Chapter-V

IMPERIAL HEGEMONY & COLONIAL POLICY

The success of the nationalist forces in the struggle for hegemony over Indian society was fairly evident by the end of the War. The British rulers had won the war against Hitler, but lost the one in India. The space occupied by the national movement was far larger than that over which the Raj cast its shadow. Hitherto unpolarised areas and apolitical groups had fallen in line with the rest of the country in the agitation over the INA trials. Men in the armed forces and bureaucracy openly attended meetings, contributed money, voted for the Congress and let it be known that they were doing so. The militancy of the politicised sections was evident in the heroic actions in 1942 and in the fearlessness with which students and others expressed their solidarity with INA and RIN men. The success of the national movement could be plotted on this graph of the spread of nationalist sentiment and the fervour of people.

A corresponding graph could also be drawn of the demoralisation of the British officials and the changing loyalties of Indian officials and loyalists, which would tell the same story of nationalist success, but differently. In this tale, nationalism would not come across as a force whose overwhelming presence left no place for the British. Rather, it would show the concrete way in which the national movement eroded
imperial hegemony, gnawed at the pillars of the colonial structure and reduced British political strategy to a mess of contradictions.

* * * * *

That the British wielded brute force to maintain their rule and to crush opposition is well known. Very often, the state did not actually repress— the very fact that it had the capacity to do so was enough to contain revolt. Hence, the British considered the maintenance of a large, disciplined, efficient, and loyal army to be a prime necessity, for the armed forces remained, in the ultimate analysis, the final guarantor of British interests. But generally, for the continued existence of their rule, and for the perpetuation of imperialist domination, they relied on a variety of ideological instruments. It is in this sense that the "British colonial state in India was, in however limited a way, a hegemonic or semi-hegemonic state in the Gramscian sense". Its «semi-hegemonic foundations» were "buttressed by the ideology of Pax Brittanica, law and order, the British official as the mai-bap of the people, as well as by the institutions of the ideological, legal, judicial and administrative systems"... "the ideological state apparatuses ..... which acted as the active purveyors of these colonial ideologies."

-----------------------------

The impression of the unshakeable foundations of British rule, the aura of stolidity and general prestige of the Raj contributed towards the maintenance of imperial hegemony. The prestige of the Raj was very largely embodied in its much vaunted 'steel frame', the Indian Civil Service (ICS) and more specifically in the district officer who represented authority in the countryside: "...At the centre of the 'benevolent despotism' that British rule in the subcontinent adopted stood the steel frame of the Indian Civil Service... and in particular...the figure of the district officer himself, the physical 'embodiment of Government' across the Indian countryside..." The prestige of the Raj, by showing the futility of attempts to overthrow it, had all along played as crucial a role in the maintenance of British rule as the armed might behind it.

A state structure of this kind, based on "semi-hegemonic foundations", called for certain specific policies in the political sphere. A reliable social base for the state had to be secured on the one hand; on the other, strategies had to be devised to limit the social reach and effective clout of the anti-imperialist forces. Active cooperation of 'native allies' in running the country was gained by a variety of techniques, ranging

from the handing out of jobs, favours and positions of some authority to concessions to the 'legitimate' political demands of the loyalist and liberal sections.

As regards the snowballing anti-British discontent, it was sought to be neutralised by confining it within the constitutional arenas created by the political reforms. Constitutional concessions were regularly made, though under pressure, to the demands raised by the anti-imperialist forces. Divisive tactics, perfected in the communal sphere, were used to disrupt the broad unity of the national movement. A split was sought to be created between the left and the right wing, either by co-opting the moderate wing of the Congress through sustained constitutionalism, or by allowing extremism to go unrestrained, in the belief that the moderates would take fright and effect a break. These were the hopes during the period of


4. Linlithgow wrote to the Secretary of State, "It would, indeed, be convenient if the various sections in the Congress ranks were to part company and sort themselves out before action became necessary against the real revolutionaries", 5 March 1937, Linlithgow Papers, MSS/ EUR F.125/4, NMML. Linlithgow wrote to Haig, the UP Governor, that & the only ultimate refuge lies in a split in the Congress, with the right joining moderate opinion outside in defence of the rights of property", 23 Oct. 1938, Haig Papers, Roll 1, NMML.
not to arrest Nehru in 1936-37, despite his clearly seditious speeches.

