formed immediately after the cessation of the hostilities. This Assembly was to have the fullest powers to frame a constitution for India. It was to be elected under the system of proportional representation by an electoral college consisting of the members of the lower houses of all the Provincial legislatures. The Princely States were to send their nominees in proportion to their total populations.

3. The Provinces and the States may choose to remain outside the scope of the constitution. It may be decided through a plebiscite with a bare majority.

4. The Constituent Assembly shall be required to enter into a treaty with the British Government. The treaty would contain provisions for the safety and security of racial and religious minorities. The British will withdraw their sovereignty and the constitution framed by the Constituent Assembly was to come into operation, once the treaty was signed.

Ambedkar's reaction to those Proposals was
typical and uncomparably pungent. No other leader or
party could have denounced in so vehement terms as he
did. He, as the leader of the Depressed Classes, issued
a Press Statement in which, he called the proposals
as 'a sudden volte face on the part of His Majesty's
Government'. They denounced the minority rights which,
Ambedkar called as 'the Munich Mentality' - the essence of
which is to save oneself by sacrificing others. He
expressed great surprise at the proposals that came
from Sir Stafford Cripps, who should have known better.
The proposals were an 'volte face' in so far as they were
now conceding what was rejected once. The demand of the
Congress for a Constituent Assembly was rejected by Mr.
Amery on the floor of the House of Commons on August,
14, 1940, on the ground that it would not be in the best
interests of the minorities like the Muslims and the
Depressed Classes. So there cannot be a Constituent
Assembly and Constitution without an agreement between
these principal elements of national life. But the
Cripps Proposals came to concede a Constituent Assembly
with the indirectly elected and a nominated element. The
insistence on a prior agreement among the various commu-
nities was sacrificed in the proposals. On the other
hand, there was to be a treaty to safeguard the interests

11. What Congress and Gandhi Have done to the
of the minority communities. This was designed only to appease the Congress.

The Proposals also went to concede the demand for Pakistan indirectly, by providing for the Provinces and Princely States to choose to join the new constitution or stay out of it. This was, once again, in clear contravention to Mr. Amery's declaration of April, 23, 1941 on the floor of the House of Commons opposing the vivisection of the country. Mr. Amery had said, on behalf of His Majesty's Government, "I am not concerned here to discuss the immense practical difficulties in the way of this so-called Pakistan project nor need I go back to the dismal record of India's history in the 18th century or to the disastrous experience of the Balkan countries before our eyes to-day in order to point out the terrible dangers inherent in any break up of the essential unity of India, at any rate in its relation to the outside world. After all, there is no British achievement in India of which we have reason to be proud than the unity ... we have given her." But in the Cripps proposals this stand was completely changed, just to win over the Muslim League. The British were prepared to give something more than what the League was asking for. The League was only asking for a right to raise the question of Pakistan at the time of the new constitution. The only explanation for this volte face, thought Ambedkar, was

that Great Britain had become "... panic-stricken. The proposals are the result of a loss of nerve. How great is the panic that has overtaken His Majesty's Government can be easily seen if one compared the demands made by the Congress and the Muslim League and the concessions made to them by these proposals ..." Ambedkar thought that these proposals were "intended to lead India to wage a total war in which Hindus, Mussalmans, Depressed Classes and Sikhs are called upon wholeheartedly to participate." He was particularly bitter over the deal to the Depressed Classes in the Cripps Proposals, which was also an volte-face— not in their favour, but to their detriment. The attitude of the British towards all other sections, excepting the Congress and the League, had undergone a thorough transformation. Mr. Churchill had made enough suggestion to this effect in his statement referred to already. Sir Cripps also was inclined to think on the lines of making a distinction between the major and minor parties. The major parties were those whose consent was necessary for adopting a solution. The minor parties were those with whom consultation was enough. This was a new distinction that naturally placed the classes on a lower plane than the one given to the Muslims. Ambedkar was very much annoyed on this invidious

