Simon Commission and the Liberal Attitude -

"My general impression is that", wrote Lord Irwin, who had succeeded Lord Reading in April 1926, "politics in India is somewhat receding into the background partly from the realisation of the fact that hitherto they have been disappointingly negative, and that after all the thunder the landscape remained where they were; also because they are, as you know, being obliterated by communal strife ... I think there is ... a considerable desire to give politics a rest and to devote more attention to less sterile matters". To this Birkenhead replied: "I have a feeling that if you handle the situation with subtlety, a very promising political prospect may now develop; the Swarajists are down. The Hindu-Muslim dissensions have destroyed Gandhi's dream."

Thus by the middle of 1926 the political situation seemed to be one of relative equilibrium though an extremely unstable equilibrium. But Irwin, when he wrote these words, had certainly 'no inkling that his viceroyalty would coincide with a grand climacteric in the affairs of the sub-continent'. As Lord Reading had rightly said that his successor would pass through a period of comparative calm during the first eighteen

1. Irwin to Birkenhead, 9 June 1926, Halifax Collection, op. cit., Letters to Secretary of State for India, April to December 1926, pp. 30-31.

2. Same to same, 24 February 1927, ibid., Letters to Secretary of State for India, January to December 1927, p. 19.
months which would be only a lull before the storm. And the storm was brought by the Government itself.

The Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms had been tentative and the British Parliament had arranged to send a commission of enquiry to India, after a decade of the Reforms, to report on their 'operation, success and failure and their possible improvement'. The appointment of the Royal Commission was not, therefore, due until 1929. But Lord Birkenhead, the Secretary of State for India was unwilling 'to run the slightest risk of its nomination by a Labour Government'. "You can readily imagine", he told the Viceroy, "what kind of a commission in its personnel would have been appointed by Colonel Wedgwood and his friends. I have, therefore, throughout, been of the clear opinion that it would be necessary for us, as a matter of elementary prudence, to appoint the commission not later than 1927 ... we must keep the nomination of the personnel of this commission in our own hands". He therefore decided to appoint a commission before 'the swing of the political pendulum' brought the Labour Party once more into power. Accordingly a Bill was passed amending the relevant section of the Government of India Act in order to enable the appointment of the commis-

6. Ibid., p. 512.
7. A Bill to amend Section 84A of the Govt. of India Act with respect to the time for the appointment of a Statutory Commission thereunder, P.P., Commons, 1927, vol. 2, (cmd. 204), pp. 79-80.
sion two years ahead of the schedule.

It seems that Birkenhead's mind was absolutely open in the beginning in the matter of the composition of the commi-

sion. But the Viceroy was unwilling to have a mixed commi-

sion including Indians. The Viceroy had been convinced by his

own advisers in India that a British Commission chosen from both

the Houses of Parliament would satisfy the Liberals who would,
in turn, act as softening influence upon the more extreme

policies of the Congress. He had also been told that as the

Moslems would support the commission, the Hindus, fearing that

the Moslems might thus gain the sympathy of the Government, would

not try to boycott it. He was therefore sure that Hindus would

not boycott the commission and hoped to rely on two prin-
cipal elements - the Moslems, and the Liberals.  


9. Birkenhead to Irwin, 29 July 1926, Halifax Collection, op. cit., Letters from Secretary of State for India, April to December 1926, pp. 68-89.

10. Irwin to Birkenhead, 19 August 1926, ibid., Letters to Secretary of State for India, January to December 1926, p. 79. Also same to same, 17 November 1926, ibid., p. 153; also same to same, 6 January 1927, Letters to Secretary of State for India, January to December 1927, p. 5, same to same, 11 May 1927, encl. Notes on Composition of Statutory Commission, 10 May 1927, ibid., pp.100-101; also same to same, 27 January 1927, ibid., pp.2-3.


12. Irwin to Birkenhead, 3 November 1927, Halifax Collection, op. cit., Letters to Secretary of State for India, January to December 1927, pp. 200-08a.

also proposed to hold talk with Gandhi and Patel, Sapru, Jayakar, Malavya and Jinnah 'to keep them straight'. Thus relying on the advice of the Provincial Governors and the members of his Council together with private conversations with a variety of officials and non-officials, Irwin assured Birkenhead that anything like a complete boycott to a purely parliamentary commission was not to be anticipated.

Those who advised the Viceroy against a parliamentary commission dwelt upon the unwisdom of giving the Swarajists what would be represented as a racial grievance by a departure from normal practice in the appointment of the commission, at the very moment that they were finding themselves in an 'unprofitable cul de sac'. Such action would give them new vigour and might well drive the present supporters of Government into the extremist camp.

Sapru also warned the British Government in a similar strain and Sapru's warning proved to be prophetic. On 8

14. Same to same, 18 October 1927, ibid., p. 208.
15. Same to same, 3 November 1927, ibid., p. 208a.
16. Same to same, 2 June 1927, ibid., p. 127.
17. "If Lord Birkenhead means business", Sapru wrote in the Times of India, "and does not mean merely to feed us upon long ovations which he had been delivering in the House of Lords and if he is at all serious in his invitations to Indians to co-operate, he ought not to take a leaf out of the book of the non-cooperators ... It is possible for the Government of India and Lord Birkenhead to take their stand upon the high and dry principle of having a judicial commission but I repeat confidently that that will be the surest way of alienating their best friends and shaking such little confidence in the conservative Government it may be enjoying even in some quarters in India." Times of India, 28 June 1927, also Pioneer, 29 June 1927.
November 1927 the composition of the commission was announced by the Viceroy, and all organised sections of political opinion in India joined together to deny all help to the Simon Commission in its enquiries. Irwin now perceived how mistakenly his advisers had assumed that, because the Moslems would offer their co-operation with the commission, the Hindus would not dare to boycott it and that the Liberals would stand by constitutional progress.

Certain arguments, indeed, were advanced for the exclusion of Indians; that a Royal Commission answerably to the British Parliament had necessarily to choose its personnel from that Parliament, that the representation of various interests would make the commission an unwieldy body, that the political and religious differences in India would make the prospect of an agreed report infinitely remote. The fact was that Birkenhead later became afraid that 'an unreal alliance' might be created between the British Labour M.P.s and Indian members for producing a scheme which might not be acceptable to the Conservatives.

From the Indian point of view one major flaw in the composition of the commission was that no Indian was represented in it. They thought that the commission's task would be to

17a. Statement published on 8 November 1927 by the Governor-General of India, P.P., Commons, 1927, vol. 18 (cmd. 2986), p. 5.
decide the political future of India and the Indian people, and
give evidence of a fundamental dishonesty of purpose. The announce-
ment of the commission, therefore, brought the Liberals who had
tried to work the constitution before, and had suffered an
eclipse on that account, into limelight again. They were par-
ticularly disillusioned at the failure of England in this acid
test of her bona fides to India and were vehement in their denun-
cia tion of this all-white commission since it gave the coup de
grace to their cherished ideal of Indo-British collaboration.

The appointment of the commission was a direct affront partic-
ularly to the Indian Liberals. Never during the last sixty
years had a Royal Commission been appointed to enquire into
Indian affairs in which they had not been included as full mem-
bers. But now they were excluded from a commission appointed
to consider the important question of determining the political
future of India.

21. Presidential address at the tenth session of N.L.P. of

22. C. Sankaran Nair, 'Indian Commission. A Criticism',
Contemporary Review, 1928, vol. 133, pp. 160-68. Also
C. S. Sivaswamy Aiyar, 'A Brand of Insecurity and a National Insult', Hindua-
Chintamani, 'Our Attitude Towards the Statutory Commission',
Ibid., pp. 124-26, also Mrs. Annie Besant, 'Lord Birken-
head's Casuities on the Royal Commission', ibid., pp. 107-09.
The personnel of the commission was also dissatisfactory to them. Barring Sir John Simon who was a front ranking statesman, the rank and file of the commission were composed of men of what Sapru called 'second flight'. The majority of the members - Viscount Burnham, Lord Stratherona and Mount Royal, Mr. Cadogan, Colonel Lane Fox - were Conservatives. Lord Burnham was the proprietor of the *Daily Telegraph*, which, with the *Morning Post*, had stoutly opposed the Reforms of 1919. These four members, if they were true to their principle were likely to present a report proving at least to the satisfaction of the Conservative Party then in power, that no greater mistake was made than the Reforms introduced in 1919, that they had proved not only a failure but also mischievous, and that this imposition of western constitutional ideas must be stopped in Indian interest once for all. Among the other members Sir John Simon was a prominent Liberal statesman; but he was the only Liberal on the commission and it was doubtful whether he inherited the tradition of Gladstone. On a question like this he was, however, not likely to submit a dissenting report. The other two members belonged to the Labour Party; but they were the nominees of Mr. Ramsay Macdonald, between whom and the rank and file of the Labour Party there was a great split so far as India was concerned.