This was in peace-time, but when the Congress declared all out war on officialdom, as in 1920-22, 1930-32, and 1942, a different approach was called for. Nevertheless, even on such occasions, repression was never immediate and pervasive as we shall see but selective and after deliberation. On the whole, even mass movements were sought to be dealt with constitutionally. For one, the government would normally not act on perceiving the threat of civil disobedience, but would wait till the actual movement was launched to make arrests and scotch the plans. A naked show of force was always sought to be avoided, for not only would it sow deep seeds of bitterness, but would alienate the liberal sections in society, some even within the administration, and push them into the nationalist camp, albeit for brief sojourns. Repression, when wielded, was no doubt very brutal and widespread, but on the whole, the British preferred to find solutions to political developments, and even political crises, within the ambit of constitutionalism. Thus the keynote of British policy was constitutionalism in

5. This has been discussed at length in Sucheta Mahajan, "British Policy towards Left Nationalism: Nehru's Challenge, 1934-37", unpublished paper, 1979, Centre for Historical Studies, J.N.U.
general and as far as possible, and repression only when necessary and preferably against extremists alone.

* * * * *

At the end of the War, the British were evaluating their position in the context of the post-1942 situation. It was clear to them that the hegemonic foundations of their rule were fast crumbling. Even erstwhile loyalists were deserting and the ICS was reaching a breaking point. The army, despite the rumblings of discontent and increase in pro-nationalist sympathies, was, however, considered quite safe at the time. The general consent of the people to British rule had diminished, and the open, military repression of the 1942 movement had contributed greatly to this.

Even liberal opinion in the country had shifted, slowly but steadily, away from the British and towards the nationalist forces. In 1942, Sapru, who had been on the Viceroy's Council during the non-cooperation movement in the early twenties, bemoaned the depths to which British policy had sunk in the hands of officials like Amery and Linlithgow. He, Jayakar and others had pressed for the release of Gandhi when he fasted in 1943, and later supported the demands for the release of leaders and the

formation of a national government: "The present Viceroy... is totally devoid of imagination.... If this is my feeling about Linlithgow my feeling about Amery is that no Secretary of State since 1858 has done half the mischief which Amery has done... I have come to the conclusion that there is no chance for Indo-British relations being straightened out, unless there is change in the personnel at Delhi or Whitehall".

The loyalists were in a dilemma. They could no longer sustain faith in the inherent 'justice' of British rule or in the invincibility of the British. The repression of 1942, the obstinacy of the government in February 1943, and then its stubborn insistence on holding the INA trials offended the loyalists. Besides, their belief in the innate strength of the British had been assailed by the conciliation of the mid-1930s.

In 1945 this faith was further eroded when the government followed a policy of wooing their erstwhile opponents, at the time it retreated under the storm of public pressure on the question of severely punishing the INA soldiers and when violence of the Congress speeches rent the air and officials stood


8. Even a hard-core loyalist and conservative like C.P. Ramaswamy Aiyar felt the same way: "the present situation calls for the immediate elimination of the Secretary of State and for the appointment of an Indian Viceroy", Aiyar to Sapru, 4 January 1942, *Sapru Papers*, S-1, Reel 1, No. A-148, NMML.
helplessly by. In late 1945, Wavell noted that non-official loyalists were doubtful of the willingness and capacity of the British to protect them. Wavell told the Secretary of State that we are running risks to keep the possibility of negotiations open, but there are "many experienced officials in this country who think that our policy is so weak as to lead inevitably to loss of control".