13. Ibid., p. 383.
and obnoxious distinction introduced all of a sudden, contrary to the earlier pronouncements by the Secretary of State and successive Viceroyes. It was nothing short of a breach of faith with those minorities who had thrown themselves into the war-effort wholeheartedly. He denounced it in most unequivocal terms as nothing but handing over the Depressed Classes to the caste Hindus, bound hand and foot. He was terribly disappointed as the Grippes Proposals did not offer the Depressed Classes anything but stone instead of bread. 'The constituent assembly', he said, 'is nothing short of a betrayal of the Depressed Classes. The proposed nature of the composition of the Constituent Assembly would not help the Depressed Classes at all. Their voice cannot count!' So by these proposals, His Majesty's Government have thrown the Depressed Classes to the wolves'. He was not at all optimistic about the adequacy and efficacy of the proposed treaty in protecting the interests of the minorities. The nature of the proposed treaty was such that either it would never come off, and if it comes off the British would not be in a position at all to enforce the treaty provisions in case they were violated by the parties. There will be either no means to enforce the treaty obligations, or the British will not be willing to use those means to coerce the Indian National Government to abide by the terms of the treaty. The Grippes
Proposals were, therefore, unacceptable to Ambedkar who had a lifetime's responsibility and duty to protect the interests of his unfortunate and downtrodden millions. He was particularly aware of this duty of his, while a new constitution for a free India was to be hammered out. At every stage, therefore, in the course of the constitutional development of our country he took great care to see that the interests of his men were not sacrificed to appease some one else whose voice, perhaps, was more vocal. When such an effort was actually made in the course of the Gripps Proposals, he could not be caught napping. He was very much alert to the implications of the Proposals and rightly denounced them as a 'Munich Mentality' that was writ large on these Proposals. In his statement to the Press, he called upon the British to withdraw those Proposals forthwith. "If they cannot fight for right and justice and their plighted word," he said, "they should better make peace. They can thereby at least save their honour." If he were a stooge of the British imperialists, as alleged, he would never have used such exceptionally strong and incriminating language to condemn the Proposals. So it would be highly improper and unjust to brand him as a stooge. On many an occasion, whenever the situation demanded a strong and bitter approach, he never hesitated to be brutally frank in his lashings at the British Government.
Framing a Constitution for India: Ambedkar's Stand

Ambedkar's reaction to the Cripps Proposals brings to light a very important viewpoint of his on the question as to who should frame the Constitution of the country. He questioned the very validity of having a Constituent Assembly to write the new constitution. It is appropriate to discuss his views on the question in view of what happened later and his role in the Constituent Assembly of India, when it came into being.

He expressed his opposition to the project of the Constituent Assembly itself, as suggested in the Cripps Proposals. He had taken special objection to the manner of its composition, which would not enable to bring into it progressive elements. He thought that the representatives of the Depressed Classes may not find a place at all, as no communal quotas were fixed. Even if they were to be there, they will be in a hopeless minority. Since a bare majority vote would suffice to decide any question of fundamental and constitutional importance, the voice of the Depressed Classes will never count in the Assembly. The proposed system of Proportional Representation would result in the caste-Hindus virtually having the right to nominate the representatives of the Depressed Classes. They will, naturally, be the tools of the caste-Hindus. Ambedkar anticipated that only those
Depressed Classes who belonged to the Congress would be brought into the Assembly. For, he argued further that the Assembly will be packed by the Congressites that will form the dominant party and would carry out its own programme. In such an event, it would follow that Depressed Classes will not get anything in the new constitutional arrangement for the simple reason that Gandhi and the Congress were opposed to giving political safeguards for the Depressed Classes. What the Congress may do in the Constituent Assembly may amount to wiping out the political safeguards already granted to them under the 1935 Act. His opposition to the Constituent Assembly and support for the idea of adopting the 1930 Act itself, with suitable modifications, as the new constitution for the country, is to be understood in the light of these views of his.

His views on this question were expressed in a more organized way in his Address to the All India Scheduled Castes Federation held in Bombay on May 6, 1945. In this Address, which was published under the title *Communal Deadlock and A Way to Solve It*, he raised a more fundamental question as to who should frame a constitution for India? It was wrong to expect, Ambedkar replied, the British to solve the deadlock and frame the Constitution too. All along, the constitutions were
imposed ones, which could not be the case in free India.
In a free constitution there cannot obviously be a place
for reserved powers and 'break down clauses', like the
notorious section 93 of the Government of India Act,
1935. In all such imposed constitutions "there is
either a constitutional Government or a Rebellion".
That means, "... the Constitution must be so made that
not it will only command the obedience but also the respect
of all; and all or if not all, at any rate, all important
elements in the national life of India shall be prepared
to uphold it and to give it their support. This can
happen only if the constitution is formed by Indians for
Indians with the voluntary consent of Indians." He
further stated, "I am, therefore, firmly of the opinion
that if Indians want Dominion Status, they cannot escape
the responsibility for framing their own constitution."15
So he accepted that Indians alone should write their
constitution. However, he was not opposed to the break-
down clause altogether. He seems to accept its necessity,
in spite of theoretical objections to such a provision,
as a medicine to the body politic when it goes sick and
to maintain law and order. The break down clause,
therefore, seemed to him to be "of the highest value for
the peace and tranquility of the people. It is the one
and the only means which can save the country from anarchy.

15. Communal Deadlock and a way to solve it;
1945; pp. 4-5.
For, when constitutional Government fails, the breakdown clause has at least the merit of maintaining Government." 16

He was, perhaps, opposed to a breakdown clause in an imposed constitution, and not in a free constitution. It must be mentioned here that as the author of the Constitution of free India he provided for similar breakdown clause in the course of Articles 352 to 360 of the Constitution of India. In this respect he sounds inconsistent, which he could have avoided.

