Chapter Six

MASS CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE AGAIN
THE OFFICIAL VIEW

On the conclusion of the Second Round Table Conference, Gandhi started for India via Europe. He arrived in Rome on 12 December 1931 and was received in audience by Signor Mussolini. Subhas Chandra Bose regarded this meeting as an "historic one". He also records that Gandhi's attitude towards the Fascist authorities, including his attendance at a demonstration of the Fascist boys, were severely criticized in anti-Fascist circles. (1) From this, an inference may be drawn that the Fascist circles were pleased at Gandhi's attitude. But this does not appear to be so in the light of what Alexander Kirk, the US Charge d'Affaires ad interim in Rome, said on this matter. According to Kirk, there appeared to be a feeling in the official circles that "although he [Gandhi] expressed polite interest in the various activities of the Regime, his attitude was one of mild sarcasm rather than wholehearted support." (2)

The Gloom in India

In the meantime, situation in India was worsening. Soon after Gandhi had left for the Second Round Table Conference, the Government of India began to prepare effectively to meet the


2 Alexander Kirk, Charge d'Affaires ad interim (Rome) to Secretary of State, 16 December 1931, 845.01 Conference/69, Records of the Department of State.
situation if the civil disobedience movement were to be resumed or even threatened. (3) Gandhi had foretaste of the new mood of the British Government when no less a person than the King-Emperor himself sternly warned him in the Buckingham Palace: "Remember, Mr. Gandhi, I won't have any attacks on my Empire!" (4) In fact, the British Government soon proceeded "to attack India's new sense of freedom" achieved during 1930-31. (5) This was reflected in the repressive policies of the Government of India and the Provincial Governments in tackling the no-rent campaign in the United Provinces, the Red Shirt movement in the North-West Frontier Province and the activities of the revolutionaries in the Province of Bengal. (6) The Governments concerned equipped themselves with

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4 Viscount Templewood (Sir Samuel Hoare), Nine Troubled Years (London, 1954), pp. 59-60. In these pages, the author, who at that time was the Secretary of State for India, has given an interesting account of how the King-Emperor reacted to the proposal that a party be held at the Buckingham Palace for all the Round Table Conference Delegates which, naturally, would include Gandhi. "What! Have this rebel fakir in the Palace after he has been behind all these attacks on my loyal officers?", was the King's first reaction. Later on, he reconciled himself to the idea and the function was held. At a suitable moment, Sir Hoare presented Gandhi to the King. In the course of his conversation with Gandhi, the King resentfully looked at Gandhi's bare knees and, when Gandhi was taking leave of him, burst out with his grave warning. According to Sir Hoare, Gandhi's savoir faire saved the situation, his reply being: "I must not be drawn into a political argument in Your Majesty's Palace after receiving Your Majesty's hospitality."


6 For the Government's version of these movements, see Government of India, India in 1931-32 (Calcutta, 1933), pp. 24-30; for the nationalist version, see B. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, The History of the Indian National Congress (Bombay, 1946), vol. 1, pp. 499-505.
emergency powers under various Ordinances and launched upon a plan of quick arrest of leaders and severe punishment of the local population whenever troubles erupted. "The die seemed to be cast and all hopes of peace gone" on the eve of Gandhi's arrival in Bombay, wrote Jawaharlal Nehru. (7)

A. C. Frost, the new American Consul General in Calcutta, noted the gloominess of the prospect and, referring to the Round Table Conference being held in London, reported that "As the extreme demands of the Indian leaders could not conceivably be met, there has been little feeling of optimism at any time respecting the concrete results to be achieved." Definite reaction would, however, crystallize only after Gandhi's return, (8) He also briefed the Secretary of State about the increased activities of the revolutionaries in Bengal. His report appeared to be a justification of the repressive measures that the British authorities had adopted in Bengal as also in other Provinces: "While the people of India generally are extremely pacific in character, the Presidency of Bengal," he wrote, "has always been notorious for the number of acts of personal violence, as there is a small element of extremely fanatical nature, capable of committing outrages in times of great emotional stress under political inspiration." They committed a number of crimes during the period of the Round Table Conference which "was intended to be one of truce." This "thoroughly aroused British official and business

8 Consul General in Calcutta (A. C. Frost), to Secretary of State, 17 December 1931, 845.00/746, Records of the Department of State.
interests to the urgency of drastic action for the prevention of further outrages." The result was the promulgation of the Bengal Emergency Powers Ordinance which equipped the authorities "with powers somewhat analogous to martial law." In other Provinces, too, certain steps were already taken "to cope with difficulties which may possibly arise after the return of Mr. Gandhi," reported the Consul General. (9)

Subsequently, the Consul General reported about the situation in the United Provinces and the North-West Frontier Province on the eve of Gandhi's return. In the United Provinces there had been a no-rent campaign which, according to him, had assumed "alarming proportions". "The discontent caused by distress among the agriculturists in that region might, under the influence of the agitators, easily have carried the movement to a serious point.... The no-rent campaign offered excellent material apparently for a new type of civil disobedience and the concessions made by the Government in taxation matters were ignored by the Congress people", he reported. (10) As regards the North-West Frontier Province, he stated that the Red Shirt "revolt" had gathered much strength; "troops were being raised and trained for direct action, the non-payment of taxes was urged, and even attempts were made for setting up a framework of counter-government." In a nutshell, the outlook in this region was "decidedly menacing." (11)

9 Ibid.
10 Consul General in Calcutta (A. C. Frost), to Secretary of State, 14 January 1932, 845.00/751, Records of the Department of State.
11 Ibid. The Red Shirts were the volunteers in red robes organized under the guidance of Abdul Gaffar Khan who, because of his devotion to Gandhi, had already earned the title of the "Frontier Gandhi".
Congress under the Attack of the Government

Gandhi reached Bombay on 28 December 1931 amidst the cheers of a mammoth crowd as if he had returned "with Swaraj in the hollow of his hands." (12) In reality, he was a disappointed man. He had come back empty-handed but had not compromised the honour of the country. He could see that the British attitude had hardened and described the arrest of his colleagues like Abdul Gaffar Khan and Jawaharlal Nehru, and the other repressive acts of the Government as "Christmas gifts from Lord Willingdon, our Christian Viceroy." The Ordinances and other Government measures were, according to him, so many attempts to "unman a whole race". Even in the face of such developments, however, Gandhi did not want to close all doors of negotiations. (13) He sent a telegram to the Viceroy in which, after referring to the arrests of the leaders and the ordinances, he suggested an interview with him. The Viceroy was willing to see Gandhi but was not prepared to discuss with him the measures which the Government had taken in the Provinces. In the meantime, the Working Committee of the Congress met in Bombay to decide what course to take in the situation. Gandhi attended this meeting. The Working Committee regarded the outcome of the Round Table Conference as wholly unsatisfactory; condemned the terrorist activities by individuals in Bengal; condemned also the terrorism practised by the Government; and, in the event of satisfactory response not coming forth from the Government, called upon the nation to resume Civil Disobedience.