Since the government relied on the active support of the loyalist and the liberal sections to run the administration and work the reforms, the diminishing number of loyalists, especially ones of credibility and calibre, posed a serious problem. Viceroy's Wavell and Linlithgow often bemoaned the low calibre and standing of the Indian members of the Executive Council. As early as 1940, the then Viceroy felt that only a Congress-League Council would effectively command authority. Further, the Indian members of the Executive Council could not be relied upon, as was evident from the resignation of three members of the Viceroy's Executive Council on the question of the British refusal to release Gandhi during his 21 day fast in February 1943.


10. 27 February 1946, TP, Vol.6, p.1076.

11. Linlithgow to Hallett, U.P. Governor, 10 June 1940 and Viceroy to Secretary of State, 8 October 1940, Linlithgow Papers, MSS/EUR F. 125/103 and 125/14.
The Civil Service was deemed to be at a breaking point by the end of 1943. The problem of declining recruitment, which had plagued the ICS ever since the end of the First World War, had reached alarming proportions by the Second World War. By 1939 British and Indian members had achieved parity. Overall recruitment was first cut in order to maintain this balance, and later stopped in 1943. Between 1940 and 1946, the total number of ICS officials fell from 1201 to 939, that of British ICS officials from 587 to 429 and Indian ICS officials from 614 to 510. By 1946, only 19 British ICS officials were available in Bengal for 65 posts. Besides, the men coming in were no longer Oxbridge graduates from aristocratic families whose fathers and uncles were 'old India hands' and who believed in the destiny of the British nation to govern the 'child people' of India. They were increasingly grammar school and polytechnic boys for whom serving the Raj was a career, not a mission.

At the end of the War, the ICS was a run-down machine, not only because of its depleted numbers, but because the officers were heavily strained by the War and by long absences from home. The Viceroy informed the Secretary of State that the services "badly need a rest from the strain which they have undergone during the war years". The U.P. Governor confirmed

that district officers were "both over-tax'd and overworked". Even after the War, the passage's situation was so bad, with the troops getting priority, that civilians and their families could not go home on leave. In early October 1945, the Viceroy pointed out that scarcity of sea passages had a bad effect on the morale of British civil servants who wish to proceed home on leave. But four months later, there was little difference in the situation and he warned that if special provision was not made, this will have a "serious effect on the morale of the services at a time when it is essential for us to keep it at its highest".

However, the main factor in the debilitation of the ICS was not manpower shortage (presented by Potter as an 'autonomous' factor delinked from Indian political developments) but the slow, invidious decline of its prestige and authority. Here the erosion of authority had been taking place over the years when the rising nationalist forces had been sought to be contained by a policy of conciliation mixed with repression. But the strategy of the national movement, of a multi-faceted struggle combining non-violent mass movements with working of constitutional reforms,


14. Viceroy to Secretary of State, 1 October 1945 and 29 January 1946, TP, Vol.6, pp.308 and 870 respectively.
proved to be more than a match for them. When non-violent movements were met with repression, the naked force behind the government stood exposed, offending the sensibility of the Government's supporters, whereas if government did not clamp down on 'sedition', or effected a truce (as in 1931 when the Gandhi-Irwin Pact was signed) or conceded provincial autonomy under the Government of India Act, 1935, it was seen to be too weak to wield control and its authority and prestige were undermined.

The services had always cried out for a clear-cut policy, one way or the other, but the 'pursuit of political ends' had held sway and the result was deterioration of the administrative machine. The contradictions of a policy intertwining conciliation with repression are obvious. Action could be decisive only if policy was clearly defined. A two pronged policy could not but create problems, especially when the same set of bureaucrats have to implement and effect both policies. This dilemma arose in the mid-1930s, when the officials who had organised the repression of the Congress-led civil disobedience movement and kept the leaders in detention, were faced with the prospect of serving under these very men in the provincial ministries to be set up in 1937. This prospect soon became a reality in eight