The second fundamental question he posed was, should there be a Constituent Assembly to write the constitution? Of course, the demand of the Congress for a Constituent Assembly was conceded in the Cripps Proposals, and by the Sapru Committee also. But Ambedkar was completely opposed to the idea as a 'dangerous project, which may involve this country in a civil war'. Moreover, he considered it as absolutely superfluous. This statement of his was in complete contradiction of his stand that Indians alone should undertake the responsibility for writing a constitution. How could they discharge this responsibility and duty unless they get an opportunity to sit together and deliberate? There was no constitution in force at the time that was written by the Indians themselves exclusively, and as a free people. The Act

The Constitutional Act of 1935 was enacted by the British Parliament. The reasons that Ambedkar gave for considering the Constituent Assembly as superfluous were as follows:

1. Constitutional ideas and constitutional forms were ready on hand.

2. Scope for choice was limited in view of there being only two or three constitutional patterns to choose from.

3. Federalism had come to stay and was almost accepted as the form of polity for free India.

4. So much of the Indian Constitution was already written in the 1935 Act which was to be adopted with some modifications only.

5. The only issue, that remained to be solved, was that of communal deadlock. Constituent Assembly would not be the proper agency to solve it in view of its composition.

These reasons seem to be convincing up to a point. But he was arguing, once again, against his own stand that the Constitution of free India should be written by Indians themselves. The Constitutional
provisions of the Act of 1935 were not written by Indians, as is well-known. Then how could he plead for its adoption, even with modifications? Even granting that it could be, it required a body of Indians to adopt it and make it their own. Ambedkar was also overlooking another important aspect of constitution-making, which is one of sentiment and psychological attachment. How could anyone deny the Indians the satisfaction of writing their own constitution? If a people are given an opportunity to write and give unto themselves a constitution, in the wake of their freedom, they will be tenaciously attached to it and it comes as the supreme attainment of their freedom struggle. Ambedkar was unfortunately oversimplifying the whole problem beyond proportions, which naturally did not enlist any support. He was once again isolated from the mainstream of the country's politics. He could have objected to the composition of the proposed Constituent Assembly and could have demanded adequate representation for his people. He should not have questioned the very project of the Constituent Assembly, which was contradictory to his earlier stand. Perhaps, a solution for the communal deadlock was reigning supreme in his mind, and in his anxiety to find out a solution for it, he was opposing the Assembly itself, which, we are justified in calling as incorrect. Further, the complete rout of the Scheduled Castes Federation candidates in the General Elections of February, 1946 substantiated his apprehensions. It was mainly responsible
for an attitude of scepticism on his part. But that could hardly be a justification for his opposition to the Constituent Assembly project. Majority of the seats had gone to the depressed class candidates of the Congress persuasion. It is gratifying to note, however, that Ambedkar could not prevent the project of the Constituent Assembly. He should have demanded separate representation on it, as he did at the time of the Cabinet Mission Proposals. The main reason for the rout of the Scheduled Castes Federation candidates was the electoral device as agreed to by Dr. Ambedkar himself in the Poona Pact. He was further disillusioned when the Cabinet Mission's Proposals were made, abolishing the safeguards for the scheduled castes. Instead, the Mission proposed an 'Advisory Committee on Minorities' for safeguarding the minority rights, which was worse than useless in view of its proposed composition and its recommendatory capacity. Ambedkar called this Advisory Committee as 'a hoax if not a humbug', and as utterly incapable of counteracting the mischief of the Hindu majority. It must be mentioned here that he was a Member on this Committee when it was formed by the Constituent Assembly later.
In a Memorandum submitted by Ambedkar on behalf of the All-India Scheduled Castes Federation, it was once again pointed out that they were opposed to the Constituent Assembly for the following reasons:

(i) That the Constituent Assembly is unnecessary and incompetent for dealing with purely constitutional questions.

(ii) That the Constituent Assembly will be useless for dealing with communal questions, for no minority will be prepared to accept the decisions of the majority.

(iii) That the Constituent Assembly would be open to corrupt practices and it will give a free hand to a strong and wealthy party to buy members of the scheduled castes to vote with them.

(iv) That in the Constituent Assembly, the scheduled castes would be completely out-numbered and they cannot, therefore, have any effective say in its decisions.

The Memorandum also pointed out that the results of the General Elections of February, 1946 had shown that the system of Joint electorates and Reserved seats had
worked to the detriment of the Scheduled Castes. So they should be given 'Separate Electorates', as provided for in the Communal Award of 1932, if they were to have effective representation. It also demanded that the Scheduled Castes were to be given at least half the number of seats given to the Muslims in the Interim Government.

A close study of the Memorandum reveals that Ambedkar and the Scheduled Castes Federation were opposing the Constituent Assembly project not because of all the reasons they gave. Their main objection was regarding its composition. They wanted the Scheduled Castes not to be returned on the basis of the arrangements agreed upon under the Poona Pact, which had proved dangerous and a mockery of the right given to the Scheduled Castes. This conclusion can be further substantiated on the basis of the demands made by Ambedkar himself in the course of a Statement 'The Cabinet Mission and the Untouchables'.