12 Bose, n. 1, p. 232.

including non-payment of taxes. (14) There was a further exchange of telegrams between Gandhi and the Viceroy. The Viceroy firmly told Gandhi on 2 January 1932 that the Government could not accept the position that its policy should be dependent on his [Gandhi's] judgment as to the necessity of measures which it had already taken. Two days later, the Government "banged an iron door in his face", arresting him again under Regulation XXXV of 1827. (15)

It was clear that the Government had decided to swing into immediate and strong action. Four Ordinances were promulgated on 4 January, the day Gandhi and many other leaders were arrested: the Emergency Powers Ordinance widening the operative section of the Press Act; Unlawful Instigation Ordinance, directed against no-tax campaigns; Unlawful Association Ordinance, aimed at Congress buildings and funds; and the Prevention of Molestation and Boycotting Ordinance, directed against picketing and boycotting of public servants. A direct attack was made on the Congress organizations many of which were declared unlawful associations under the Criminal Law Amendment Act. "It was a declaration of a kind of state of siege for the whole of India, the extent and intensity of application being left to the discretion of the local authorities." (16) The activities indulged in by the British Indian authorities were of such a character that Bertrand Russell

14 For the exchange of telegrams between Gandhi and the Viceroy, see Government of India, n. 6, Appendix II, pp. 231-8; for the Working Committee resolutions, see All India Congress Committee, Indian National Congress: 1930-1934 (Allahabad, n.d.), pp. 136-44.

15 Fischer, n. 5, p. 300.

16 Nehru, n. 7, p. 322.
compared them to the misdeeds of the Nazis in Germany. (17)

A. C. Frost, the US Consul General in India, regarded the promulgation of the four Ordinances by the Government of India as "the Government's final answer to the decision of the Working Committee of the Congress ... to launch another civil disobedience and boycott movement." (18) He reported that "These far reaching measures have apparently paralyzed the Congress party for the time being but it is realized that these severe measures are no solution of the problem." Unlike the situation in 1921 and 1930, these repressive measures, noted Frost, had "apparently caused surprisingly little disturbances." But the reason was that the Congress was not prepared for immediate action. "The Government, by acting with extreme speed and efficacy, undoubtedly gained a great strategic advantage and would have found the situation much more difficult to cope with had action been delayed....", he reported. He also mentioned that according to some liberals, the Viceroy, even for the sake of appearances, might well have received Gandhi without any restrictions. Frost, however, felt that "the results would undoubtedly have been the same." (19)

**Congress Not Subdued**

In London, Ray Atherton, the Charge of the US Embassy,


18 Frost to Secretary of State, 14 January 1932, n. 10.

19 Ibid. According to Rajendra Prasad, a member of the Congress Working Committee at that time, Congress leaders were not mentally prepared for the satyagraha just then, they rather wanted to avoid it. See Rajendra Prasad, *Autobiography* (New Delhi, 1957), p. 343.
reached the conclusion that the steps taken by the British in India were unavoidable in the face of the attitude of the Congress. "Notwithstanding the clearly indicated determination of the Government to deal vigorously with challenges to its authority, the attitude of Congress leaves little room for optimism," he wrote to the Secretary of State. The Bombay Provincial Congress had turned itself into a "War Council", had "decreed" general cessation of work which was reported to have been fairly effectively carried out, and a large number of volunteers had been listed. (20) The Government also continued to hold a posture of "uncompromising determination" which was expressed in the Viceroy's speech before the Legislative Assembly on 25 January. (21) Yet "Independence Day" was celebrated in India on 26 January which was signalled by hundreds of arrests and was followed by firing by the troops on mobs in widely separated places like Bombay, Allahabad, Patna, and in the North-West Frontier Province. Thus, the Congress was by no means "shorn of

20  Chargé d'Affaires ad interim (Ray Atherton) to Secretary of State, 11 January 1932, 841.00 P.R./214, with 845.00/748, Records of the Department of State.

21  Chargé d'Affaires ad interim (Ray Atherton) to Secretary of State, 26 January 1932, 845.00/750, Records of the Department of State. The Viceroy in his speech referred to the decision of the Congress with regard to the civil disobedience movement and characterized it as a "challenge" which no Government worth the name could hesitate to accept. He and his Government, he said, were "determined to use, to the full, the resources of the State in fighting and defeating a movement which would otherwise remain a perpetual menace to orderly government and individual liberty." Text of the speech in Nripendra Nath Mitra, ed., The Indian Annual Register 1932 (Calcutta, n.d.), vol. 1, pp. 113-21.
its locks", reported Atherton. (22)

From Calcutta, Consul General Frost reported that the imprisonment of many thousands of Congress leaders and sympathizers, the seizure of the Congress funds in various banks, "the virtual censorship of the native press," and "the supreme power given to Government officials through the Ordinances to deal effectively with any disorders", had combined to prevent any major outbreaks in the country and the Government had the situation "basically well in hand". But cases of isolated disturbances had been "extremely numerous," there had been much use of hartals, the boycott of the British goods had been effective, and the picketing was marked by the increasing participation of women. This showed that "the Congress movement still has a great deal of vitality making the future uncertain." (23) Frost made the same assessment of the situation a month later when he reiterated that due to the continued vigilance of the authorities operating under "drastic ordinances", India remained "tranquil" although the Congress movement was "still very active working under cover throughout the country." (24) By 18 June Gerald Keith, the Vice Consul in Calcutta, was reporting that the political situation might be described as "marking time". The confinement in jail of

22 Charge d'Affaires ad interim (Ray Atherton) to Secretary of State, 1 February 1932, 841.00 P.R./217, with 845.00/753, Records of the Department of State.

23 Consul General in Calcutta (Frost) to Secretary of State, 18 February 1932, 845.00/762, Records of the Department of State.

24 Consul General in Calcutta (Frost) to Secretary of State, 17 March 1932, 845.00/767, Records of the Department of State.
"such a large number of Congress leaders, plus the authority wielded by the Government under the Ordinances" had curbed "very thoroughly any conspicuous action on the part of the Congress Party." But the numerous provincial Congress organizations continued to attempt to hold meetings and bring out processions. (25)

**Indian Politics and the Washington Bi-Centenary**

The awareness of the gravity of the situation in India on the part of the US Consular officers was reflected on another issue also. In 1932 the Bi-Centenary of the birthday of George Washington was to be organized on a large scale for which a Commission — George Washington Bicentennial Commission — had been constituted in the United States. This Commission wanted that suitable celebration should be organized in other countries also. It kept track of such celebrations.

In Calcutta an unofficial organization — Bangiya George Washington Smriti Parishat (Bengali George Washington Memorial Society) — came into existence with Ramanand Chatterjee, editor of *Modern Review*, as President and persons like Rabindranath Tagore (poet), Sarat Chandra Chatterjee (novelist), and Bidhan Chandra Roy (Mayor of Calcutta) as Vice-Presidents. (26) They were enthusiastic about celebrating the bi-centenary and called themselves the *George Washington Bicentennial Commission*.

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25 Vice Consul in Calcutta (Gerald Keith), to Secretary of State, 18 June 1932, 845.00/777, Records of the Department of State.

26 All walks of life were represented on this organization: Politicians, educationalist, scientists, teachers, literary figures, publicists, journalists, trade union leaders, businessmen, lawyers, etc. Quite a good number of them belonged to the Muslim community. See 811.415 Washington Bi-Centenary/1928, Records of the Department of State.
upon public associations, commercial organizations, trade unions, and the academic bodies to celebrate the occasion in a befitting manner. They gave directions that attention need not be paid only to George Washington on this occasion but also to the diverse phases of American achievements and progress. Evidently, the plan was to bring America to the attention of the Indians on a large scale. To this end, India and the World, a newly started journal in Calcutta, devoted its February 1932 issue comprising many articles on George Washington as well as United States and India.