15. See Bipan Chandra, Long Term Dynamics, op.cit., pp. 46-53. Also see Bipan Chandra et.al, India's Struggle for Independence, New Delhi, 1988, chs. 38 and 39.
Constitutionalism wrecked the services' morale as or more effectively as the mass movement before it, as the experience of the ministries of 1937-9 showed, though this is not often realised. From the elections onwards, condemnation of police officials had begun, and later on policemen and intelligence officials were even hounded out of the political meetings they

16. Epstein refers to the "long shadow cast by the threatening approach of a specifically Congress ministry in Bombay, apparent in fact from 1935 onwards", op. cit., p.506. "The constitutional experiment would also tax the administrative structure of the provinces greatly. The officials who had hitherto taken punitive action against Congressmen, would now have to take orders from them". Visalakshi Menon, National Movement, Congress Ministries and Imperial Policy: A Case Study of the UP, 1937-39, M.Phil. dissertation submitted to the Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, 1981. I am indebted to Visalakshi Menon for references from Haig and Linlithgow Papers.

17. In UP, during the tenure of the Congress ministry, insecurity among officials increased, especially since charges were constantly levied against officials. See Visalakshi Menon, op.cit. Epstein argues that by the close of the thirties the trend of events (was).... undermining the morale of the services at breakneck speed", op. cit. See Interview with Y.B. Chavan, New Delhi, 2 May 1984.

Venkatachar has pointed out that "the disastrous electoral result was the end of Zamindars and Taluqadars as a force in the political life of the province. The Collector of my Aligarh days was then in Lucknow doing election work. Reflecting on the results of the election, he remarked to me that it was the beginning of the end of British rule as it was hitherto thought that Congress had some influence in the urban areas and over the urban intelligentsia; now, it has convincingly demonstrated that it held the rural area in its grip. What was astonishing he added, was that Congress played the game and won on rules set by government". Hunt and Harrison, op. cit., p.193.
came to cover. In some parts of the country the Congress organisation became a locus of authority parallel to the official administration, with left-wing Congressmen directing that rent be paid to them, deciding agrarian disputes and setting up Congress panchayats.


19. "One of the most dangerous activities of left-wing Congressmen" was seen to be their attempt to "set up the Congress organisation as a parallel administration", Quarterly Report for period ending 31 March 1937, Linlithgow Papers, F-125/142, pp. 15-16.

In Saran district in Bihar, home ground of one of the Congress ministers, Kemp had a rather similar experience: "The Congress ministry were great interferers in the day-to-day administration of the districts and in Saran district in particular. With so many of their henchmen in the villages the Ministers lacked no sources of information or requests for favours on which the District Officer was required to report and often to act in the manner indicated. Generally however one managed to avoid a clash, without having to compromise too much on principles".

In Bombay, too, Symington records: "It was a momentous occasion when, in the month of April, we came under the rule of the party which had been agitating against the British raj for more than twenty years...One feature of the early months of Congress rule was objectionable, and embarrassing to the new Government. Every petty Congress committee, regional, district, or village, not to mention their secretaries and chairmen, assumed it had somehow acquired official status and could give orders to local officials. This quickly grew into a nuisance; and firm action was needed, and was taken, by the Congress High Command to squash it". Hunt and Harrison, op. cit., pp. 196-8.
People could not fail to notice that the British Chief Secretary in Madras took to wearing khadi or that the Revenue Secretary in Bombay, on tour with the Revenue Minister, Morarji Desai, would scurry across the railway platform from his first-class compartment to the latter's third-class carriage so that the Honourable Minister may not be kept waiting. Among Indian officials, disloyalty was not evident, but where loyalty to the 'Raj' was paraded earlier, 'it was the done thing to parade one's patriotism and, if possible, a third cousin twice removed who had been to jail in the civil disobedience movement'.

With Congress having assumed office once, the likelihood of its return to power in the future weighed as a consideration with officials. The Bombay Governor felt that the "feeling that Congress would return to power some day...cannot fail to be in the mind of all Indian officials". Hallett explained Pant's condemnation of services as directed to "discredit the present regime or to remind officers that the Congress may again become

---

20. Similar instances of the officials' desire to please their Congress "bosses" were recounted by innumerable nationalist workers. See Interviews, ICSSR Project, JNU.


their masters. That is one of the difficulties I foresee in the future...."