He had realised, that due to the demands experienced by the Scheduled Castes in 1946 elections, some special guarantees were necessary by way of a new arrangement. He demanded from His Majesty's Government the following steps, in order to prevent the mischief of the dominant caste Hindus against the Untouchables in the Constituent

18. From the Private Papers of Dr. Ambedkar in the Siddartha College Library, Bombay.
1. His Majesty's Government should declare that they regard the untouchables as a minority. This is necessary in view of the statement by the Congress that they are not a minority, (Letter from the Congress dated the 25th, June, 1946 (Item 21 in Omd. 6861 ), and the same was not denied by the Viceroy in his letter of reply to the Congress.

2. A declaration as to whether His Majesty's Government will institute a machinery, if so, of what sort, to examine whether the safeguards for minorities framed by the Constituent Assembly are adequate and real.

3. His Majesty's Government should also declare if they will insist upon the Constitution framed by the Constituent Assembly containing clauses circumscribing the power of the future Indian legislature to do away with minority safeguards by bare majority. 19

Ambedkar, obviously, felt that the Cabinet Mission had not given much thought to these matters of vital importance on the question of minority safeguards. Hence, His Majesty's Government was to be pressed for such

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19. Ibid.
declarations on the rights of the Untouchables. The Cabinet Mission had recognized the Muslims and the Sikhs as separate elements, but had lumped the Scheduled Castes together with the Hindus; while His Majesty's Government had all along recognized them as a separate element in the national life of India. The declarations of Mr. Amery and others are to be recollected in this connection. The Cabinet Mission, in its part, justified their action on the basis of the February elections in which the seats reserved for the Scheduled Castes were captured by the Congress. So the Scheduled Castes and their destiny could as well be trusted to the Congress. Secondly, the mission thought, the proposed Advisory Committee on the minorities, with the representatives of the Scheduled Castes on it, will have a voice in framing the Constitution.

Ambedkar was not prepared to accept these contentions and arrangements as valid and adequate. He denied the conclusions of the Cabinet Mission and it was because of such a situation created by the Constituent Assembly project for the Untouchables, that he was calling it unnecessary and useless. If he were satisfied on the question of its composition, he would not have opposed it as the agency for writing our constitution. This is quite evident from the demands he made of the Government
of His Majesty for the Untouchables.

The outcome of the 1946 Election was a great blow to the Scheduled Castes Federation candidates. With that, the position of Ambedkar had also become weak and shaky. He demanded that all safeguards for the Untouchables should be included in the new Constitution. It was rather unfortunate that Ambedkar committed an error of judgement on this issue and thus became completely out of the pale. Ambedkar was almost faced with a crisis in his leadership of the Untouchables, who were never so hopelessly divided as during this period. He himself was in a high office as the Member of the Viceroy’s Executive Council. But there were a number of forces acting against his interests. He was called a stooge of the British; and the Untouchables were told that he was opposed to the freedom of India, and, as such, was against the freedom movement itself. Such an insinuation against him paid its dividends in as much as a large number of Untouchables found themselves in the Congress camp. The 1946 Elections proved this amply. Ambedkar was naturally shaken rudely and terribly disturbed. He tried to point out, with all the force at his command, that the Scheduled Castes were not coming in the way of the freedom of the country, and they were not trying to have a veto over her political advancement. He was only demanding for their adequate representation in the Central and the Provincial
Legislatures, Executives, Public services etc., for the Untouchables. He wanted the Cabinet Mission to include the safeguards in the new Constitution. When the Cabinet Mission published its proposals to set-up an Union of India with three different categories of Provinces; the formation of the Constituent Assembly, and an Interim Government, without any reference to the demands of the Scheduled Castes, he was completely disappointed and frustrated. This was the signal for his attack on all those responsible for the situation.

At this juncture there were acts of brutality committed upon the Scheduled Caste people, particularly in Bombay and adjoining areas. The Working Committee of the Scheduled Castes Federation met in Bombay in the first week of June, 1946 and condemned the brutalities against the Scheduled Castes and denounced the British proposals of 17th, May, 1946 as mischievous and threatened to resort to direct action if the wrong done to the Scheduled Castes was not rectified. With the decision of the British Government to set up an Interim Government on the lines of the Cabinet Mission's Proposals, Ambedkar had to lose his position as Labour Member of the Viceroy's Executive Council. He was the first Untouchable to occupy a position of such eminence in India. He had accepted that high office with the chief objective of
striving for the emancipation of the dumb and downtrodden millions, from a position of power and strength. It was perfectly within the scope of the advice he was giving his people that they should get political power to set right the wrongs done to them. An Untouchable Hindu, as he was, came to occupy the highest position in the governance of the country when he was appointed as Labour Member in the expanded Executive Council in June, 1942. Ambedkar did not, however, look upon this opportunity as the crowning success in his career, though it was one. He was painfully aware of the lot of his people and he looked upon it only as an useful opportunity for fighting for their cause. He had declared at the time of his accepting the office "that he would never surrender in the battle he would have to wage for protecting and advancing the interests of the working classes in India (of which the most numerous were the Untouchables); but added that he would not at the same time threaten his colleagues in the Cabinet with his resignation at every point of minor difference." 20 He was determined to continue his work as the leader of the Untouchables, and he very well utilised the opportunity, wherever he went, for exhorting the Untouchables to rise in revolt against their indignities. During his official tours, the language he used invoked a lot of opposition from the caste Hindus.

particularly, in the Andhra residency. While in office, he helped the formation of a new political party — the All-India Scheduled Castes Federation and kept on guiding its activities at all stages. This, however, should not imply that he was not an efficient Labour Member. He had proved himself an efficient and purposeful Labour Member.