So the Liberal felt that they could not look for a sympathetic understanding of their situation from men 'all of them English, most of them Conservatives, and all of them profiting indirectly from British control of Indian trade and finance'.

It was urged by Lord Birkenhead that the framers of the Government of India Act contemplated a purely parliamentary commission. But in the opinion of the Liberal Party, upon a dispassionate examination of things, there was nothing in the relevant section of the Government of India Act to warrant the conclusion that Parliament intended in 1919 that the commission to be appointed under that section should consist wholly and entirely of its members. There was nothing in the language of the section which prevented the Secretary of State from proposing a mixed commission for the concurrence of Parliament. But even if the statute had so contemplated, the Liberals thought, that they could have included two Indian members of the Parliament, Lord Sinha from the House of Lords and Saklatvala from the Commons. Secondly a mixed commission was refused on the ground that it would be impossible

26. Ibid.
to get a fairly representative commission; but the Liberals pointed out that commissions were not constituted on the same basis of representation as the Legislative Council. The only effect of argument of this character was to give an impetus to class consciousness and stimulate differences. They pointed out that they did not want on the mixed commission representatives to urge the claims of the special interests. But Indian public opinion wanted on a mixed commission Indian statesmen above class interests with knowledge and ability to frame that constitution. The other objection advanced by Lord Birkenhead was that a mixed and unwieldy commission could not produce an unanimous report and that there was bound to be a multiplicity of contradictory reports. As against this they said that even commission of eighteen persons such as the Macdonald Commission had not been unknown in England and that the statement was put forward on the assumption that Indian members were bound to be representatives of class interests. It was no doubt possible that, even otherwise there might be an

Indian dissenting report. But it was a poor compliment, the Liberals thought, to the capacity of the Parliament that it would not be able to judge between the dissentient reports. The real reason, in the opinion of Sir Sankaran Nair, was that experience had no doubt satisfied Lord Birkenhead that Indian representation might carry greater weight with the Parliament and with a fair parliamentary commission than the report of an English commission. The first report of the Government of India under Lord Chelmsford contained a minute of dissent by the Indian member which was accepted by the Conservative Secretary of State. But Lord Birkenhead avoided any reference to this in his speech. The subsequent report of the Government of India also was accompanied by a minute


36. Secret Despatch from the Governor-General-in-Council to His Majesty's Secretary of State for India, 24 November 1918, Chelmsford Papers, op. cit., vol. 34, pp. 1-27.

37. Ibid., pp. 1-14.


of dissent from the Indian member, and the Joint Committee accepted all the material recommendations of the Indian member, discarding the views of the Government of India. It was this contingency that Lord Birkenhead wished to avoid. The minority argument of Lord Birkenhead was also dismissed. The Liberals pointed out that Lord Birkenhead was showing no concern for the minority in South Africa, and that minorities in Canada 'proved no hurdle in her political emancipation'. Lastly, the Liberals said that the real nature of the scheme of committees of Indian Central and Provincial Legislatures, as propounded by Lord Birkenhead for co-operating with the Simon Commission, was that they were not in truth equal of the commission. They would not share the responsibility of making any proposals, submitting any reports to Parliament or voting at the sittings of the commission; their function would be merely to assist the commission by placing their proposal before it and the commission might accept or reject them. "The position of those committees", observed Chintamani, "would be like the position of the co-opted members of the Southborough


41. Speech by H.N. Kunzru at the tenth session of N.L.F. of India, 1927, Bengalee, 28, 29 December 1927.

42. Presidential Address by Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru at the tenth session of the N.L.F. of India, 1927, Ibid.

43. Ibid.
"I was seated", said he, "by the side of the Dacca members and I was allowed to cross examine the Secretaries to the Government and other witnesses... But when the examination... was over the whole business for me... was to take my ticket from Lucknow to Allahabad". Thus they would have no more status and no more power than submitting their views as any other witness.

In defence of Liberal Party's position for boycott of the Simon Commission Sapru quoted from Colonel Wedgwood's letter to Lala Lajpat Rai where he said: "Petitioning for little scraps of Liberty is a dirty business, and there has been too much of it... I was always against non-cooperation... But this commission does not require your help. There is no need to stand in the witness box and be cross examined by persons of no great importance who have not shown any great interest in your views or feelings" and that being the real nature of the association offered to India in the work of determining her political future, India with self respect could not agree to accept the position.

Sapru, presiding over a meeting of the Liberal Party at Madras, said that it should repudiate - not only the commission

44. The Committees appointed in 1919 to determine Franchise and Function.


47. Liberal Manifesto adopted at the tenth Annual session of N.L.F. of India, 1927, *ibid.*
but the entire spirit in which the question of India's further
advance had been approached.

The announcement of the Simon Commission thus healed
temporarily the breach between the Moderates and the Extremists. In their annual sessions at the end of December both
the Congress and the Liberals resolved to boycott the commis-
49
son.

All Parties Conference : Nehru Report -

Motilal Nehru was now thinking of collaborating with the
Liberal leader, Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, in devising a constitu-
tion that would secure India's unity 'over and above the com-
mission and inspite of Lord Birkenhead'. The Leader supported
this 'positive response' to the situation:"Let us", it admonish-
ed, "put our houses in order ... and formulate a united nation-
alist demand. The boycott of the commission is a negative act.

48. Ibid., pp. 422-32.

49. As to the actual programme of boycott there was however
a difference between the Congress and Liberals. The
Liberals professed their determination merely to keep
aloof from the commission and have nothing to do with
them at any stage or in any form. But the Congress, while
elaborating this aspect of the programme and prohibiting
attendance at social functions given to the commission,
also resolved to organise mass demonstrations on the day
of the arrival of the commission in India and similar
demonstrations in various cities which the commission
might visit. This part of the programme was repudiated
by the Liberals. Resolutions passed at the tenth session
of N.L.P. of India and forty second session of I.N.C.,
December 1927, Leader, 30 December 1927. Also Viceroy to
Secretary of State, 8 January 1928, G of I, Home Pol.
no. 26/1928.
It should be followed by constructive effort." As early as 1925 Lord Birkenhead had challenged the Indians to produce a constitution of their own. In his address to the Legislative Assembly on 20 August 1925, instead of announcing a Round Table Conference or a commission consisting of Indian and British leaders, Lord Hading repeated the challenge of Lord Birkenhead to the Indians to produce a constitution of their own. In 1927 Lord Birkenhead again criticised the attitude of Indians in not co-operating with the Simon Commission. He challenged them to produce a scheme for the constitution of India instead of indulging in merely destructive criticism of Government plans.

Accordingly the Working Committee of the Congress summoned an All Parties Conference which held its first sitting on 12 February 1928 at Delhi under the chairmanship of Dr. M. A. Ansari. After crossing many hurdles, chiefly created by the difference between Hindus and Moslems points of view, the All Parties Conference again met in Bombay in May 1928 and appointed a committee under the chairmanship of Pundit Motilal Nehru. Pundit Nehru and Sapru then jointly drafted a valuable report.

50. Leader, 25 December 1927.
53. Birkenhead to Irwin, 9 February 1928, Halifax Collection, op. cit., Letters from Secretary of State for India, January to December 1928, p. 20.
54. Same to same, 22 February 1928, ibid., p. 26.
which provided that India was to be given an equality of status with other self-governing dominions and that the India office was to be abolished. Full responsible Government a phrase designed to cover Dominion Status was to be conferred upon India. The report discarded separate electorate but said that there was to be reservation of seats for ten years to Moslems in Provinces where they constituted a minority and to non-Moslem minorities in the North Western Frontier Provinces and Baluchistan. Sind was to become a separate Province with a Moslem majority. As regards Swaraj constitution India was to be a commonwealth including the Indian states on certain conditions. There was provision for direct election by adult suffrage. It also included a declaration of fundamental rights and made provision for a secular state.