From the time ministries resigned in September 1939 negotiations were afoot to bring Congress back to office. This continued till the rejection of the August Offer in 1940 and later, when the Cripps Offer was made, the prospect of provincial ministries loomed again. This dual policy of carrot and stick complicated the dilemma of the officials.

This trend of declining morale was arrested by the outbreak of the War in 1939 and the resignation of Congress ministries. Initiative and authority were restored to officialdom. But a strong policy and return to official rule provided only a temporary respite. During individual civil disobedience many officials hesitated to take action against the organisers. The U.P. Governor explained this hesitation: "During the Congress regime officers were brought in contact with Congress workers and possibly became friendly with them; it is only natural that they would be reluctant to take action against their former friends. But apart from this, there


24. The Home Political files and Linlithgow's correspondence in March-April 1940 are full of discussions on the need to crush the Congress. HomePoll. 3/2/40; 3/11/40; 3/13/40 and Linlithgow to Zetland, 5 and 25 March 1940, Linlithgow Papers, F.125/9.
is the fear of what their position will be if Congress returns to power."

The Quit India movement, with its features of attacks on and killings of police and district officers and burning of police stations, created a difficult situation for district officials. In some areas, action taken was weak, perhaps because officials were wary of antagonising Congressmen or secretly sympathised with them. In other cases, repression was exceptionally harsh, perhaps as a last ditch measure. As the U.P. Governor admitted later, such actions were committed in 1942.

25. For government hesitation to act in 1941, See U.P.F.R. for first half of April 1941, Home Poll. 18/4/41.


Martin, ICS, Bihar, wrote about Bihar during the 'riots' of August 1942: "The landlords who formed the richest and most influential grouping in the province were united only in a recognition that to survive and prosper they would have in the long run to make their peace with the Congress Party; and much the same feelings influenced the members of the provincial services, particularly the magistracy and the police, who formed the great part of the administration". Hunt and Harrison, op. cit., p. 202.


134
"which dragged out in the cold light of 1946, nobody could defend". This unwarranted repression had to be covered by a Viceregal pledge that no enquiries would be allowed into executive action. Finally, it was only the widespread deployment of troops that scotched the movement by unprecedented, brutal repression.

By mid-1944 it was clear that constitutionalism had returned, though the War, Defence of India Rules and detentions continued. Gandhi's release, albeit on grounds of ill-health, was a pointer, given a government which had made arrangements for his funeral in February 1943. Assemblies of Congressmen were convened, though Congress was under a ban, constructive work picked up and through it a machinery was created which would be the basis for Congress re-organisation in mid-1945. The 75 lakhs Kasturba Gandhi Fund was easily subscribed. All sections of political opinion from their manifold political platforms voiced the two demands - release of leaders and formation of a national government. District officials stood idly by, watching these developments, as they did the later ones-the release of the leaders, the

announcement of elections and the increasing likelihood of Congress ministries in many provinces.

It was a vastly-depleted, war-weary, 1942-battered bureaucracy that was expected to implement the peace-time constitutionalism now on the cards. At any time the ambivalence of a policy of repression followed by constitutionalism posed a difficult problem for the administration. In 1945 there were more concrete entanglements between repression and conciliation because the Congressmen released from jail were determined to pull the 1942 skeletons out of the cupboard. The victims of repression, those who lost their lives, were hailed as 'martyrs', while the officers responsible for repression were, often by name, severely condemned for their gross misdeeds. While such speeches and the government's inability to check them had a devastating effect on services' morale, what was more alarming for the officials was the rising crescendo of demands for enquiries into official action.

The forthcoming elections were likely to bring Congress ministries back to power, significantly in provinces where repression had been most arbitrarily brutal, and the services feared that enquiries would be instituted, Linlithgow's pledge notwithstanding. The question of enquiries was seen as "the most difficult issue" that the formation of provincial ministries would bring to a head, which could only be resolved by
a 'gentlemen's agreement' with the Congress.