A Period Of Crisis And Political Paralysis:

India was under a period of political transition with the Cabinet Mission's declaration to form an Interim Government forthwith. It was also a period of great trial for not only Ambedkar, but for the Untouchables as a whole as they were suddenly lumped with the caste Hindus without any special safeguards. How could they expect a better deal and justice either in the Interim Government or in the several branches of the Government? As Mr. Keer looked at it: "He(Ambedkar) knew this was the last opportunity to assert the rights and the will of his people; for he feared that a free India might revert to the old traditions, and his people would be impoverished, neglected and ostracized." Ambedkar could not allow the situation to deteriorate. He had to rise to the occasion and prove his mettle as a leader in the real sense. He had to organise and agitate. There was no

escape from it. He gave the 'clarion call' to his people to wage a war in the 'cause of justice and humanity and to expose the machinations and conspiracy hatched against the rights of his people'. So they plunged into this battle of justice and humanity by launching satyagraha. He declared that this non-violent and peaceful movement for securing political rights for the Untouchables would become a country-wide movement, if need be. In effect the struggle was one aimed mainly at the Congress, as it had arrogated to itself the claim for representing the entire body of Untouchables. Ambedkar, as always, opposed this in strong terms. This was nothing but an unmistakable exhibition of a division among the Untouchables into Congressites and non-Congressites. His leadership had, during the 1940s, come to be confined to the non-Congressite Untouchables, whose number was waning in favour of Mahatma Gandhi's leadership and the Congress. It should, however, be stated here, with all deference to Ambedkar's intellectual acumen and courage of conviction, that he did not have all the qualities of a mass leader. He was essentially an intellectual and a social revolutionary. He had no politics other than that of social upliftment of his people. In comparison with Gandhiji, Ambedkar lacked the halo and the visible identity of purpose, though no one could question his sincerity. Mahatma Gandhi, besides other things, was a man of the masses with a
special attraction for the simple, innocent masses. He appealed to the masses in such a manner as to attract them to his leadership. This was particularly successful in view of his religious-political approach. In contrast, Ambedkar was making a completely secular approach and his thinking was too radical for his times in the social sphere. There was a great gulf between him and his people in all respects. Naturally it was an uphill task for him to rally all his people under a single banner and one undisputed leadership. Ambedkar had to work under this handicap which was quite formidable. Over and above these difficulties, his acceptance of office under the British, however genuine might have been his intentions, helped to alienate him from the masses. The Gandhian appeal and approach was too very attractive to be missed sight of by the simple, unsophisticated, ignorant mass of Harijans, a Gandhian appellation, which also had its own impact against Ambedkar.

A Desperate Appeal To Britain:

When the Interim Government was announced on August 24, 1946 in which only one Untouchable member of the Congress persuasion Mr. Jagjivan Ram was included, Ambedkar was rudely shaken and terribly disappointed. His immediate reaction was to demand one more seat for the
Scheduled Castes in the Cabinet. Appeals also went to Mr. Jagjivan Ram not to join the Cabinet in view of the inadequate representation for the Untouchables. As a protest against this, the Scheduled Castes Federation continued its Satyagraha at Nagpur and other places. Ambedkar came to realise that he should make a final attempt in Britain and elsewhere for more satisfactory results. He also threatened that he might be forced to seek outside help, in order to achieve the objectives before him, on behalf of his people. In one of his statements dated 18th March, 1946 on the declaration by the British Prime Minister that the Government "cannot allow a minority to place their veto on the advance of a majority", he had observed: "the majority also shall not be allowed to dictate to the minority what political safeguards they should have."

He had also declared in the same statement: "I am bound to tell ... the scheduled castes are not quite so helpless as the British and the Hindus might think them to be. If the British and Indian nationals will not help the scheduled castes, the scheduled castes are not without friends in the nations of the world. They know whom to look for help and they know a call for help will not be a call in vain. That such a step may prove fatal to the British as well as to the Hindus, goes without
saying ..." 22 He concluded the statement by saying that if the British Government failed to remove the fears in the minds of the scheduled castes that they will not have any power and freedom to mould their destiny in the new Constitution, they will be forced "to take recourse to outside help to save themselves from the impending calamity of a naked Hindu Raj". 23

It is very difficult to get into the mind of Ambedkar to analyse this statement of his and to know what exactly he meant by this threat of invoking outside help. Besides being naive, the statement contemplated a serious and dangerous step. Of course, he had neither the time nor an opportunity to invoke the threatened outside help in view of the fast pace of developments that were taking place in the political and constitutional progress of the country at the time. He was, as many others, simply hustled through by the events. Even then he did make an attempt to contact the British leaders. He sent out telegraphic messages to Lord Petinck-Lawrence, Sir Winston Churchill, Prime Minister Attlee and others protesting against the British attitude towards the scheduled castes. He called it 'a shameful betrayal of

22. From the files containing his correspondence with the Cabinet Mission and with other leaders; at the Siddhartha College Library, Bombay.