Ramanand Chatterjee sent a radiogram to the US President informing him that his organization had celebrated the bi-centenary and that it offered its greetings to the American people. (27) Subsequently, R. Ahmed, Joint Secretary of the organization, also sent the President a booklet issued in the memory of George Washington. On both the occasions, the Department of State asked the Consul General in Calcutta to make appropriate acknowledgements on behalf of the President if he saw no objection to this. (28) A little later, the Department forwarded to the Consul General a letter from the Associate Director of the George Washington Bi-Centennial Commission in which he sought to know how the bi-centenary had been celebrated abroad. (29)

27 Radiogram from Ramanand Chatterjee to President Hoover, received in the Department of State on 24 February 1932, 811.415 Washington Bi-Centenary/1100.

28 See Department of State to Consul General (Calcutta), 1 March 1932, 811.415 Washington Bi-Centenary/1156 and Department of State to Consul General (Calcutta), 19 April 1932, 815.415 Washington Bi-Centenary/1319.

29 See Consul General in Calcutta (Frost) to Secretary of State, 28 July 1932, 811.45 Washington Bi-Centenary/1528.
The Consul General informed the Department that a representative meeting of the American businessmen in Calcutta had disfavored any formal observance of the bi-centenary at this time. Bengal was under very drastic Ordinances, practically martial law, since 1 January, and, the Consul General reported, "the local revolutionary atmosphere is not propitious for a public celebration of any sort". The Bengali George Washington Memorial Society had celebrated the occasion but it was the belief of the Consulate General that "this movement was not under suitable leadership..." Moreover, the Consulate General was afraid that "any native celebration, sponsored by this office in the state of extreme nationalism which now prevails, might degenerate into a political move and might have unfortunate developments." (30)

The Communal Award

Meanwhile, the civil disobedience movement in India was wilting under the knock-out blows of the Government. But the political interest was enlivened once again by the announcement of, what came to be known as, the "Communal Award" by Prime Minister MacDonald on 17 August. This was related to the quantum and mode of representation of the various communities and interests in the legislatures contemplated under the constitutional reform in India. Under the Award, the Moslems, the Sikhs, and the Europeans were to elect their representatives from separate communal electorates. What was more, the Depressed classes, too, were given the right to elect an assigned number of candidates from their own separate constituencies apart from the right to vote in the general
constituencies. This particular provision was to stand for 20 years if not terminated earlier by mutual agreement. (31)

When the Award was announced, a copy of it was transmitted to the State Department by the First Secretary of the Embassy in London with the comment that the Government, as emphasized by the Prime Minister in his accompanying statement, never wished to intervene in the communal controversies in India but did so only when the inability of the communities to agree among themselves had been amply demonstrated. As regards the criticism from some British circles that the provision for possible revision of the whole scheme after ten years might keep the local opposition alive, he opined that "Time alone will tell whether the Government ... has chosen the better ay of cultivating a favourable reaction in India by thus leaving open a possible means of revision instead of definitely closing the door." (32) A few days later, Atherton, the Counsellor of the Embassy, gave an analysis of the document, which he regarded as a document"of great importance to the future of Indian constitutional reform," and observed that in Bengal and the Punjab the balance of "effective power" would be held by "the conservative European and Indian interests." (33)

As to the reactions in India, Consul General Frost reported that in view of the "excessive claims" of all political parties,

31 For the full text of the Communal Award, see Sitaramayya, n. 6, Appendix VI, pp. 656-62.

32 First Secretary of the Embassy in London (Benjamin Thaw, Jr.) to Secretary of State, 19 August 1932, 845.00/784, Records of the Department of State.

33 Counsellor of the US Embassy in London (Atherton) to Secretary of State, 22 August 1932, 841.00 P.R./246 with 845.00/785, Records of the Department of State.
it was not surprising that the reception of this Award should cause dissatisfaction among most of the groups concerned. He, however, noted that the Europeans and Anglo-Indians appeared to be well satisfied with the Award and "the Mohammedans, despite certain grumblings, especially in Bengal, have reason to be contented as a whole with the consideration shown them in the matter of representation in the Punjab and Bengal, together with weightage in the other provinces." (34) As regards liberals, they, notably Sir Chimanlal Setalvad and Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, were reported to have shown a disposition to maintain a somewhat open mind, although they also were not fully satisfied with the Award. So, making a general observation, the Consul General said that with certain exceptions, the Liberals, the Moslems, the Europeans, and the Anglo-Indians were willing to entertain the Award as a basis for constitutional development, but the Hindus and the Sikhs were bitterly opposed to the proposed solution. (35)

Gandhi's Fast unto Death

Gandhi was up against that provision of the Award which gave separate electorate to the Depressed Classes. He had shown his opposition to such suggestions even during the Second Round Table Conference and later in his correspondence with Sir Samuel

34 Consul General in Calcutta (Frost) to Secretary of State, 18 August 1932, 845.00/786, Records of the Department of State.

35 Consul General in Calcutta (Frost) to Secretary of State, 8 September 1932, 845.00/790, Records of the Department of State.
Hoare, the Secretary of State for India. (36) When the Award was announced, Gandhi declared that he would resist the Award with his life since it gave statutory separation to the Depressed Classes from the Hindu fold. He would go on a "perpetual fast unto death" beginning from 20 September.

Atherton noted a bewilderment in London at the decision of Gandhi. The first reaction was that some way must be found out to prevent the consummation of the threat. However, no suggestions as to how this was to be accomplished were coming forth, as, Atherton noted, even those who called Gandhi's gesture a political stunt were "being obliged to admit that he is sincere in his purpose." Nevertheless, it was obvious to Atherton that the British authorities were apprehensive lest Gandhi's hunger strike "precipitate a situation with consequences far more serious than might seem possible to anyone not familiar with present conditions in India." (37)

Gandhi's decision immediately stirred the whole of India and even a doubting and bewildered Nehru conceded that the fast had aroused mass consciousness. (38) Leaders like Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, C. Rajagopalachari, Rajendra Prasad, and many others met in Bombay and tried to find out a quick solution. Gandhi had started his fast as scheduled and commenced to sink. There was hard bargaining with B. R. Ambedkar, the leader of the Depressed Classes. But finally an agreement was arrived at

36 For Gandhi-Hoare Correspondence, see The Indian National Congress 1930-34, n. 14, pp. 156-60.
37 Counsellor of the US Embassy in London (Atherton) to Secretary of State, 16 September 1932, 845.00/789, Records of the Department of State.
38 Nehru, n. 7, p. 338.
on the fifth day of the fast, known as the "Poona Pact". Under this Pact, instead of 71 seats allotted to the Depressed Classes on the basis of separate electorates under the Communal Award, a total of 148 seats were reserved for them from the general constituencies. Election to these reserved seats was through joint electorates subject to a sort of primary election whereby the Depressed Classes themselves were to elect four candidates for each reserved seat from amongst whom the general electorate was to choose one. (39) This agreement was accepted by the British Prime Minister whereupon Gandhi ended his fast on 26 September to the relief of all concerned.