30. Reports of Governors of Bombay, Madras, Sind and C.P. to Viceroy and Viceroy's report to Secretary of State, TP., Vol.6, pp. 429, 318, 437, 468, 526 and 602. Rs of C.P. and Berar, Madras, Assam, Delhi, Orissa and Bombay for July to October, 1945, Home Poll 18/7/45, 18/8/45 and 18/9/45 reveal the officers' alarm at enquiries. The Viceroy informed the Secretary of State that even Nehru had threatened revenge at Lucknow and had subsequently attacked five officials by name on his tour of Eastern U.P., TP., Vol.6, pp. 349 and 378. "This is probably the most difficult issue that will arise between Governors and their Congress Ministries". Viceroy to Secretary of State, 27 February 1946, ibid., Vol. 6, p. 1077. However, if this did not come about, an ordinance preventing judicial proceedings without the provincial Governor's sanction was suggested. Viceroy to Secretary of State, 6 February 1946, ibid., p. 909.

The end of the war and the return to government by elected ministries in all the provinces was trying enough, as Ray, ICS, Bihar, records for Bihar: "They toured the districts continually with a large following, not for administrative purposes, but mainly for political reasons. Seldom was any warning given in advance: a telephone call at any early hour would inform one that an Hon'able Minister had arrived at the Circuit House which meant postponing one's work, joining the queue of petitioners and dancing attendance upon him for the rest of the day. With one or two notable exceptions they had little idea of the complexities of administration. 'I hear there is a lot of blackmarketing in the district- look to it at once and let me know next week' was a fairly typical verbal instruction I once received. Nor were personal courtesies always very marked. After a tiring day with the Prime Minister I recall being dismissed with a wave of the hand late at night on the railway station with a curt: 'You can go now'. However objectionable all this did not really matter, but what did matter was the tendency of Ministers to manipulate affairs with their Congress henchmen on the spot. Endless intrigue, interference and misunderstanding was the result. This meant that the District Officer was often isolated and bypassed and had no idea of important orders passed or decisions taken until long after, often by rumour. Transfers of subordinate officials without warning or consultation became commonplace. Nevertheless any failings or shortcomings were attributed to 'sabotage by British officials', the words of a friendly Congressman to me". Hunt and Harrison, op. cit., p.235.

For compensation of services, protection against reprisals, reaction to political events, air evacuation, etc., see accession nos. 3826-3832, specially file nos. 180,181, 182,183,185,187 and 287, R/3/1 series, P.S. to Viceroy's Office Papers, I.O.L.R., Microfilm in NAI.
Having outlined the impact of the national movement on the British position over the years, let us assess the impact of popular nationalist activity and 'popular movements' on British policy in the six months after the end of the War. As stressed earlier, British policy was in the main based on long-term considerations, the assessment of the past and the anticipation of the future course of events. It was hardly ever related to immediate, individual events, rather, it tended to override short-term pressures in the determination to reach the desired goal. For example, in 1945, the Home Department explained their liberal policy towards 'sedition' in the election period as risks that were necessary in order to secure the wider interests of getting provincial ministries into office. Moreover, the Government's reaction to unanticipated challenges to the peace was normally one of repression, of handling them as law and order problems. This is clear from the severe handling of all the upsurges - the prompt use of troops, indiscriminate firing, stern ultimatums to the naval ratings, calling in of Royal Navy ships and the forcing of surrender by siege of the ships and firing by troops.

Even in 1945, their wherewithal for repression was intact, as shown again by the successful use of Indian troops against RIN ratings, and the failure of the RIN strike to become the signal

31. Home Secretary to provincial governments, 5 December 1945, Home Poll 33/1/46.
for a general revolt in the armed forces. The Government's determination to force the ratings to surrender is clear from the Viceroy's reiteration that only an unconditional surrender was acceptable, that Admiral Lockhart had ample forces, and that if the ships opened fire, "they will be sunk". In Karachi surrender was forced by firing at the ships, in which 8 RIN ratings were killed. In Bombay naval officials warned the ratings that only unconditional surrender was acceptable and 8 ships of the naval squadron were en route to Bombay. The Viceroy also testified to the continuing reliability of the forces of repression.