23. Ibid.
the cause of 30 millions of Untouchables* that they
should go without representation anywhere, including
in the Constituent Assembly. He sought the intervention
of Mr. Churchill saying that the "... Future of
Untouchables very dark. stop (.) Entirely depend
upon you for safeguarding their interest". 24

Mr. Churchill's reply by cable to this appeal
is interesting. He responded to Ambedkar thus: "You
may be sure that the Conservative Party will do its
utmost to protect the future of the sixty million
Untouchables whose melancholy depression by their
coreligionists constitutes one of the gravest features
in the problem of the Indian sub-continent stop (.)
we shall take our stand on the broad principle set forth
in the American Declaration of Independence that all men
are born free and equal and entitle to Life Liberty and
the pursuit of Happiness" 25 A very strange assurance,
indeed, from a die hard Tory that was Mr. Churchill !!
The appeal and the response as well was capable of
several interpretations, specially if one were to read
in between lines. It could be interpreted to bear serious
repurcussions on the political developments and the
relations among the concerned parties. Naturally, it

24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
was disliked and criticised by an already hostile Indian public.

In another lengthy telegram to Prime Minister Attlee on 17.6.1946, Ambedkar drew the attention of Mr. Attlee to the developments and decisions at the Simla Conference. He had demanded three seats for the Scheduled Castes in the Interim Government, but was persuaded to agree for two seats only. Actually only one seat was given when the list was announced, which was a volte-face. Moreover, the only one Scheduled Caste nominee was not the nominee of the Scheduled Castes Federation, but was of the Congress. Ambedkar reiterated that the Untouchables should be represented by the nominees of the Scheduled Castes Federation alone and not of the Congress. Mr. Jagjivan Ram's appointment was a representation given to the Congress and not to the Scheduled Castes Federation, which alone represented the Untouchables. He, therefore, urged that two of the Scheduled Castes Federation's nominees should be appointed and sought the intervention of the Prime Minister to secure the same. The contents of this demand and its timing lead, naturally, to a misunderstanding of this move of his. Motives could be imputed, and were imputed. He was aware of this when he said in his telegram: "To avoid misunderstanding of my motive ... eye (I) like to state that eye (I) have no
desire to be in Interim Government and will stand out stop(•) Am fighting for rights of scheduled castes stop(•) hope there is some sense of justice left in British Government” 26

By such a desperate appeal to the British leaders at a time when feelings were mounting in the country against the continued presence of the British, he was misunderstood and misrepresented as one hoping to see the Conservatives back in power in England for protecting the interests of the Scheduled Castes! Ambedkar, as we know, even left for England to follow up, in person, his telegraphic appeals to the British leaders. He could not achieve any success in his mission and was advised by Mr. Attlee to seek solace in the Constituent Assembly and try his luck there. He had to return a disappointed man. Reporting on this visit of Ambedkar and the talks he had there, which were however, not open for the Press, an "United Press of India" message of November 6 from London commented:

It is understood, however, that Dr. Ambedkar expressed his profound disappointment at the Cabinet Mission's work. He explained to the members present the memorandum which was presented by him to Mr. Churchill and Lord Pethick-Lawrence which attempts to show

26. Ibid.
that the Congress does not represent untouchables. He demanded the abrogation of the Poona Pact signed by himself and Mahatma Gandhi and demanded the restoration of separate electorates as envisaged in Mac Donald's Communal Award.

Dr. Ambedkar has, however, little hopes of succeeding in his mission except in Mr. Churchill being returned to power.

The Labour Members questioned him closely which indicated that the Party in power 'is in no mood of raking up the whole communal issue'. He was told, it is learned, to adjust himself to the changed situation and try his luck in the Constituent Assembly.