This constitution was considered at a meeting of the All Parties Conference held at Lucknow between 28 August and 31 August 1928. It was the subject of further discussion at an All Parties National Convention which was held in Calcutta on 22 December 1928 and subsequent days when Jinnah presented his fourteen points. Hindu Muslim differences prevented an agree-

56. Ibid., p. 123.
57. Ibid., p. 125.
58. Ibid., p. 122.
59. Ibid., pp. 101-03.
ment being reached on both these occasions. The report contained provisions which the Muhammedans could not accept. For there was to be no reservation of seats except in Provinces where the Muslims were a minority and this dealt a severe blow to their hopes of obtaining the majority of seats in the Bengal and Punjab Councils and to their demand for continuance of separate electorate.

"The Nehru Report was the constructive aspect of the boycott" and Sapru admitted his substantial role in the Committee. Mahatma Gandhi in appreciating the Nehru Report paid a special tribute to the Liberals saying, "the Liberals led by Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru lent a weight to the conference which it otherwise would have lacked." Though communal differences remained unsolved, the Liberal Party's ideal of Dominion Status was accepted as the highest commonly agreed goal. Thus the report breathed an outlook of wide generosity and was a remarkable testimony to the constitution making abilities of Motilal Nehru and Tej Bahadur Sapru.

Irwin's October Declaration —

After a 'survey' of the political scene by mid 1929 Irwin

60. Leader, 1, 2 September 1928, 23, 30 December 1928. Also Bengal, 2 September 1928, 30, 31 December 1928.
61. S. Gopal, op. cit., p. 29.
62. Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru's speech at the eleventh session of the N.L.F. of India, December 1928, Leader, 2 January 1929.
came to realise that the composition of the commission had severely wounded Indian pride and that some genuine gesture was necessary to heal the wound. Sir Chimanlal Setalvad had earlier pointed out to him that the Hindu Liberals had been deeply concerned at the growing influence of extremism in the Congress and that they wanted from him a conciliatory gesture. "I pressed him," he wrote to the Secretary of State, "as to what this meant and the nearest that I could get to his mind was that at some stage the spokesman of His Majesty's Government should make it plain that it was our object to lead India to Dominion Status, and that once this had been said, the ways and means of doing so would be less intractable ... I give you this for what it is worth ... because it is indicative of what I more and more come to believe is true, namely that in nearly all quarters except the most extreme there would be very genuine relief if some face saving device which afforded an excuse for the introduction of saner counsels could be found."

The Viceroy therefore went home in the summer of 1929 to talk things with the Labour Cabinet. Sapru wished Irwin 'bon voyage' and 'every success in your high mission'.

66. Ibid.
67. Sapru to Irwin, 23 July 1929, Sapru Papers.
also in touch with V.J. Patel and T.B. Sapru. "You may rest assured", he wrote to Sapru, "that I shall do everything in my power that may lead to a solution of our present difficulties, and I am sure that I can count upon your help in that direction at this end." Irwin's task was facilitated by MacDonald's astute decision to appoint Wedgwood Benn as Labour Secretary of State for India. Benn was a former Liberal and an experienced parliamentarian and an advocate of constitutional process. "The Secretary of State for India is a very fine man ..." wrote Kunzru to Kodanda Rao from London, "He will fight for us as hard as he can." Once Benn told a Labour M.P. that he did not know much about India, 'on the principle that cabinet ministers should be appointed to the post about which they know the least' but Graham Pole assured Sapru that "Benn is entirely with us and working magnificently ... (and) regards himself as representing Indians and not British." So in Benn Irwin found a sympathetic colleague and made it clear to him that it was necessary to assure Indian politicians that the goal of India's political status should not be less than that of the

69. Irwin to Sapru, 24 June 1929, Sapru Papers.
70. 'I am not afraid', wrote Irwin to his father, 'of any policy they are likely to produce as long as the direction remains in the same hands as at present. I think Wedgwood Benn ought to be rather good for the India Office ... I have no doubt I shall get on with him'. The Second Earl of Birkenhead, Halifax, op. cit., p. 222.
72. Major D. Grahampole to Sapru, 1 November 1929, Sapru Papers.
Dominions and that the purpose of convening a conference was to consider what steps could be taken to attain that status. On his return to India he made a far reaching announcement with the concurrence of the Labour Government at home on 31 October 1929 by which he declared that India's goal was to be Dominion Status to which Britain was pledged and that after the publication of Simon Report His Majesty's Government would send for the representatives of the Indian people at a conference in London.

The Liberals were delighted at this outcome. 'It gives us', Sapru told Irwin, 'an excellent opportunity of putting our case before His Majesty's government'. A conference of leaders of all parties immediately met at Delhi in November of the same year to confer on the announcement and Gandhiji himself drafted the resolution which was discussed and adopted with Sapru's amendment which on the whole accepted and welcomed the new policy. A Manifesto was issued under the signature of the most prominent leaders, including Gandhiji and Motilal Nehru. It expressed appreciation of the sincerity underlying the Viceroy's pronouncement and offered co-operation to evolve

73. The First Earl of Halifax, op. cit., p. 117.
75. Sapru to Irwin, 30 October 1929, Sapru Papers.
a Dominion Constitution for India. The signatories expressed their belief that the business of the proposed Round Table Conference would be 'not to discuss when Dominion Status is to be established, but to frame a scheme of Dominion Constitution for India'. They also urged that a general amnesty should be declared before the Conference met, and the Indian National Congress should have predominant representation in the Conference.

Thus the acceptance of the Round Table Conference was secured without insistence on certain conditions precedent. Actually the Manifesto was a triumph for the Moderates because they had succeeded in persuading the Congress leaders to put their signatures to a document in which co-operation was promised 'not with binding conditions but with strong recommendations'.

Irwin was satisfied. "The predominant feeling in all circles," he wrote to Wedgwood Benn, "is in favour of co-operation with government, that as things stand at present Congress leaders ... do not seriously expect their conditions expressed in the form of hopes to be taken too seriously ... They all appreciate (our position) and I think honestly do not wish to be more embarrassing to us than is necessary to enable them to carry their left tail along with them." Sapru was 77

77. Ibid.

78. Irwin to Wedgwood Benn, 6 November 1929, Halifax Collection, op. cit., Letters to Secretary of State for India, January to December 1929, pp. 157-58.
also delighted at this outcome. 'The leading Congressmen', he said, 'who had in the past refused to co-operate with the Government had now said they were willing to tender their co-operation'.

The Debate in Parliament -

But the question of asserting India's political goal to be the attainment of Dominion Status roused a serious political controversy in Parliament. The statement had sparked off a political crisis. Ramsay MacDonald's Labour Government did not command a majority in the House of Commons and it was dependent upon the Liberal M.P.s to keep it in office. While there was a general agreement in regard to a Round Table Conference, the Conservative and Liberal leaders were opposed to the declaration regarding Dominion Status for India, and an acrimonious debate followed in Parliament. The legal minds of Birkenhead and Reading were agitated over the use of the term Dominion Status, which had acquired an exact and legal meaning since the Imperial Conference of 1936. They could never contemplate that India, with its communal differences, its many languages and religions, its Indian states and British Indian Provinces and, last but not least, its inability to defend itself, could ever attain Dominion Status after the manner of Canada, Australia and South Africa. So it was urged

79. Sapru to Irwin, 11 November 1929, Sapru Papers.
by them that the term Dominion Status could not be appropriately used to describe the next stage of Indian Constitutional Reforms. Irwin thus at once found himself up against Lord Reading. The Debate in Parliament began on 5 November with Lord Reading attacking Irwin's announcement in the House of Lords. He emphatically objected to the expression Dominion Status when the Statutory Commission had not expressed their judgement on the future Indian Constitutions; Lord Birkenhead speaking next to Lord Reading asked the members of the Simon Commission 'to treat that which the Government have instructed or authorised the Viceroy to do as irrelevance in the old classic phrase as impertinence'. Lord Parmoor and Lord Passfield were anxious to secure a Government majority and defended the Viceroyal statement in a half-hearted manner.