Within the framework of long-term considerations, the immediate situation and political developments in the present acted as pressures, modifying and even partially changing specific policies. The widespread strength behind the Congress, the reach of sympathy for the INA to sections hitherto outside the pale of the nationalist movement- liberals, loyalists, services and the army- the debilitating effects on services' morale of Congress glorification of the 1942 movement and threats of bringing guilty officials to book, were all watched with increasing anxiety by officialdom. They led to changes in British policy too; for instance, the slow retreat on the INA

32. See Home Poll. 5/14/46; Viceroy to Secretary to State, 22 Feb. 1946; Viceroy to PM, 24 Feb. 1946; Viceroy to Secretary of State, 27 Feb. 1946, and Viceroy to King George VI, 22 March 1946, TP, Vol. 6, pp. 1048, 1055, 1076 & 1234.
issue to trying only those directly responsible for brutality, and finally to commuting sentences on the first trials. The position taken on the issue of enquiries into 1942 action also shifted from the firm pledge to disallow enquiries given by Linlithgow, to Wavell's general assurances to the services and to the seeking of a 'gentleman's agreement' with the Congress to avoid enquiries. Finally, though this falls outside this period, Wavell promised Nehru to look into the matter himself and ask the guilty officials to retire.

However, though the immediate political situation did affect British policies, as we have shown above, the contention of the left historians that the upsurges they focus on led to concrete changes in specific policies - the abandonment of the INA trials, withdrawal of Indian troops from Indonesia, the sending of the Parliamentary Delegation - and to a major shift in British policy, the sending of the Cabinet Mission - is clearly untenable. These developments were the result of considerations and pressures other than those alleged.

Firstly, the policy changes on the INA question were, as we have seen, gradual and based on considerations other than the violent outburst of November 1945. The widespread support behind the demand for the INA prisoners' release, as demonstrated in the widespread, popular, though peaceful activity associated with the whole INA campaign all over the country (including the support by
liberal and even loyalist factions), was an important factor. The Commander-in-Chief was of the view that any executions "might result in unrest on a scale more serious than in 1921 & 1942".

Doubts about the wisdom of holding public trials, especially in the Red Fort, had been expressed by some Home Department officials while policy was being framed. The C.P. Governor referred to the "mistake" made by the Government in trying the INA men at Delhi.

The Government had unrealistically expected that public opinion would turn against the INA when their cowardice in joining the INA as an escape from being persecuted by the Japanese was publicised, and when the brutalities committed on loyal POWs was known to all. The Secretary of State felt that if punishment was given only to those guilty of brutality, it would "take the wind out of Congress criticism". The Viceroy went further to say that "when the courts-martial begin other people may be shocked, too". The government had failed to adequately publicise the Government's position before political parties took up the issue. All these doubts had been voiced from the very

33. Commander-in-Chief to Viceroy, 24 Nov. 1945, ibid., p.530.
34. Letter to Viceroy, 26 Nov. 1945, ibid., p.542.
35. Secretary of State to Viceroy, 5 Oct., and Viceroy to Secretary of State, 9 Oct. 1945, ibid., pp.315 and 321.
36. Viceroy to Secretary of State, 5 Nov. 1945, U.P.Governor to Viceroy, 19 Nov. 1945 and note on INA sent by DIB, 20 Nov. 1945, ibid., pp.442, 507 and 515 resp.
beginning from within officialdom and were now recognised as valid by the decision-making authorities. The Home Member outlined all the blunders and omissions in the Government's policy towards the INA men.