The 'United Press of India' understands that Dr. Ambedkar is soon leaving for India, a disappointed man. 27

In such a depressing situation, Ambedkar "was facing a political paralysis, and it was a very severe blow to the life-long efforts which he had made towards the cause of the Untouchables. His only point was that the scheduled castes should be given due representation in the executives and Legislatures. He was working desperately to achieve that end..." 28

27. Bombay Chronicle, 7.11.1946.
The foregoing analysis provides the key for a clear understanding of the nature and seriousness of the problem he was facing, and also to the way in which his mind was working. As can be seen, Ambedkar, as always, had maintained that the Congress could not claim to represent the Untouchables. It was the Scheduled Castes Federation that should be recognised as the party of the Untouchables for all intents, and, as such, its nominees alone can represent their interests. The Conservative Government appeared to have accepted the contention, as can be seen from the provisions for safeguarding the interests of the Untouchables all along. But with the coming into power of the Labour Party in Britain, the position seemed to have undergone a thorough change. It was one of anxiety and hurry to transfer power to the Indians, and thereby putting an end to the political stalemate in the subcontinent at the earliest date possible. The Cabinet Mission's work hastened the process. To any one reading the Mission's Report, it would be obvious that they were anxious to minimise the difficulties in the way and the Mission chose to lump the Untouchables along with the Hindus for purposes of representation etc. Secondly, the results of the February election also indicated that the Congress had the mandate of the Untouchables in as much as a greater number of seats for them were captured by the Congress,
and not by the Scheduled Castes Federation. So the
Cabinet Mission did not find it necessary at all to
continue to treat the scheduled castes as a separate
element in the political life of India. In other words,
the Cabinet Mission was anxious to minimise the hurdles
in the way of transferring power. Ambedkar could not
reconcile to this change in the political climate of the
country consequent to the change in the ruling party, and
found himself in a very awkward position. He was not a
man to reconcile to situations and policies which were
opposed to his own approach and intents. He was not
shrewd enough in this regard. In retrospect, it is
possible for us to hold now, that it would have been a
wiser step on his part to reconcile himself to the new
situation and to wait for an opportunity in the Constituent
Assembly, where he could expect to get an opportunity,
to help his people, in view of his recognised abilities
in the field of constitutional law. In fact, as we know,
he became the chief draftsman of the constitution of free
India. It was a wrong strategy on his part to have taken
recourse to desperate steps to achieve the most legitimate
and justifiable goal he had before him. He should not
have allowed himself to be denigrated as a beneficiary
of the Tories, and secondly, his threat to seek the help
of an outside power, perhaps Japan besides Britain, was
again an highly imprudent and impolitic approach. In
fact by such an approach and lashing out, the tables were
turned against him; and the wind was taken away from his
sails when the Muslim League, which had refused to join the Interim Government, decided to join. One of the nominees of the League was an Untouchable, Mr. Jogendranath Mandal, who was appointed as Law Minister in the Interim Cabinet. It is very interesting to know that Mr. Mandal was a Member of the Working Committee of the Scheduled Castes Federation and he was brought in as the nominee of the League! Moreover, he was given the Law portfolio which, perhaps, would have been occupied by Ambedkar with ability, if he were to be included in the Interim Cabinet. With Mr. Mandal's addition there were two Untouchables in the Interim Government. Thus the uncalled for heat that was generated subsided abruptly, which only shows that Ambedkar need not have become so desperate and taken recourse to such undesirable steps. He rather overdid his role as the leader of the Untouchables during this crucial period in Indian politics.

It must also be mentioned here that Ambedkar was considering the possibility of taking the question of the Untouchables to the newly born United Nations Organisation. This is revealed in a letter he wrote to one Professor Dubois at the University of Atlanta, Georgia, U.S.A. In the letter dated nil, but despatched to Prof. Dubois on July 2, 1946, Ambedkar requested him to send some papers which would be helpful in taking the question of the
Untouchables to the J.N.O. The letter runs thus:

Although I have not met you personally, I know you by name as everyone else who is working in the cause of securing liberty to the oppressed people. I belong to the Untouchables of India and perhaps you might have heard of me. I have been a student of the Negro problem and have read your writings throughout. There is so much similarity between the position of the Untouchables in India and of the position of the Negroes in America that the study of the latter is not only natural but also necessary.

I was very much interested to read that the Negroes of America have filed a petition to the J.N.O. The Untouchables of India are also thinking of following suit. Will you be so good as to secure for me two or three copies of this representation of the Negroes and send them to my address? I need hardly say how very grateful I shall be for your trouble in this behalf. 29

He however did not pursue the matter. In the meantime, the British Government announced that it would hand over power by June 1948 either to a Central Government or to the existing Provincial Governments in India, in the absence of an agreement among the Indians. Lord Louis

29. From the Files containing his correspondence with the Cabinet Mission and with other leaders, at the Siddhartha College Library, Bombay.
Mountbatten was sent as the Viceroy of India in place of Lord Wavell and the trend was towards an immediate implementation of the aforesaid proposal of the British Government to transfer power within the deadline.

The Dawn of Freedom:

The situation in the country was very tense when Lord Mountbatten arrived in India. His chief task was to implement the policy of His Majesty's Government as contained in Prime Minister Attlee's statement of 20th February 1947 to the British Parliament. The statement had declared in categorical terms that the intention of the British Government was to transfer power to Indian hands not later than June 1948. Lord Mountbatten had the onerous task of bringing about the transfer in a manner that would ensure the happiness and prosperity of the people in the subcontinent. The British Government's plan to transfer power, possibly to the then existing provincial governments or to some form of a combined government for parts of India, invoked resentment from the Congress circles particularly, as it meant anarchy and an open invitation to separatist forces. As Mr. V.V. Menon looked at the proposal: "...It had dangerous implications. It was a direct invitation to Jinnah's intransigence to stand out and form a separate state with
the Muslim-majority provinces, and it was an encouragement to the big Indian states, like Hyderabad, to stand out for independence. In the circumstances of that time, with people in a state of great commotion, many of them being armed, it was an invitation to sheer anarchy."