Discussions in the Commons were to cast a still deeper gloom. Lloyd George, the leader of the Liberal Party, implied that Dominion Status declaration was a form of unnecessary appeasement, while Stanley Baldwin the Conservative leader was evasive. His speech was "wrapped round in ponderous rhetoric, simple thought and resounding generalities". He admitted that he personally approved the statement concerning Dominion

82. Ibid., p. 407.
83. Ibid., pp. 388-400, 415-22.
84. Ibid., Commons, 1929-30, vol. 231, pp. 1314-23.
Status but later he learnt that members of the Simon Commission had not approved the statement, and for that reason he informed the Government that the Conservatives could not support such a statement.

A powerful and influential section of the British press and public opinion also insisted on a definite assurance from the Prime Minister that the Viceroy’s declaration involved no fresh departure from the preamble to the Government of India Act, 1919. At last the controversy was set at rest by the interchange of correspondence between Baldwin and the Prime Minister, Ramsay Macdonald. Baldwin, under pressure from the rank and file members of the Parliamentary Party, had to secure an understanding from Ramsay Macdonald that the statement did not mean any departure from the Government policy as contained in the Montagu declaration. In reply to the letter of Baldwin, the Prime Minister said that the preamble of the Government of India Act of 1919 stood unchanged unless and until Parliament would decide to amend the Act, and that there would be no resiling from the last Government announcement.

The debate in Parliament destroyed 'the emotional bridge' that Sapru had sought to build between the Government and the Congress since Irwin's last October declaration. The debate

87. Especially the campaign of Daily Mail and Daily Express.
evoked much hostile criticism of the proposed Round Table Conference. The general impression, left on the public mind by the reactionary debate in Parliament and reinforced by the publication of the subsequent correspondence between the Premier and Baldwin, was very discouraging. It was now being realised that the Viceroy's announcement was nothing more than a camouflaged version of the declaration of 1917 and that it was nothing more than a device to rally the Moderates among the Indian politicians. The Liberals, too, regretted the debate in Parliament but they recognised that behind the debate lurked the exigencies of party politics in Britain and, notwithstanding the unfavourable impression created by Mr. Lloyd George's speech in the House of Commons and the extremely discouraging speeches delivered in the House of Lords by some statesmen, they thought that the situation had not materially been affected and that a conciliatory policy would emerge at no distant date since Wedgwood's speech in the Commons was quite hopeful.

So Sapru in co-operation with Jinnah and Patel, set himself to the task of repairing the damage. He had learnt from a meeting with Motilal Nehru that the Congress Working Committee would decide at their forthcoming meeting of 16 November to go back upon the acceptance of invitation to the proposed Round Table Conference. Sapru pointed out to him the in-

89. Sapru to Patel, 5 November 1929, Sapru Papers.
90. Same to same, 11 November 1929, ibid.
advisability of such a course and dangerous repercussion of it in both India and in England, that the enemies of Indian progress would very much like the chances of the Conference taking place in London and being attended by the Congressmen to be spoilt. They would welcome a decision by the Congress to withhold themselves from the Conference. He also requested Mrs. Besant to prevail upon Pundit Nehru and Gandhi, urging them not to make united action impossible by absolutely refusing the invitation which was scarcely what one would expect from them after they had put their signatures to the Delhi Manifesto. At the same time he wrote a letter to the Viceroy suggesting that Pundit Motilal Nehru should be allowed to see the Viceroy which would enhance the chances of a favourable atmosphere being created and, secondly, that some measure of conciliation should be introduced in the Provinces.

A second conference of the signatories to the Delhi Manifesto therefore followed at Allahabad on 18 November to review the political situation as it had developed both in England and in India since the Viceroy's announcement and the Parliamentary debates. Throughout the proceedings of the conference Gandhiji was emphasising on a 'change of heart' on the part of Government. Translated into practical propositions from his point of view it meant (1) that conditions in the Punjab

91. Sapru to Motilal Nehru, 11 November 1929, ibid.
92. Sapru to Mrs. Besant, 11 November 1929, ibid.
93. Sapru to Irwin, 11 November 1929, ibid.
required immediate consideration, (2) that the question of prisoners should be taken into consideration without loss of time, and (3) generally speaking there should be a more liberal spirit introduced in the actual administration in the Provinces.

The controversy between the Congress and the Liberals was as to whether all these should be treated as conditions precedent or mere recommendations. The Liberals were opposed to anything like conditions precedent. Thereupon the conference finally decided to stand by the Delhi Manifesto such as it was. Sapru thus succeeded in securing an endorsement of the Delhi Manifesto in the conference summoned at Motilal Nehru's residence; so the conference again ended in a triumph of the Liberals and Sapru received a number of warm congratulations. The resolution, it was true for the moment, represented the success of Moderate elements but it would be rash from this to draw conclusions about the final decision. Decision, so far as the Congress was concerned, was merely postponed till the Congress session at Lahore and the issue would be fought out there.

The Liberals, however, appeared to be quite determined to maintain their attitude. They decided to bring private pressure upon the Viceroy with regard to the question of political prisoners but to proceed on the assumption that the plan of a
Round Table Conference was acceptable to Indian opinion. The Allahabad Conference convinced Sapru that Gandhi was essentially a man of peace who would like his hands to be strengthened in dealing with his own following. So he suggested to the Viceroy that the Mahatma should have a 'free talk' with him assuring him that he would make no unreasonable demands even in respect of political prisoners. The Viceroy who was on tour expressed his readiness to meet Gandhi, Motilal Nehru and Jinnah on his return to Delhi.

The interview was arranged on 23 December 1929. Accordingly Gandhi, Nehru, Jinnah, Patel, Sapru and Mrs. Naidu met the Viceroy on that day at the Viceregal Lodge but the conference proved to be a fiasco. Gandhi and Nehru asked the Viceroy to give a pledge that the Round Table Conference would recommend nothing short of Dominion Status and that the British Government would honour such a pledge. But the Viceroy could not commit himself to such a pledge. Patel, Sapru and Jinnah who had done so much to organise the meeting felt themselves betrayed at the turn events had taken. Sapru saw the deliberate rejection of an opportunity.

It must be admitted that the attitude of the two Congress leaders was somewhat different in the last week of December from what it had been in the first week of November.

97. Sapru to Irwin, 26 November 1929, ibid.
96. Irwin to Sapru, 3 December 1929, ibid.
99. G. Cunningham to Sapru, 27 December 1929, encl. Minute of the meeting between Viceroy, Gandhi, Motilal, Sapru, Jinnah and Patel on 23 December 1929, ibid., also same to same, 16 January 1930, ibid.
100. Sapru to D. Grahampole, 9 January 1930, ibid.
Motilal Nehru was offended at the Viceroy's refusal to meet him separately. He was unwilling to meet the Viceroy along with Jinnah or Sapru. "The idea was to discuss", he wrote to Patel, "the Congress point of view with the Viceroy, with Congress alone. Gandhi was to join me if possible. Even Sapru who brought about this arrangement was not to be present ...

... I cannot understand your proposal to form a heterogeneous deputation to the Viceroy ... Do you expect Sapru, Jinnah, Gandhi, myself and yourself to be of one mind when we meet the Viceroy ...

It appears that his main concern at that time was the ensuing session of the Congress at Lahore where Jawaharlal as President, was to move a resolution declaring independence to be India's goal. He did not expect anything out of the interview as he told Patel a fortnight before the interview: "I expect no result from our (Gandhi's and mine) interview", Nehru wrote to Patel, "but I have to redeem my promise ... at present all roads lead to Lahore". This was significant. Jawaharlal was the President designate of the Congress. He had already, presiding over a meeting of the All India Federation of Trade Unions at Nagpur, expressed himself against the possibility of compromise by negotiations and had come out openly against

100a. Motilal Nehru to Sapru, 28 February 1928, Motilal Nehru Papers, op. cit.
102. Ibid., p. 1071.
the conference and Motilal knew that persistence in the policy of co-operation and acceptance of Round Table Conference would inevitably split the Congress and 'isolate' the radical elements of the country led by Jawaharlal. It would mean an 'overwhelming success of the Viceroy's policy and also of the moderates'. On the other hand support to the radicals would ensure the unity of the Congress and enhance its prestige.