Ray Atherton was greatly impressed with the way events took shape since Gandhi's decision to go on fast stimulating the leaders of the Caste Hindus "to make a revolutionary change of policy towards the Depressed Classes." These events proved that "he [Gandhi] knew his public, although to the Western mind his methods were first not readily comprehensible." He had initiated a movement among the Caste Hindus for abolishing the social disabilities of the Depressed Classes out of which this problem, in fact, had arisen. "He had accomplished something which few people believed possible," thus wrote Atherton. Going still further in his assessment, he observed:

In many ways he [Gandhi] is an exceedingly troublesome person to the British Government, but the result of his activities in this case must be highly gratifying to it, for Gandhi has succeeded in greatly smoothing the path of India's progress toward self-government, while if the incipient
movement in the direction of social reform can gather momentum; it obviously has possibilities of the greatest importance to India and to the British Empire. (40)

The Effect of the Fast

As Louis Fischer has said, following Gandhi's decision to go on fast, a spirit of reform, penance, and self-purification swept over India. (41) In villages and towns thousands of wells were allowed to be used by the Untouchables, hundreds of temples were thrown open to them, and caste Hindus and Harijans (the untouchables) demonstratively fraternized in streets and other places. The Poona Pact marked "a religious reformation, a psychological revolution" in the Hindu India. (42)

The US Consul General also recognized this great impact wrought by Gandhi's fast in India. Reporting in December, he noted that "considerable progress has been made in the revolutionary change to permit the depressed classes to enter the temples." (43) He was conscious of the fact that the problem was an enormous one and would take a long time to work out. Conservative Brahmin circles were naturally opposed to the yielding of important privileges enjoyed through the centuries and, so, reaction against the Poona Pact was noticeable at some places. But Gandhi had done the "unthinkable". Wrote the Consul General:

40 Counselor of the US Embassy in London (Atherton) to Secretary of State, 1 November 1932, 845.01 Conference/33, Records of the Department of State.
41 See Fischer, n. 5, p. 319.
42 Ibid., p. 320.
43 Consul General in Calcutta (Frost) to Secretary of State, 8 December 1932, 845.00/803, Records of the Department of State.
The tact that quite a number of temples have been opened to the untouchables is an important event which could only have come about through Mr. Gandhi's sacrificial fast and would have seemed unthinkable of accomplishment even a few years ago. (44)

The Consul General was not oblivious of the political importance of the Poona Pact. According to him, it had "certainly restored Mr. Gandhi's political prestige in an extraordinary degree." The Depressed Classes, too, had greatly improved their political position in that they had gained twice as many seats under the Poona Pact as they had been allotted under the Communal Award. There was an additional dimension to the importance. "If the nationalists succeed in holding the untouchables within their political fold rather than have them drift apart through separate electorates as originally proposed [under the Communal Award], the gain to the Hindu cause, as the normally dominant party in India, may be of far-reaching future consequence," noted the Consul General. (45)

As far as the civil disobedience movement itself was concerned, the situation became depressing after Gandhi's fast. Gandhi's fast had aroused mass consciousness but it had also deflected this consciousness into directions other than directly political. Even according to Sitaramayya, the official chronicler of the Congress, "The public response to Gandhi's call for the removal of untouchability did doubtless affect the progress of the Civil Disobedience movement." (46) Despite occasional attempts to

44 Ibid. Emphasis added.
45 Ibid.
46 Sitaramayya, n. 6, p. 555.
revive the movement, this downward trend continued. But Gandhi again dropped a bomb-shell by beginning his 21-day fast for self-purification on 8 May 1933. He was released in view of the objective of his fast whereupon he issued a statement advising suspension of the Civil Disobedience for a full month or six weeks. M. S. Aney, the Acting President of the Congress, accepted this advice and suspended the Civil Disobedience first for a period of six weeks and then for a further period of six weeks.

The Consul General noted in this entire period that Gandhi had increasingly devoted himself to the moral causes and that the Congress activity had steadily declined, the movement having ceased to be of any real importance. (47) In Bengal, however, the revolutionaries continued to harass the British. Sir Alfred Watson, the editor of the Statesman, had to leave Calcutta for England incognito after repeated attempts on his life. "It offers a significant sidelight on conditions in Bengal that the principal British editor in India finds it necessary to leave the country", commented the Consul General. (48)

But there was growing evidence of dissension in the Congress as to the wisdom of continuing the civil disobedience movement which was sharpened after the suspension of the campaign during Gandhi's fast and recovery. There was a left wing which, according to the Consul General, favoured "violent measures against the Government" and had never been satisfied with Gandhi's doctrine of

47 Consul General in Calcutta (Frost) to Secretary of State, 26 January 1933, 845.00/807, Records of the Department of State. See also his Despatch No. 368, 29 April 1933, 845.00/818.

48 Frost to Secretary of State, n. 43.
non-violence. Yet the Civil Disobedience had been suspended pending his recovery. From this the Consul General concluded that Gandhi continued to control the Congress Party. (49)

THE NON-OFFICIAL VIEW

As the Second Round Table Conference closed in London, the attention of the American newspapers and journals shifted from London to India. An Associated Press despatch from Bombay noted the breach between Gandhi and the Viceroy on the question of Ordinances and civil disobedience and reported that the talk of "civil war" hovered over unhappy India as the old year died. (50) There was new bloodshed and turmoil in India and Gandhi was "defiant."

India's Appeal to America

It is noteworthy that in this darkening atmosphere and after calling upon the nation to launch another civil disobedience movement, the Congress Working Committee, sitting in Bombay during 29 December 1931 – 1 January 1932, passed a separate resolution under the title, "Appeal to Free Nations of the World". In this resolution, the Working Committee pointed out the dependence of the non-violent struggle on the strength of public opinion for

49 Consul General in Calcutta (Frost) to Secretary of State, 20 July 1933, 845.00/825, Records of the Department of State.


its success and gratefully acknowledged that the public opinion of the world was "being slowly but surely drawn in ever-increasing degree towards India's fight for national independence." But it did not confine itself to that. It called upon the free peoples of the world and, what is more important, their Governments to give greater and more effective support in this hour of trial.

The resolution read:

On the eve of the fresh ordeal to which the nation has been summoned, the Working Committee invites the free peoples of the world and their Governments to watch and study the progress of the movement, and if they are convinced of the justness of the unique means adopted by the Congress for reaching the national goal, to give to the movement their enlightened support in a greater and more effective measure than before. (52)

In view of the interest of Gandhi and other Indian leaders in American opinion shown in previous chapters, it can be assumed that while the Congress Working Committee was deliberating on this resolution, the United States was, along with other countries, prominently in its mind. This is corroborated further by, what Haridas Takoredas Muzumdar calls, "the parting message" which James A. Mills, the American correspondent of the Associated Press, received from Gandhi on 3 January, i.e., on the eve of his arrest. In this hour of gravity, Gandhi was cryptic but so pointed:

I am grateful to you for keeping the public informed of our activities and our aims. Tell the people that even as America won its independence through suffering, valor and sacrifice, so shall India in God's good time achieve her freedom by suffering, sacrifice

and non-violence. *Let America not forget us in the hour of our travail.* (53)

**American Opinion Hardens**

But the Indian leaders hardly realized that this campaign had been started under less favourable circumstances than, as the *New York Times* pointed out, the struggle which had been launched in 1930 with Gandhi's march to the sea to violate the salt laws. The Second Round Table Conference had just ended in London which, in the eyes of many, had promised some sort of Dominion rule in India. Again, the columns of the American newspapers and journals were full of news about the assassinations of Government officials in Bengal, the seditious activities of the Red Shirts in the North-West Frontier Province, and the no-rent campaigns in the United Provinces. (54) Moreover, the Second Round Table Conference and the subsequent events in India had also shown that India did not stand united behind Gandhi. The *New York Times* tried to show how Gandhi had less claim on the sympathies of the outside world this time:

*His* [Gandhi's] protest against measures aimed to discourage the assassination of Government officials is thus weaker morally than his protest two years ago against British revenue laws that were unjust to the masses of India. Resorting to civil disobedience after the most solemn pledges by all the British parties of ultimate Dominion rule for India, he has a slighter claim on the sympathies of the outside world than when he began his campaign against the limited measures of self-

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government contemplated in the Simon Report. His strategic position is further weakened by events at the second round table conference which made it clear that he does not have a United India behind him. (55)

In the opinion of the New York Times, it was also futile to launch a movement at this time when the public opinion in England had definitely gone conservative as reflected in the last General Election there. It noted that even the Liberals of England had begun to ask if any peaceful settlement with Gandhi was possible. (56)

The New York Times conceded that Gandhi embodied "a just aspiration", but his methods were "impossible"! "India has so many conflicting interests to reconcile, so far to go in economic betterment, so much to learn of the art of government, that it is hard to understand the die-hard Nationalist demand for all or nothing", it observed. (57) It was recognized by this paper that the racial and religious complexity of the peoples of India had often been exaggerated in the past by "a selfish British Toryism." The charge of the critics of the British Administration that Great Britain encouraged divisions among the Indians so as to "Divide and Rule" was also noted. But such critics were immediately reminded that "Such motives are not to be attributed to English statesmen of the type of Lord Irwin." Moreover, it was not to be forgotten that "events elsewhere in Asia in the last few years

56 Ibid.
57 "British Tactics in India", ed., ibid., 29 April 1932, p. 16.
justify the fear that the complete and sudden withdrawal of British supervision would spell untold evil for the people of India", the journal sombrely pointed out. (58)

M. E. Tracy of the San Francisco News even doubted the sincerity of Gandhi towards the Indian minorities and his faith in the non-violent methods of the struggle. Sarcastically he wrote:

In other words, he /Gandhi/ demands independence for a country which is unable or unwilling to guarantee minority rights or personal liberty for millions of its citizens.

The shallowness of his leadership is shown by the fact that he can talk so hopefully of non-violent thoughts while guiding 300,000,000 people toward the precipice of riot, rebellion, and destruction. (59)

Albert Shaw, the editor of the Review of Reviews, did not mince words. He pointedly posed the problem before the Americans: "Is Gandhi's movement entitled to the moral encouragement of Americans in the light of our own history? Will it bring order out of confusion? Is Gandhi a Washington, or merely a De Valera?" (60)

58 Ibid.
60 Review of Reviews, 85 (February 1932), p. 15.
Shaw reminded the Americans that this was the two-hundredth anniversary of the birth of George Washington and showered praise over the leadership and personality of this undoubted American hero. Shaw asserted that Washington's public and private life never ceased to have influence upon standards of life and conduct everywhere. It did not, however, follow that "such standards were always correctly applied in testing the merit of particular controversies." (61) Shaw warmed up and sharply asked: Should the Americans regard Gandhi as India's Washington simply because he demanded full independence for his country? He emphatically stated that this analogy which the followers of Gandhi sought to make and from which they drew strength was slight and superficial. The British authorities, he pointed out, had recently seemed "solicitous" and "thorough-going" in their study of all the problems of India. "If there was evidence that the peoples of that vast empire could form a national government, strong enough to maintain order and liberal enough to assure the rights of all classes and individuals, there would be no cause of dispute. India would make her own choice", he asserted.

Shaw, then, enlightened his readers that the American colonies had made painful sacrifices in their "defensive war" but they were not chasing "phantoms". "They would not have fought if Britain had been governed by the MacDonalda and Baldwins

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61 John Haynes Holmes regarded Gandhi a still nobler figure than Washington. Gandhi, to him, was not only leader of his own people, but also of all humanity. See Unity, 108 (23 November 1931), p. 163.
of today." Moreover, while the colonies were gaining their own objects, they were also transforming the future methods of the British Empire. Did not the colonies like Australia and Canada gain their independence, subsequently, by voluntary agreement with the British Empire? Shaw was almost sure what counsel George Washington would have given Gandhi in the present situation:

Leadership like that of George Washington would probably have advised Gandhi to do business harmoniously with such open-minded friends as King George and the present British Cabinet, with the hope of attaining independence in due time after the desirable fashion set by Canada and Australia. (62)

The traditional critics of the Indian nationalist movement continued to shoot their arrows especially at Gandhi. Mayo called Gandhi a Tammany Hall politician and blamed his "doctrine of passivity" for the miserable plight of the Untouchables. (63) Patricia Kendall denied that the Ordinances promulgated in India were oppressive and argued that Gandhi and other nationalist leaders thrived on publicity. (64) On top of it, there were continued reports in the newspapers and journals on "India - Where Briton, Hindu, and Moslem Clash" with cartoons which presented a bizarre picture of thousand disparate elements of race, religion, caste, language, and political groupings out of which John Bull was determined to fit out "A United And Happy India." (65)

62 Review of Reviews, n. 60, p. 16.
64 Ibid., 18 May 1932, p. 8. See also Ibid., 9 July 1932, p. 9 and 4 September 1932, Part 2, p. 8.
And finally, the British Consul General in New York, Gerald Campbell, was ready to tell the Americans the "facts" about the Indian situation. Addressing a meeting of the Government Club in New York, he said that it was a great pity that the despatches in the American press on India centred "entirely" around one man - Gandhi. The man was "evidently" considered as "saintly and picturesque in the United States", but, in fact, Gandhi "never made one constructive suggestion", this British officer exhorted the Americans. (66)

Gandhi: A Great Puzzle

In September 1932, Gandhi again was in the world spotlight with his threat to fast unto death against the Communal Award announced by the British Prime Minister. The Communal Award had a good reception in the American press. The Literary Digest called it a "bold attempt" on the part of the Prime Minister "to settle the endless disputes among communal Indian leaders". (67) The New York Times felt that the Prime Minister had fulfilled his promise of proclaiming an electoral system if the Indian factions failed to agree upon one themselves. (68) To counter Gandhi's argument that the separate electorate would encourage division in India, it reiterated the Prime Minister's contention that the scheme went part of the way to meet Gandhi's objection in that the Untouchables would vote with the Hindus in

67 "Indian Rage at MacDonald's Vote Plan", Literary Digest, 114 (3 September 1932), p. 8.
the general constituencies. (69)

So, when in this background of the Award having been received as a bold step in an inevitable situation, Gandhi's threat to fast was announced, the American press was greatly annoyed. Their annoyance was mingled with sarcasm at Gandhi. They recalled the blight of the caste system in India as exposed by Mayo in *Mother India* and also referred to Gandhi's much announced sympathy for the Untouchables, whom he called *Harijans*, "the children of God". (70) "But the puzzle now is why he plans to resist to the death the British scheme to give legislative representation to the very people he is supposed to love - India's 40,000,000 outcastes, or untouchables," observed the *Literary Digest*. (71) The *New York Times* pitched its sarcasm still higher:

Community of religion hasn't prevented the high-caste Hindus from keeping these millions of their fellow-believers pitiably apart and degraded, impure, defiling. Yet the attempt to improve their condition by the communal settlement is so wicked and irreligious that Mr. GANDHI is willing to die in protest, if necessary. Only high-caste Hindus must better the conditions which they have allowed to go on for centuries. (72)

Besides, how could the British yield on the question of policy? If the Indian factions could not come to a settlement, an attempt at settlement had to be made by Great Britain. "Does she [Great Britain] or Mr. GANDHI rule India", the paper

69  Ibid.
70  See "The Blight of Caste in India", *Literary Digest*, 114 (17 September 1932), pp. 18-19.
71  "Gandhi's Suicide Threat", *Literary Digest*, 114 (24 September 1932), p. 16.
angrily asked. (73)

The New York Times felt that Gandhi was putting hunger strike to a novel use. The Russian revolutionaries had used this against the inhuman treatment meted out to them in the prisons under the Czar. People sometimes went on hunger strike when there was no freedom of speech or press. This, according to this paper, was not the situation in India where the nationalists had "ample opportunity" to state their case. One could think of an American citizen going on hunger strike, if a basic human right was denied to him. But Gandhi was going on hunger strike not on such issues but against a concession to the Untouchables. "A hunger strike against the concession of a separate vote to the Hindu Untouchables cannot escape a touch of the incongruous", the paper noted. It emphasized that this was a "grotesque element" in him in the Western eyes. Yet this was "part of his greatness, certainly of his prestige." (74)

According to M. E. Tracy of the San Francisco News also, it was not possible for the West to understand Gandhi's fast since it regarded such acts as obsolete but they were so much in tune with India. (75) To the Philadelphia Inquirer the explanation was very simple: Gandhi was fasting simply because he was opposed to giving the Untouchables any share of power in a free India. It wrote:

73 Ibid.
74 "Gandhi Opens a New Campaign", ed., ibid., 19 September 1932, p. 16.
75 See Mackett, n. 59, p. 213.
His [Gandhi's] grievance is that the untouchables are to have some share in the future government of India which to a high caste Hindu like himself is well nigh unthinkable. In other words, the apostle of liberty for India would keep millions of his countrymen in hopeless subjection. If any consciences are shaken it should be those of Gandhi and his supporters. (76)

Gandhi's fast, however, had reader appeal. It was natural for the press to grab at that. The Associated Press informed newspaper readers that even while threatening to embark on a fast, Gandhi was actually also having finishing touches put on a new set of false teeth! (77) Articles on the duration for which a man could live without food and on the position of the Untouchables in the Hindu society were also written. (78)

But once the Poona Pact was arrived at, the tone of sarcasm of the American press, in many cases, changed into that of appreciation and wonderment. The Literary Digest regarded the Pact as epoch-marking and also showed appreciation of why Gandhi had opposed the Communal Award. (79) Current History was not sure of the total results of this "dramatic incident" but noted that Gandhi had "gambled his feeble frame chiefly against the obduracy and self-importance of the high-caste Hindus." (80)


77 See New York Times, 14 September 1932, p. 9 and 18 September 1932, Part 8, p. 2.

78 See ibid., 25 September 1932, Part 6, pp. 9, 15 and Part 8, p. 4.


The New York Times welcomed the Pact as "a happy solution." "It is certainly for the best interests of the Indian peoples that the great Hindu constituency should not develop new group cleavages in a country affiliated with too many factions and separatist interests," it observed. (81) It believed that the compromise paved the way for further progress in constitutional reform in India. It gave top priority on its first page to the news of Gandhi breaking his fast and the Hindus launching on a drive to end untouchability. (82)

These developments left the San Francisco News' Tracy somewhat dazed. It was quite beyond the "rationalism of occidental thinking", he wrote, that "a little old man could overthrow one of the sternest traditions of Hinduism and cause the British Empire to change its plans by merely threatening to starve himself to death." (83) This also showed that "All of the King's horses and all of the King's men have not been able to stop the Nationalist movement in India", observed the San Francisco News editorially. (84)

In subsequent months, Gandhi's concentration on fighting the evil of untouchability and the stiff resistance the Hindu orthodoxy was putting up against him received some attention of the American press. The Literary Digest made a survey of the

82 See ibid., 27 September 1932, p. 1.
reactions Gandhi's effort on behalf of the Untouchables was generating in India. (85) The New York Times published an article by C. F. Andrews in which he highlighted how and why Gandhi had turned all his zeal to aid the Untouchables. He also pointed out that the world forces released by Gandhi's reform movement might in the end lead to the greatest of all modern advances in the progress of mankind. (86) Current History discussed the vicissitudes of Gandhi's struggle with the caste Hindus especially in South India. (87)

The New York Times gave some prominence to the advice of the French priest, philosopher, and author, Abbe Ernest Dimnet, who in a speech in New York, said that the United States needed an American Gandhi — a saint and a great personality. (88) Editorially, however, it not only disputed the view that the United States needed a saint at the moment, but also the opinion that Gandhi was a saint. Pointing out that Gandhi was not fighting for any spiritual causes but for material causes, it observed:

GANDHI is not really a saint but a statesman if you are on his side, and a politician if you disagree with him. He is not fighting for spiritual but for material causes. He wants a United India and as free an India as he can get. His ascetic mode of life is merely incidental. His aims are political and economic. (89)

85 "Did Gandhi Help or Harm Hinduism?" Literary Digest, 114 (5 November 1932), p. 15. See also ibid., 114 (12 November 1932), p. 18.
87 Current History, 37 (February 1933), p. 610.
89 "Swaraj is not Sainthood", ed., ibid., 20 October 1932, p. 20.
The lack of understanding of Gandhi and his methods lingered on. It was reflected again when Gandhi went on still another fast in May 1933 for self-purification and the purification of his associates to acquire greater dedication to the reform movement he had embarked upon. The New York Times found it difficult to understand why the fast was undertaken. "We might almost say that the outside world has lost a good deal of interest in that particular spiritual weapon", it commented. (90)

The Liberal View: "War in India"

With the return of Gandhi to India after the Second Round Table Conference in London, the American liberals noted the growing gravity of the situation in India. Extreme repression was on in Bengal and elsewhere and yet the zeal of the rank-and-file Indians was undiminished. It was a portent with which, they felt, the British will have to reckon with. (91) Even Unity doubted if Gandhi "could still the uprising which has followed upon the failure of the Round Table...." (92)

"War in India" was the caption of the editorial article in The Nation on Gandhi's arrest. It wrote: "War is on in India. The harassed and despairing world is now to be the scene of another bitter and, we fear, bloody struggle which can have only one outcome — the end of British control in India." (93) "It is

90 Ibid., 31 May 1933, p. 16.
war in India," was the reaction of the New Republic also. It referred to the repressive measures promulgated by the Viceroy and felt that they were almost as comprehensive as they could possibly be. On the other hand, the "radical Nationalists" were growing in numbers and importance. The journal was, therefore, almost certain that despite Gandhi's pleas against violence, violence was going to be employed in India. (94) Unity used still stronger words: "This is Britain's declaration of war - the calculated attack of a great empire upon a helpless people for their repression and subjection at any price of blood and horror." (95)