But with the clever and timely intervention, behind the scene, by Mr. V.P. Menon who was then the Constitutional Adviser to the Viceroy, this calamity was averted and a new plan, drafted by Mr. Menon himself, was taken up for consideration. The plan, which is famous as the 'Mountbatten or the June 3, Plan', was accepted by the Indian National Congress, the Muslim League and other parties as the best possible solution in the circumstances. 'The Great Acceptance', as Alan Campbell Johnson called it, was possible because of the most tactful handling and persuasive and friendly influence of Lord Louis Mountbatten. He is, therefore, entitled for his own rightful place in the constitutional history of India.

The Plan provided for the partition of the country and it also advanced the date for the transfer of power, for the communal tension was mounting higher and higher. To quote Mr. Menon again: "...Mountbatten was more strongly convinced than ever that if the transfer of power were not implemented quickly the situation would..."
get out of control. The Services began to take sides, especially in the Punjab, and the army, the last instrument in the hands of the Government to hold the situation, would also be contaminated before long by the communal virus. The Viceroy, in spite of the great practical difficulties in the way, decided to advance the date of handing over of power. 31 Lord Mountbatten made it clear, in a Press Conference he addressed on 4th June 1947, that the date for transfer would not be June 1948, but it 'could be about the 15th August' 1947.

The June 3 Plan was well received throughout the world as a bold and statesmanly solution to resolve the Indian deadlock and the Labour Government was praised for its sagacity and nobility in deciding to transfer power to India. It may be worthwhile to quote Mr. Walter Lippman, the well-known American political commentator, who wrote in The Washington Post:

Perhaps Britain's finest hour is not in the past. Certainly this performance is not the work of a decadent people. This on the contrary is the work of political genius requiring the ripest wisdom and the freshest vigour, and it is done with an elegance and a style that will compel and will receive and instinctive respect throughout the civilised world. Attlee and Mountbatten have done a service to all mankind by showing what statesmen can do, not with force and money

but with lucidity, resolution and sincerity. 32

The implementation of the Plan was a stupendous task which should have taken years, but had to be implemented in the course of a few weeks! Despite the stupendous nature of the job, it had to be accomplished, and power was transferred strictly according to schedule.

In London, the Indian Independence Bill was presented before the Parliament on July 4, 1947 and was enacted on July 18, 1947 — a record time for any legislative measure. The objective of the Indian Independence Act, 1947 was to give effect to the Mountbatten Plan and legalise the promises that were already made. The Act provided for partitioning India and establishing two Dominions of India and Pakistan. The new Dominions were to be governed under the provisions of the Act of 1935 till a Constitution of their own was framed and adopted. It abolished the post of the Secretary of State for India and dropped the title of 'Emperor of India' from the titles of the English monarchs. The Act of 1947 was a great landmark in the Anglo-Indian relations. It marked the end of the British rule in India. It was after all the last but, nevertheless, the noblest and greatest law ever

enacted by the British Parliament. With the dawn of independence, Indians were released from the bondage of nearly two centuries under the British and became a free people of a free nation.

Ambedkar, fortunately, was resiling from his position of opposition to the Constituent Assembly project. He was quick to grasp the new trend and came out in a spirit of co-operation to realise his objectives in the Constituent Assembly. As he was a pronounced and uncompromising critic of the Congress, the Congress did not sponsor his candidature to the Constituent Assembly, nor he could expect it. However, he got elected from the Bengal Assembly, as he had no supporters in the Bombay Assembly. Now the stage was set for his launching into the field of constitution-making. He restated his thoughts on the nature of safeguards that were essential for the Untouchables in the wake of his experiences with the Cabinet Mission proposals. He made out a case for separate electorates in a modified form to have it only in those constituencies in which seats were reserved for them and in others they were to vote jointly. He prepared a Memorandum in March, 1947, laying down his view which was published under the title States and Minorities. This gave a good start for him in the Constituent Assembly.
As Dr. M. V. Pylee puts it: "... subsequent developments culminating in the partition of the country made him realise that political realities demanded a moderate attitude on his part towards those who had in their hands effective political power. The Congress leaders responded to this gesture so generously that they elected him the Chairman of the Drafting Committee. They could not have made a decision which was or could be more right. For, Ambedkar not only fully justified his selection but added lustre to the work he undertook." Thus ended a period of great turmoil and tension in his public life as well in the life of the country; and a new period of constructive and fruitful activity opened up with the dawn of Indian independence on August 15, 1947.