Early in December Sastri had predicted that "Motilal Nehru would in the end be overcome by his paternal affection." But, as Sapru rightly pointed out, it was not only 'paternal affection' but the reactionary debates in the Parliament, the campaign of the die-hard press in England and the ensuing session of the Congress at Lahore which led him to lend support to his son. So far as Gandhi was concerned he had already said that he would not be unhappy 'if the conference fell through'. It was not possible for him to risk any split or schism at Lahore for it would

have meant the sacrifice of the dearest principle of his life.

Sapru was deeply frustrated. "It is a tragedy", he wrote
to a friend in England, "that the Congress should have run mad
in this matter ... His (Motilal's) point of view was that the
Viceroy should guarantee that immediate Dominion Status would
be granted. Our point was that the door of the Round Table
Conference being open ... It was quite clear to Jinnah and my­
self that we had been badly let down and that these gentlemen
had gone there determined to break off relations with Viceroy".
Patel, who was formerly a Congressman, also thought in a similar
strain. He admitted that 'Gandhi was somewhat unreasonable in
demanding assurance when he was dealing with a Viceroy who was
sincerely trying his best to find a solution'.

The Liberals saw quite clearly that Gandhi and Motilal and
the Congress were 'heading for a disaster at the heels of Jawahar­
lal and the young men'. In fact, among the Congress leaders
themselves also there were pleas for restraint. Ansari, Sarojini
Naidu and Malvya were inclined to trust in the sincerity of
Irwin and to oppose any precipitate action. The debate in the
Subjects Committee was long and tense. The inaugural session

108. Gandhi was stated to have said long before in a letter
that he did not in any way wish any split or friction.
If any such thing happened in the Congress camp the whole
object of his life would be defeated. Gandhi to Motilal,
18 August 1924. GOI, Home Pol., confidential no. 140/
24/1924.


cit., p. 1132.
was in fact held up for six hours while the Committee discussed
and voted on the main resolution. In the end Gandhi's personal
prestige and enthusiasm of the rank and file carried the day.
In December 1929 the Congress chose to explore the wilderness
of Civil Disobedience. But Sapru was not to be thrown off
by this rebuff. He had already decided his own course of action.
"If Mr. Gandhi and Pundit Motilal Nehru go back on the invitation
to the Round Table Conference", he affirmed, "my support
of it will continue to be unabated and unqualified" and the
Liberal decision to support the conference was endorsed at the
Liberal Federation Session at Madras.

Sapru now devoted all his energies in an attempt to organise
something definite and something widespread for the purpose
of the conference and pave the way for the solution of the
communal problem. For sometime past he was being urged by some
friends to take steps 'to rally those forces which were in fa-
vour of a Round Table Conference'. Sapru put himself in
touch with Muhammadan friends and Pundit Malavya and others
of the Hindu Sabha. Setalvad also tried to bring together

111. Progs. of the Congress Subjects Committee Meeting, Leader,
29-50 December 1929.
112. I. N. C., Report of the fortyfourth Annual session, (La-
hore, 1929), pp. 87-88.
113. Sapru to Natesan, 11 November 1929, Sapru Papers. Also
Sapru to Munshi, 15 November 1929, ibid.
114. Progs. of the twelveth session of the N.L.F. of India,
Madras, 1929, Bengalee, 29, 31 December 1929.
115. Munshi to Sapru, 10 November 1929, Sapru Papers, also same
to same, 20 November 1929, ibid.
116. Sapru to Irwin, 4 January 1930, Halifax Collection, op.
cit., Letters and Telegrams from persons in India, January
to June 1930. p. 9b.
the representatives of the various political bodies e.g. Liberal Federation, the Muslim League, the Hindu Mahasabha, the Justice Party and the European Association to confer together. Accordingly the Liberals and Moderate leaders of all communities met together in Delhi in the last two weeks of February 1930 to consider measures for effecting communal settlement. Sir A. P. Patro of the Justice Party presided on the occasion. But the Hindu Mahasabha demanded, in the very beginning, that the Government should declare first that they would grant Dominion Status and then only they would enter into any discussion with the Muslims as regards their demands. But the Muslims immediately expressed their unwillingness to commit themselves to the support of reforms until they knew what their position and safeguards would be. Sapru knew well that the British Government would not agree to such a demand and pointed out that no constitutional position would be acceptable to the Government if the minorities' failed to reach any agreed settlement of their reasonable claims among themselves. Thus the intrinsigent attitude of the Hindu Mahasabha in the end wrecked the whole affair and the intervening period between the Delhi discussion and the meeting of the conference in London was marked by a gradual hardening of Muslim attitude.

117. Setalvad to Irwin, 4 January 1930, ibid., p. 10.
119. Organisation of the non-Brahmins also known as the South Indian Liberal Federation.
120. Leader, 26 February 1930.
121. Ibid., 27, 28 February 1930, also Bengalee, 28 February 1930.
Meanwhile the situation had turned from bad to worse. During the turmoil of Civil Disobedience the Simon Commission released its report late in the spring of 1930. This document was dead even as it fell from the press. Its recommendations did not evoke any enthusiasm. In the main it was a conservative analysis of the Indian problem. The report stressed the difficulties and obstacles lying in the way of self-Government. It only hinted at a future federation for India. Above all it did not give adequate recognition to the dynamic qualities and strength of Indian nationalism. The Simon Report had in fact been outstripped by events.

By April 1930 the Civil Disobedience campaign spread and grew in amazing intensity. The situation nearly reached a state of dead lock. The Liberal organs including the press, the Western India Liberal Association, Calcutta's Liberal dominated Indian Association, the council of National Liberal Federation - along with such individual leaders Sapru, Sastri Sivasevami Aiyar, Setalvad, G.A. Natesan, T. Rangachariar, began to take up a cry for negotiation compromise and peace, and before very long Sapru again appealed to the Viceroy "to

123. Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 404-09.
124. "Punhalade", 27, 29, 30 April, 15-18, 23 May 1930, also "Leader", 30 April, 8, 13, 18, 26, 28, 29, 30 May 1930.
do something to quicken the execution of constructive policy ...
that the fact is that those who want Dominion Status plus a
stable government are disorganised and if I may say demoralised". Setalvad met the Viceroy separately and urged him
to make another statement to the effect that the object of the
conference would be to discuss a scheme of Dominion Status and
to examine how best the difficulties in any such scheme might
be overcome. He laid great stress upon the unsatisfactory
position in which the Moderates found themselves in the midst
of such circumstances and the need they felt of 'some new
strength to their elbow ...' For his part Irwin knew well
that he was heavily dependent for successful execution of his
policy upon Moderate support. He reassured Sapru. "I do not
lose my faith in the Conference policy", Irwin told Sapru,
"and I think we have all got to continue working quite steadily
and unshakably to this end." In the meantime Jayakar who
was progressively assimilating himself with something like the
Liberal position also saw the Viceroy and requested him to
give some assurance to the effect that Government meant to
back the Indian case as far as it could. This might enable him

125. Sapru to Irwin, 20 April 1930, Sapru Papers.
126. Irwin to Wedgwood Benn, 14 May 1930, encl. Note of Interview with Sir C.H. Setalvad, Halifax Collection, op.
cit., Letters to Secretary of State for India, January to December 1930 and January to April 1931, p. 147.
127. Ibid.
128. Irwin to Sapru, 8 May 1930, Sapru Papers.
to persuade Motilal to call the movement off, and on 9 July in a speech to the Imperial Legislative Council Irwin reiterated his Dominion Status statement and announced that the forthcoming conference 'would be free to approach its task greatly assisted indeed, but with liberty unimpaired with the report of the Statutory Commission or any other documents...'. 'It was', he said, 'the Government's intention to treat the conference not as a mere meeting for discussion and debate but as a joint assembly of representatives of both countries on whose agreement precise proposal to participate may be found'.