The liberals also felt that the issues involved were substantially the same as on the previous occasions. But this time Gandhi had entered upon his campaign "morally strengthened". He had tried to discuss things out with the Viceroy but the latter refused. (96) The Christian Century was convinced that it was the British Government which must accept the responsibility for having locked up Gandhi and other leaders of the Congress, and this was a responsibility of the first magnitude. It wrote: "The refusal of the Viceroy so much as to discuss with the mahatma the recently enacted emergency ordinances in Bengal must be taken as a deliberate return to the 'iron hand' policy abandoned by Lord Irwin." (97) The liberal press continued to condemn the British for their repressive policy and continued to

96 See The Nation, n. 93.
97 Christian Century, 49 (13 January 1932), p. 47.
express confidence in the ultimate victory of the Indians despite the cruel odds they were facing. (98)

Attempts to Rally American Opinion

Gandhi's appeal to world opinion and the American opinion at that for concrete support did not go unnoticed in the liberal circles. Unity recalled the famous statement of Thomas Paine - "Where liberty is not, there is my country" - and called upon the Americans to remember that "It is in this heroic sense that India is today our country; and Indians our countrymen struggling for what we have ourselves long possessed." Moreover, the Indian cause belonged to all men who believed in peace through brotherhood and non-violence. Therefore, if the Americans believed in the religion they professed, they could not afford "to let Gandhi and his followers fail for lack of support."

"American opinion may well in the end decide this issue. Let American opinion be heard!" was the call of this journal. (99)

There were some organized efforts to rally American opinion behind the Indian cause. Haridas T. Muzumdar wrote an "Open Letter to the American People" in which he drew the attention of the Secretary of State to the enrolment of some Americans in India as members of the emergency cavalry corps organized by the British in Bombay and appealed to him to remove this factor of possible friction between India and the United


States. (100) An American League for India's Freedom was
organized with J. T. Sunderland as Honorary Chairman, John Haynes
Holmes as chairman, and Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, the Jewish leader,
as Vice-Chairman, which functioned on the pattern of English
Friends of India and also had links with them. They issued
manifestoes under the signatures of educationists, writers,
religious leaders, journalists, publicists, and public figures
in which they expressed unreserved support for complete freedom
of India through non-violence and condemned the repressive
measures of the British. (101)

'An American from India' even suggested boycott of British
goods in America as a concrete and effective way of supporting
India's freedom struggle. (102) Small organizations like
Fellowship of Faiths, the Union of East and West and the League
of Neighbors contributed their mite to the propagation of the
Gandhi gospel in their country. (103) The Community Church of
New York conferred a bronze medal to Gandhi for his outstanding
religious service of the world. (104) The New York Committee of
the Three-fold Movement and the All-World Gandhi Fellowship
celebrated the birthday of Gandhi and the advent of the Jewish
New Year jointly on 2 October which was attended by the Indian

100 Text in Unity, 108 (15 February 1932), pp. 346, 359, 360.
101 New York Times, 11 January 1932, p. 11; 1 August 1932,
p. 13; 15 October 1932, p. 34.
102 See Unity, 109 (2 May 1932), p. 142.
leader, V. J. Patel, who happened to be in the United States at that time. (105) Rabbi Stephen S. Wise and Rabbi Israel Goldstein, the Jewish leaders, highly praised Gandhi in this meeting hailing him as the greatest spiritual liberator of mankind in many centuries and comparing him with the Hebrew prophets like Moses and Elijah. (106) Roger N. Baldwin of the Civil Liberties Union, Harry W. Laidler of the League for Industrial Democracy, J. B. Matthews of the Fellowship of Reconciliation and I. Zimmerman, the Communist leader, led a delegation to the British Consulate General in New York to demand release of political prisoners in India. (107)

105 V. J. Patel was in the United States during November 1932 - March 1933. He visited many parts of the country giving lectures on conditions in India. The Mayors of many cities - like New York, Boston, Detroit, Chicago, and San Francisco - officially received him. Even Governors of many States - like Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Massachusetts - offered him their hospitality. He also addressed the Houses of the California State Legislature. The most interesting aspect of his visit to the United States was that he debated a former Secretary of State for India, Wedgwood Benn, and his predecessor as the President of the Indian Legislative Assembly, Sir Frederick Whyte, on the question of India in meetings arranged by the Foreign Policy Association in New York and Baltimore respectively. Unity compared his visit to America to that of Benjamin Franklin to France during the Revolutionary War. J. T. Sunderland thought that no other visitor from India - the other important visitors being Lajpat Rai, Rabindranath Tagore, and Sarojini Naidu - had ever met with such official recognition and welcome as V. J. Patel had. He called him India's Thomas Jefferson. See Unity, 110 (3 October 1932), p. 35; 110 (30 January 1933), pp. 306, 319; and 111 (27 March 1933), p. 63. For fuller account of Patel's visit to the USA, see G. I. Patel, Vithalbhai Patel: Life and Times (Bombay, n.d.), Book Two, pp. 1191-1205.


107 Ibid., 11 December 1932, p. 33.
H. Richard Niebuhr, clergyman and Professor at the Yale Divinity School, highlighted Gandhi's new ethical leadership of the world in his address at the summer session of the Columbia University. (108) Kenneth Saunders, Professor of the History of Religion at the Pacific School of Religion, Berkeley, California, said in his book, The Heritage of Asia (New York, 1932), that Gandhi was not only the driving force in the machinery of the Indian politics and in the remaking of the Indian soul, but also the world's leading pacifist and spiritual thinker. Rev. Frederick B. Fisher, who had worked in India as a missionary for many years, came out with a book, That Strange Little Brown Man (New York, 1932), in which he declared that India without Gandhi would be like America without Lincoln.

Alice Stone Blackwell—an important figure in the struggle for greater rights and broader opportunities for women in the United States—repeatedly compared the situation in India with that which once had existed in Ireland and drew the attention of the Americans to the cruelties perpetrated on the Indians by the British. (109) She also maintained contacts with Agatha Harrison of the India Conciliation Group in London. In fact, through Harrison, Devadas Gandhi, son of Mahatma Gandhi, sent her the statement of Pandit Malaviya which the latter had issued on how the police brutally assaulted the delegates who had assembled in Calcutta in March 1933 to attend the 47th session of the Indian National Congress. (110)

108 Ibid., 5 August 1932, p. 15.
109 See Unity, 109 (4 April 1932), p. 79; 109 (23 May 1932), p. 188.
110 See Blackwell Papers.
The limitations of the American opinion were, however, realized in some liberal circles. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, an Indian long resident in Boston, did not expect that the American Government would interfere in British "domestic affairs", however, "scandalous" they may be. Yet, he saw use of dissemination of correct reports in the United States about the Indian Ordinances and the other repressive laws. He advised that open letters of protest signed by prominent Americans should be sent to the authorities in India and England. (111) The New Republic did not believe that the Government which at the moment ruled Great Britain cared very much what the American libertarians, who had signed the manifesto issued by the American League for India's Freedom, said about India "except as their words may have some slight effect in strengthening the resistance of the Indians." But it reminded the British critics of the American opinion that the Indian resistance was already being stiffened to an incalculable degree by the acts of the British in India. (112) The Nation also told the English visitors who sought American support for the acts of the British Cabinet in India that if they desired to lessen the pro-Indian sentiment in America they should not lose a minute in releasing Gandhi who had been kept in prison without any charges having been brought against him. (113) It had earlier advised the British that Gandhi did not rely only on the boycott of British goods and other forms of "non-violent coercion" or only upon world opinion outside of Britain, but also on the self-respect and conscience of the British people.