The Liberals were pleased since they saw in it all the undertakings which they believed to be essential if progress were to be made. The Bengalee in the meanwhile had become sympathetic towards the Liberals and in late May published an Article 'What Next: Give the Moderates a Chance to Settle Problem'. It was at this time and under such circumstances that Sapru and Jayakar once again undertook the very difficult task of negotiating a settlement of outstanding differences between the Congress and the Government. Sapru rightly thought that such a settlement would facilitate Congress representation

129. Irwin to Wedgwood Benn, 3 July 1930, Halifax Collection, op. cit., Letters to Secretary of State for India, January to December 1930 and January to April 1931, p. 186.
130. L.A. Debates,' 1930, vol. 4, p. 36.
131. Ibid., p. 39.
132. Sapru to Irwin, 13 July 1930, Sapru Papers.
133. Bengalee, 28 May, 1930.
at the ensuing Round Table Conference and he set about the business, as he said subsequently, at the instance of some leading Congressmen. The basis of the negotiation were two statements by Pandit Motilal Nehru.

On 20 June 1930, Pandit Motilal Nehru gave an interview to Mr. Slocombe – the special correspondent of the Daily Herald (London) who visited India on what may be legitimately described as a journalistic peace mission – with regard to his views about attending the Round Table Conference. Shortly thereafter Mr. Slocombe met Pandit Motilal Nehru in Bombay and after conversation with him he drafted certain terms which were approved by Motilal Nehru at a meeting in Bombay where Jayakar was also present. Mr. Slocombe then wrote a letter to Sapru in the course of which he said that Pandit Motilal Nehru had no objection to Sapru and Jayakar’s acting as intermediaries for the purpose of approaching the Viceroy on the basis of these terms. On the basis of this state-

134. Patel to Sapru, 13 November 1929, Sapru Papers, also Jayakar to Sapru, 4 August 1930, ibid.

135. 'The facts connected with the efforts which we have been making for over two months for the restoration of peaceful conditions in the country', ibid.

136. Slocombe to Sapru, 23 June 1930, ibid.
Sapru and Jayakar several times waited upon His Excellency the Viceroy at Simla in the early part of July 1930 and explained to him the situation in the country and ultimately wrote to the Viceroy a letter to afford them facilities to see Mahatma Gandhi, and Pundit Motilal Nehru and Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru so that "we may put our point of view before them and urge them in the interest of the country to respond to our appeal to enable the big issue of constitutional advance being solved in a calm atmosphere". Lord Irwin's reply giving them the desired permission, reiterated the statement that he

137. The Statement submitted to Pundit Motilal Nehru in Bombay on 26 June 1930, and approved as basis of informal approach to the Viceroy by a third party runs thus: "If in certain circumstances the British Government and the Government of India, although unable to anticipate the recommendations that may in perfect freedom be made by the Round Table Conference, or the attitude which the British Parliament may reserve for such recommendations, would nevertheless be willing to give a private assurance that they would support a demand for full responsible government for India, subject to such mutual adjustments and terms of transfer as are required by the special needs and conditions of India and by her long association with Great Britain and as may be decided by the Round Table Conference, Pundit Motilal Nehru would undertake to take personally such an assurance - or the indication received from a responsible third party that such an assurance would be forth coming - to Mr. Gandhi and Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru. If such an assurance were offered and accepted, it would render possible a general measure of conciliation which should entail the simultaneous calling off of the Civil Disobedience movement, the cessation of the Government's present repressive policy, and a generous measure of amnesty for political prisoners, and would be followed by Congress participation in the Round Table Conference on terms to be mutually agreed upon'. Ibid.

138. Sapru and Jayakar to Irwin, 13 July 1930, ibid.
had embodied in his speech to Central Legislature on 9 July indicating his attitude towards the constitutional issue.

Sapru and Jayakar then had long conversation with Gandhi in Yerovada gaol in Poona 23 and 24 July. The outcome of the talk was that he gave a note and a letter to be handed over to the Nehrus in Naini gaol at Allahabad. The note among other things urged: (1) "that the conference be restricted to a discussion of the safeguards that may be necessary in connection with the full self-government during the period of transition, (2) simultaneous calling off of Civil Disobedience movement and the withdrawal of the ordinances and the release of Satyagraha and political prisoners." Further Gandhiji stated that he would reserve to himself the liberty of testing every swaraj scheme by its ability to satisfy the object underlying the eleven points mentioned in his letter to the Viceroy.

With the letter and note of Gandhi, Sapru and Jayakar went to the Nehrus in the Naini Jail at Allahabad. But the Nehrus pitched their demands a trifle too high. The first point of Mahatma's note of 23 July 1930 did not satisfy them.

139. Irwin to Sapru, 16 July 1930, ibid.
140. Gandhi's note to the Nehrus, 23 July 1930, ibid.
141. Gandhi to Irwin, 2 March 1930, Halifax Collection, op. cit., Letters and Telegrams from persons in India, January to June 1930, pp. 146-50.
142. Jawaharlal to Gandhi, 28 July 1930, Sapru Papers.
and in their note to Gandhi they expressed their doubts as to the wisdom of lowering their standard. As regards the Round Table Conference they said that "we feel that it is unlikely to achieve anything unless an agreement on all vital matters is previously arrived at."

Accordingly Gandhiji wrote his revised terms which was given to Jayakar in the first week of August declaring to the following effect: "(1) No constitutional scheme would be acceptable to Mr. Gandhi which did not contain a clause allowing India a right to secede from the Empire to her desire, and another clause which gave the right and power to India to deal satisfactorily with his eleven points. (2) The Viceroy should be made aware of this position of Mr. Gandhi in order that the Viceroy would not consider later that these views of Mr. Gandhi had taken him by surprise when they were urged at the Round Table Conference, (3) The Viceroy should also be made aware that Mr. Gandhi would insist at the Round Table Conference on a clause giving India the right to have examined by an independent tribunal all claims and concessions given to Britishers in the past."

Sapru and Jayakar thus emerged from Yerovada with no positive commitments. But they would leave no stone unturned to achieve their object. At their request the Viceroy permitted

143. Memorandum of 28 July 1930, by Messrs Motilal Nehru and Jawaharlal Nehru, ibid.

144. Gandhi's note to Jayakar, 2 August 1930, ibid.
the Nehrus to be moved to Yerovada.

The next event was the joint interview at the Yerovada Jail in Poona on 13, 14 and 15 August between Sapru and Jayakar on the one hand and Mahatma Gandhi, Pundit Motilal, Pundit Jawaharlal, Mr. Allahbhai Patel, Dr. Mahmud, Mr. Jairamdas Daulatra and Mrs. Naidu on the other. The result was a letter signed by Congress leaders in the course of which they said among other things that they did not in any way agree to the Liberals' view or the Viceroy's that Civil Disobedience had done harm to the country or that the movement was ill-timed and unconstitutional. They further added that they noticed no change in the attitude of the official world to the view that India's future should be decided by India's men and women and that they had no faith in 'the pious declaration of good intention often well-meant, of officials'. In such circumstances the utmost response they were prepared to make was that if the Government recognised their right to secede at will from the Empire and agreed to confer on India full responsible Government (including control over military and economic affairs) and concede the right to refer such British claims and concessions, including the public debt, to an independent tribunal, the Congress would call off Civil Disobedience in all its aspects.

145. Irwin to Jayakar, 2 August 1930, Jayakar Papers.
excepting peaceful picketing and salt manufacture.

They further added that simultaneously with the calling off of Civil Disobedience, there should also be release of all Satyagrahi prisoners and other political prisoners and restoration of confiscated properties, refund of fines and securities, reinstatement of all dismissed officers including those of the Non-cooperation period in Government services and finally repeal of all Viceroyal Ordinances. In conclusion they said that if these conditions were satisfactorily fulfilled, they would consider the question of the composition of the proposed conference and of the Congress being represented at it.