113 The Nation, 135 (16 November 1932), p. 469.
Making, therefore, a fervent appeal to the British conscience, it wrote:

We await with eager hope a sturdy cry within Great Britain for a cessation of the brutalities in India; we long for a demand that Gandhi and the Nationalists be freed and invited to state terms anew, and those terms be met by a generosity on the part of Great Britain far less costly than the madness of her present policy. (114)

The "Implacable" Gandhi

When Gandhi announced that he would "fast unto death" against the Communal Award declared by the British Prime Minister, liberal circles in the United States were stirred. The British journalist, S. K. Ratcliffe, wrote to Villard that Gandhi was out to prove that he was "the man of destiny for British India." The issue Gandhi had chosen for his "fast unto death" was, in the opinion of this journalist, "astounding, incredible." Trying to show up the of ambivalence Gandhi, he further wrote:

The Government's proposals (i.e. the Communal Award) seemed to us to be by far the best part of the constitutional scheme.... Gandhi, however, takes the amazing ground that he must sacrifice himself because the British Government has yielded to the pressure of the great body of people on whose behalf he himself has time and again withstood his own party. (115)

Villard's journal, however, while noting the difficulty of the British Government in the matter, found it "impossible to deny the wisdom" of Gandhi's theory that the separate electorate for the untouchables would perpetuate the communal separation in India. Moreover, how grave were the implications of Gandhi's


115 Ratcliffe to Villard, 20 September 1932, Villard Papers.
death? It wrote:

The death of Gandhi by self-starvation would not only mean the loss to the world of one of its most significant figures. It would let loose in India a storm which the British already foresee. It is hoped that the government and Gandhi will somehow find a compromise. (116)

The New Republic repudiated the misrepresentation of Gandhi's stand in some American newspapers to the effect that Gandhi was hostile to the Untouchables. It found the statesmanship of Gandhi's position "unquestionably sounder than that of the British who only a few years ago introduced into India for the first time the practices of separate electorates on a religious or racial basis." It wished to believe that MacDonald had the wisdom and courage to rise to the occasion and "cut through red tape and make a significant stroke for humanity". (117)

Unity found Gandhi, again, "the consummate statesman and the perfect saint" in the bold step he had taken. He, by his "sublime self-abnegation", would confront Britain with a united India which would make "the new enslavement of India under dishonest constitutional forms" impossible and, at the same time, bring justice to the helpless millions. "We stand on the threshold of one of the supreme martyrdoms of history. To what devotion should we be moved, to be worthy of this man!"; exclaimed this journal. (118) To the Christian Century also, Gandhi had picked


117 New Republic, 72 (28 September 1932), p. 163.

118 Unity, 110 (3 October 1932), pp. 35-36. See also Ibid., 110 (26 September 1932), p. 19.
up an issue which had both "political and profound moral connotations". He had contrived to fix an empire on the horns of a dilemma and he intended to press them on those horns at the cost of his own life. He looked like "the most implacable, ruthless figure in modern history." (119)

The liberal press hailed the Poona Pact, its acceptance by the British Government, and the ending of the fast by Gandhi as a great victory for Gandhi. "A little brown naked man lies in a prison yard, and by his simple refusal to eat brings two warring classes of his countrymen together and the proud Empire to terms. It seems incredible, but it is true," wrote the Nation. And it wondered: "What clearer example have we ever had of the ability of a great spirit to make the imprisonment of his body seem supremely ridiculous?" (120) Unity also asked what were the swords of Caesar and Napoleon compared with the soul of Gandhi? It felt that perhaps time was not far distant when all shall understand and hail Gandhi as the modern Christ. (121) The Christian Century noted that the fast had helped Gandhi reestablish his moral authority over his own group and push forward "the fundamental revolution" of bringing the caste Hindus to a point of giving social and political recognition to the out-castes. By his fast Gandhi had also served notice that he meant to attempt nothing less than the unification of the entire Indian society. "It is


the most stupendous undertaking a single man could contemplate, but Gandhi evidently means to make the effort," the journal observed. (122)

After this fast, Gandhi concentrated his attention on the removal of untouchability from the Hindu society. The liberal press noted that although the conscience of the Hindu public had been awakened to this evil as never before, yet Orthodoxy was putting up a strong fight against the movement initiated by Gandhi. (123) Each time Gandhi threatened a fast against this stubbornness, the liberal press applauded him. (124) On 8 May 1933, Gandhi again went on a three-week fast for self-purification and the purification of his associates for greater vigilance in connection with the Harijan cause. The Nation felt the fast would mark "a great step toward Indian independence" by bringing about unity among various Indian factions. (125) The Christian Century regarded it as another measure of the quality of his leadership that before pressing for the political goals of the nationalist movement, he should insist on the reform and purification of the Hindu life. (126) In a long editorial article, entitled "Gandhi's Ordeal", it declared that the ultimate effects of the fast might be universal and ever lasting: "The outcome, whatever it may turn out

125 The Nation, 136 (17 May 1933), p. 543. See also New Republic, 75 (17 May 1933), p. 3.
126 Christian Century, 50 (10 May 1933), p. 611.
to be, is likely to go on shaping the course of history after every human being now living is dead." (127) Gandhi's ordeal strongly suggested "the cross of Jesus" to this Christian journal. (128) Unity also saw immense spiritual meaning for the whole mankind in Gandhi's acts and achievements: "Gandhi today, like Jesus yesterday, reveals the presence of a Spirit, in whom we can live and move and have our being, and achieve our ends, if we choose." If there was anything else in the world so important as this, it knew not what it was, the journal wrote. (129)

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The Americans in general noted that Lord Willingdon was different from Lord Irwin and that the former was determined to adopt a tough line with the nationalists. But this did not necessarily mean more sympathy for the nationalists. On the other hand, many Americans felt that the nationalists had less ground to embark upon civil disobedience this time. Their lack of understanding of the Indian situation and of Gandhi's position was clearly reflected on the occasion of Gandhi's "fast unto death" which, by and large, was represented as a protest against an unavoidable concession to the Depressed Classes. When, however, the Poona Pact was arrived at, accepted by the British Government, and, as a consequence, a movement to reform the Hindu society was

128 Ibid., p. 649.
129 Unity, 111 (12 June 1933), p. 231.
released, the critics were greatly puzzled and tended to have second thoughts about Gandhi's real intent in protesting against the Communal Award. Gandhi, on the whole, emerged as a force fighting against Hindu reaction and orthodoxy and, thereby, struggling to achieve the unification of the Indian society. Gandhi had done the "unthinkable" was the reaction of the US Consul General in India. But Gandhi's repeated threats to go on fast had the effect of the law of diminishing returns in that many Americans lost much of their interest in the fast as a spiritual weapon.

The liberals maintained their sympathy for the nationalists and their praise for Gandhi in this whole period. Willingdon's refusal to meet Gandhi had strengthened, in their eyes, the moral ground of the nationalists to launch another civil disobedience, although they were conscious that a spirit of violence was abroad in the country. Their faith in Gandhi as a spiritual force was still more buttressed when they saw the achievement of the Poona Pact. Conscious as they were of their own limitations, they did their little mite to rally American opinion behind Gandhi's cause.

On the whole, the quantum of American interest in political developments in India was less in this period than during the period of the Salt Satyagraha, one of the reasons being that this phase of the civil disobedience was less picturesque than the spectacle of the "Indian Boston Tea Party" in 1930.