Thereafter Sapru and Jayakar again met the Viceroy on 25 August at Simla, and had several interviews with him and members of the Council between 25 and 27 August. But the Viceroy, in view of both of the general tone by which that letter was inspired, and of its contents, as also of its blank refusal to recognise the grave injury to which the country had been subjected by the Congress policy not least in the economic field, refused to deal in detail with the suggestions there made. "I must frankly say", the Viceroy stated further, "that I regard all discussion on the basis of the proposals contained in the letter as impossible ..." The Viceroy informed

147. Ibid.
148. Ibid.
149. Irwin to Sapru, 28 August 1930, ibid.
also that if the Civil Disobedience movement was in fact called off, he would also withdraw the Ordinances (save those connected with the Lahore conspiracy case and Chittagong); but he was unable to give the assurance, if and when Civil Disobedience movement ceased, it would be possible for the Local Governments to release all prisoners convicted or under trial for offence in connection with the movement which did not involve violence and the utmost he could promise would be to instruct all Local Governments to deal sympathetically with all cases individually on their merits. Upon the point of representation of Congress in the Conference, in the event of their abandoning the Civil Disobedience movement and desiring to attend, he expressed the hope that he would have no difficulty in recommending to His Majesty's Government to ensure that the Congress should be adequately represented and added that in the event of the situation taking such a turn he would be ready to consider a panel of names from the leaders of the Congress Party.

Sapru and Jayakar believed that a settlement was still possible on the basis of Viceroy's terms. So they were again given permission to see Gandhi and Motilal. With the letter of the Viceroy, Sapru and Jayakar again interviewed the Nehrus and Dr. Mahmud at Naini Jail in Allahabad on 30 and 31 August. They explained to the Congress leaders that so far as the

150. Irwin to Sapru and Jayakar, 28 August 1930, ibid.

constitutional question was concerned the position would be as stated in the four fundamental points in para two of the Vice-roy's letter to them of 28 August.

Secondly as regards the question whether Gandhi would be allowed to raise at the Round Table Conference the question of India's right to secede from the Empire at will, the position would be that anyone could raise any point he liked at the conference but in the opinion of the Viceroy it would be very unwise for Gandhi to raise the question at that time. If, however, he faced the Government of India with such a question the Viceroy would inform him that the Government would not be prepared to treat it as an open question. If, in spite of this, Gandhi insisted on this point the Government of India would communicate his intention to do so to the Secretary of State.

Thirdly as regards the right to raise the question, at the Round Table Conference, of India's liability to certain

152. As regards the constitutional question the Viceroy expressed his views in his letter of 28 August to Sapru and Jayakar to the following effect: "... It was the earnest desire of myself," he wrote to Sapru, "my Government, and I had no doubt also of His Majesty's Government, to do everything that we could to assist the people of India to obtain as large a degree of management of their own affairs as could be shown to be consistent with making provision for those matters, in regard to which they were not at present in a position to assume responsibility. It would be among the functions of the conference to examine in the light of all the materials available what those matters might be, and what provision might best be made for them. I had previously made two other points in my speech to the Legislature on 9 July, first, that those attending the Conference would have the unfettered right of examining the whole constitutional problem in all its bearing, and secondly, that any agreement at which the Conference was able to arrive, would form the basis of the proposals which His Majesty's Government would later submit to Parliament," Sapru Papers.

153. Ibid.
financial burdens and to get them examined by an independent tribunal, Sapru and Jayakar informed that the Viceroy's position was that he could not entertain any proposal amounting to a total repudiation of all debts but he had no objection if any one raised any issue connected with any financial liability of India and call for an examination.

Fourthly, with regard to the granting relief against the Salt Act, the position of Viceroy was that (i) in accordance with the recommendations of the Simon Commission the Salt Tax would soon be provincialised and (ii) as there had already been a considerable loss of revenue, the Government would not like to give up this source, but if the Salt Act was repealed and if any proposal was put forward to compensate the loss of revenue occasioned by such repeal, the Viceroy and his Government would deal with the question on its merits. It would not, however, be possible for the Viceroy to ignore open breaches of the Salt Act so long as it was law. But with the restoration of peaceful condition the Viceroy would be prepared to call a small conference of Indian leaders to discuss with them how best economic relief could be given to poorer classes on behalf of the Government.

With reference to picketting the position was that if picketting amounted to nuisance to any class of people or was accompanied by molestation or intimidation or use of force, the Government would take such action as the law permitted or

154. Ibid.
such legal powers as might be necessary to deal with any emergency that might arise. But when normal condition would be restored, the Ordinance against picketing would be discontinued.

Question of the re-employment of officers was primarily to be decided by the Local Governments. But if there were vacancies, the Local Governments would be expected to reinstate those who had given up their employment during the Civil Disobedience campaign.

As for the restoration of printing presses confiscated under the Press Ordinance, the Viceroy assured that no difficulty would arise and finally they informed that though the question of restoration of fines and properties confiscated under the revenue law, would require a closer definition and with regard to the question of confiscated properties and refunding of fines there were some difficulties involved, the Viceroy had assured them that the Local Governments would act with justice and try to be accommodating as far as possible.

But to the Nehrus these proposals were unsatisfactory and in a note to Gandhi they expressed their unwillingness to accept any settlement on that basis. At the end when Sapru and Jayakar again saw Gandhi on 4 and 5 September, Gandhi

155. Ibid.
156. Ibid.
issued a long statement drawing a subtle distinction between the Viceroy's published letter of 16 July and Motilal Nehru's signed statement to Slocombe on 25 June and reiterating all the claims which the Nehrus had made in their note of 16 August, and thus once again outmanoeuvring the Moderates who had tried to get him to London.

The Liberals were conscious of their weakness, their lack of organisation, their need for a party. They saw too well the advantage of securing Congress participation in the conference. They knew that the acceptance of the announcement by other political parties in the country meant very little if the Congress Party which was the most effective and well-organised Party in India was not reconciled to it. They knew too, that if the Congress committed itself to the goal of independence and declined to participate in the proposed Round Table Conference, the meeting in London would have very little chance of success in India. It was therefore essential that every endeavour should be made to prevent the Congress from doing so. In fact when they first undertook the work of mediation the situation was not altogether unhopeful. There were many signs that Civil Disobedience movement was collapsing amidst general weariness of the sacrifices it

158. Ibid.

159. P.C. Mitter to Irwin, 2 September 1930, Halifax Collection, op. cit., Letters and Telegrams from persons in India, July to December 1930, p. 807. Also Sapru to Irwin, 6 July 1930, ibid., p. 579b.
demanded from its exponents. The Government was fully equipped to deal with any out break of violence and communalism never dead was once more rampant. They saw that Congress opinion in general was anxious to come to a compromise and welcome Irwin’s proposal. Patel, Malavya, Jinnah and Kelkar— all were gradually swinging round to something like the Liberal position. While they requested Sapru and Jayakar to take a definite step, they also requested the Viceroy to respond to the situation. The Congress circle in Bengal and elsewhere also were not averse to peace and were anxious to find out an immediate solution of the deadlock. Repeated

160. B.C. Pal, published an article in the Englishman on 13 March 1930; ‘Gandhi’s Campaign, A Great Nation’s Tragic Puerility’.

161. The continuing reports from Provinces seemed to bear it out. Report from Bengal for May and June, from Bombay, Central Provinces for the first half of June, and from United Provinces for the second half of May 1930, G of I, Home Pol., secret no. 18/1930.

162. Sapru to Irwin, 12 July 1930, Halifax Collection, op. cit., Letters and telegrams from persons in India, July to December 1930, p. 589. Also same to same, 6 July 1930, ibid., p. 579b. Also Sapru to Jayakar, 14 July 1930, Jayakar Papers; also Irwin to Birkenhead, 24 April 1930, encl. Patel to Irwin, 23 April 1930, Halifax Collection, op. cit., letters to Secretary of State for India, January to December 1930 and January to April 1931, pp. 99-100.

163. S.C. Mitter to Jayakar, 2 September 1930, Jayakar Papers. A settlement between Congress and Government was also demanded by the Bombay merchants who were hard hit by the Civil Disobedience movement and welcomed the Sapru and Jayakar mission to Gandhi and the Nehrus. Letters dated 22 and 25 July 1930 from a group of Bombay Merchants to Jayakar, ibid.
interviews with the Viceroy also convinced Sapru that the Vicere­
roy was prepared 'to go very far with us and I think more or 
less the case with the Labour Cabinet though I feel more sure of Wedgwood Benn'.

Taking a long view of the situation Sapru and Jayakar therefore along with many others thought that 'it would be most unfortunate if no attempt was made at this stage to secure the presence of the Congress representatives at the Round Table Conference'. So it was under this circumstance that they undertook the work of negotiation, as Sapru told subsequently, at the instance of some leading congressmen. They undertook their work of mediation on the basis of the terms of the interviews given by Motilal Nehru to Mr. Slocombe. The terms put forward by Motilal approximated so closely to those of the Liberals that they promised a wide measure of support. The interview had restored the situation to its state on the eve of the Delhi interview with Viceroy on 23 December. The interview with Motilal had created the impression that he was willing to consider terms of peace. Gandhi too had been inter­viewed in gaol and had so defined his claims there as to

164. Sapru to Jayakar, 12 July 1930, ibid. Also Jayakar to S.V. Modak, 13 September 1930, ibid.
165. Sapru to Irwin, 6 July 1930, Halifax Collection, op. cit., Letters and telegram from persons in India, July to December 1930, p. 579b.
166. Patel to Sapru, 13 November 1939, Sapru Papers. Also Jayakar to Sapru, 4 August 1930, ibid.
167. Leader, 26 June 1930.
168. S. Gopal, op. cit., p. 91.
give grounds for hope that further discussion with him might be helpful in persuading him after all to participate in the forthcoming conference. They wanted to show to the Congress leaders that the Government statement represented a fair measure of agreement with the congress claims as defined in Slocombe interviews.

When they first met Gandhi on 23 and 24 July they did not experience much difficulty in getting him to agree with them in the view that they took of the Viceroy's speech of 9 July and published letter of 16 July. He raised practically no difficulty with regard to the constitutional question and they found him 'quite pleasant and agreeable'. But in the note which the Mahatma gave to the Nehrus he left the responsibility for any final decision wholly to them particularly to Jawaharlal. "Jawaharlal's must be the final voice," Gandhi wrote to Motilal, "you and I can only give our advice to him ... I should have no hesitation in supporting any stronger position up to the letter of the Lahore resolution. You need therefore attach no weight to my memorandum unless it finds an echo in the hearts of you both."

So far as Motilal Nehru himself was concerned he attached great importance to the views of Jawaharlal as he told Mr. Slocombe during his talk with him on 30 June 1930 that his son

169. Sapru to Irwin, 28 July 1930, Sapru Papers.
had great authority over the Congress and particularly over the young'.

But the younger Nehru 'who at this time seems to have guided Congress approach to politics, would not agree to any settlement. He had visited Russia in 1927 and on his return had assumed the lead of the youth movement of the country. In his Lahore Congress speech he described himself as a 'socialist and a republican'. He had already shown his unwillingness to put his signature on the Delhi Manifesto - that 'ingeniously worded announcement which could mean much or very little' as he called it. But at that time he only allowed himself 'to be talked into signing' it as the president elect of the forthcoming Congress. At the time of the Allahabad Conference on 16 November 1929 which was summoned to reconsider the Viceroy's announcement in the light of debate in both the Houses of Parliament, he had again wished to enforce his own conditions precedent to the acceptance of any invitation to the Round Table Conference. It was not possible for him to accept any position short of the recognition of India's

172. S. Gopal, op. cit., p. 94.
173. Presidential address of Jawaharlal Nehru at the forty-fourth session of I.N.C., (Lahore, 1929).
175. Ibid., p. 197.
right to secede from the Empire at will. So he failed to 'see an appreciable advance yet from the other side and feared a false or a weak move on our part'. He did not desire any settlement and in his heart and mind he rather despised these moderate counsellors who seemed to him to 'interpret politics more in terms of principle'. "For myself I delight in warfare (he wrote to Gandhi). It makes me feel that I am alive".

It is significant to note that the first letter of Gandhi did not refer to the right of secession or the question of public debt of India. It was only an after thought and inserted in his second note after he had received the note of the Nehrus and particularly the letter of Jawaharlal.

From that moment, it fact, the fate of the negotiations were sealed. But the Liberals would not give up until they felt it was entirely hopeless which they did not do at the present moment. As Sapru wrote to Jayakar: 'Frankly I am not very hopeful as they insist on the pound of flesh and refuse to look at the substance. It seems to me that we may and should make an earnest appeal to them. It is better to have tried and failed than never to have tried at all'. So the negotiation continued till September when the curtain was finally wrung down over peace talks on 6 September.

177. " Ibid.
178. Sapru to Jayakar, 12 July 1930, Jayakar Papers.
Liberals were also fully conscious that their efforts might end in failure. They never underestimated the difficulties in such a mission. 'I am most anxious', Sapru wrote to Irwin, 'that I should not be understood to say or suggest that I feel confident of the success of my self-imposed mission but as an Indian I do certainly think that it is better that I should do the best that I can in the interest of peace rather than do nothing'. They took up the work therefore as a matter of duty and pursued it right up to the last stage when they saw further progress was impossible. But if peace which the Liberals should naturally have liked best was not possible, they could console themselves by feeling the fact that while the Viceroy praised their 'gallant endeavour though they had resulted in failure, a section of the Congress press also seemed to have received a distinct fillip in their direction, which attributed to them 'the best of motives in their endeavour to bring about peace' and accused the Congress of 'unreasonable obstinacy'. For after the breakdown of the peace negotiation the Government certainly gave no hint that they were anxious to come to a compromise with the Congress.

179. Ibid., also Jayakar to R.V. Modak, 13 September 1930, ibid.
180. Sapru to Irwin, 13 July 1930, Sapru Papers.
181. Irwin to Sapru, 11 September 1930, ibid.
182. E.g. Amrita Bazar Patrika, 6 September 1930.
183. In official circle there was even jubilation: 'Thanks to the extravagant demands from the Congress during the Sapru Jayakar conversation, their stock has slumped; that of Government has risen,' G of I, Home Pol., secret no. 5/2/1931, also Irwin to Wedgwood Benn, 19 September 1930, Halifax Collection, op. cit., Letters to Secretary of State for India, January to December 1930 and January to April 1931, p. 258.
That the Congress attitude was at this time to some extent responsible for the breakdown of peace talks was true. But the fact should not be overlooked that the situation was one which also required an extremely cautious and sympathetic handling by the Government. For example, Motilal Nehru was arrested at a singularly unfortunate moment. Both he and Gandhi had been interviewed by George Slocombe and had showed themselves eager for peace. But it was while these efforts at reaching a peaceful settlement continued that the Government arrested Motilal Nehru, which made him feel naturally that Government did not mean peace. As Jayakar wrote afterwards that Motilal felt 'very bitter, perhaps because he had been clapped in gaol just at the time when he evinced a desire to become reasonable. He said that the status quo ante had been altered, and he had, in consequence altered his view'. Jawaharlal also wrote that his father, after his imprisonment at Naini gaol, told him that 'he was rather sorry that he had given such a statement' and that 'there was not the faintest chance of any peace between the Congress and the Government'. Again, when the negotiations were going on it was expected that a calm atmosphere should be maintained by the Government. Indeed, Sapru pointed out the necessity of maintaining a peaceful atmos-

187. Ibid., p. 228.
phere. But the Government, while encouraged Sapru and Jayakar to carry on negotiations, also secretly ordered all Local Governments that in deciding what action should be taken against Civil Disobedience, they should not take into consideration Sapru and Jayakar conversations. When the peace talks continued and a critical point had been reached, the news came to the Congress leaders in gaol that police had made lathi charges upon a peaceful procession which was being held in honour of Late Tilak and which was not a part of Civil Disobedience movement. This fact, as the Liberals rightly complained, undid a large part of the work done by them. What little chance there was of the Congress coming to terms, began speedily to disappear. The result in the end was that the Congress decided finally not to participate in the Conference and only the Moderates or as they preferred to call themselves the Liberals anchored themselves to Irwin's project of a Round Table Conference.

188. Sapru to Irwin, 31 May 1930, Halifax Collection, op. cit., Letters and telegrams from persons in India, January to June 1930, p. 447.


190. Setalvad to Irwin, 2 August, 1930, Halifax Collection, op. cit., Letters and telegrams from persons in India, July to December 1930, p. 639c. Also same to same, 4 August 1930, ibid., p. 546.

191. Ibid.