Most important perhaps, given the fact that it was essentially an army question despite its political implications, was the consideration that opinion within the army, especially among the rank and file and Indian officers, was generally in favour of leniency. The earlier expectations and opinion that strict punishment was necessary not only to maintain the morale of the army, but would in fact be welcomed by the army, had been proved wrong. On 2 November 1945, the Commander-in-Chief argued that the majority opinion in the Indian Army wanted INA men to be punished, but on 24 November 1945 he recommended limiting the trials to "brutality cases" alone, on the ground that the general opinion in the army favoured leniency. In fact, HMG ultimately endorsed the changed policy of leniency on the ground that it was in the interests of the integrity and discipline of the army.

37. Note in Home Department, 20 Feb. 1946, Home Poll.21/13/45, Part II.
38. TP, Vol.6, pp. 435 and 532.
39. Secretary of State's memorandum, 20 Oct. 1945, Governor-General (War Department) to Secretary of State, 30 Nov. 1945, and Secretary of State to Viceroy, 7 Dec. 1945, ibid., pp.371, 572 and 618.
The use of Indian troops in Indonesia had in fact been severely criticised by the Viceroy himself, who had demanded that they be withdrawn. The Secretary of State had pleaded inability to do so, given the paucity of available troops, but had promised their withdrawal as soon as possible and conveyed the Viceroy's strong reaction to the relevant military authorities. So their withdrawal had little to do with immediate pressure at the time of their withdrawal.

The decision to send a Parliamentary Delegation had originated in early 1945 when it had been vetoed on grounds of non-availability of air passages. It had been revived by the new Secretary of State, mainly as a means to acquaint backbencher opinion with the difficult realities of the Indian problem but delayed on account of some technical difficulties about sponsorship. Another motive was to counter Krishna Menon's influence in London circles. It had been suggested to Cripps by Amrit Kaur and accepted formally by the Cabinet India and Burma Committee on 19 November and approved by the Viceroy. Only the announcement was after the November demonstrations.

41. Turnbull to Secretary of State, 28 Sept.1945, Secretary of State to PM, 4 Oct. 1945 & Viceroy to Secretary of State, 19 October 1945, *ibid.*, pp.330, 312-3, 325-6, & 365.
The main shift in British policy traced to the impact of the three upsurges, especially the RIN revolt, is the sending of the Cabinet Mission. It is believed that a single mutiny, that of the Royal Indian Navy ratings in February 1946, led to the despatch of the Cabinet Mission. As pointed out in Chapter 4, the link with the RIN revolt or even the February demonstration is clearly untenable, the official Cabinet decision on the Cabinet Mission having been taken on 22 January, 1946 — even the announcement made on 19 February had been slated a week earlier.

The idea of a Cabinet rank delegation had been mooted even earlier — Major Short's suggestion of a Milner-type kindergarten going out to India. Then there was a proposal by the PM to give the Viceroy a political adviser — Tom Johnston, a Scottish trade union leader, being recommended for the job. The


43. The Cabinet decided on 22 January 1946, to send the Mission in March and to announce it in February, 1946, *TP*, Vol.6, p.831.

44. Major Short's note, enclosed with Cripps to Viceroy, 3 Dec. 1945. Shiva Rao suggested that a Cabinet team should go out to India after the elections as early as 20 August 1945, *ibid.*, pp.592 and 100-5 resp.

45. R.J.Moore, *Escape from Empire*, p.44.
Secretary of State, mindful of Wavell's objections to such an adviser having direct touch with Whitehall, tactfully suggested that only a Cabinet rank person should be sent, and finally, on the consideration that only a Cabinet team could actually take far-reaching decisions without referring back to London constantly, a three-member Cabinet Mission was decided upon. Thus the need to send a full-fledged Cabinet Mission was largely because of Wavell's limited capabilities as a political negotiator and perhaps the divergence of his views and emphasis from Whitehall's stance.

It must also be noted that the importance of the Cabinet Mission lay in the concrete demonstration of the willingness of His Majesty's Government to negotiate a settlement, especially since the ministers had full powers to decide and planned a long stay in India. The Mission did not mark a break in British policy, for the decision to initiate post-election discussions with Indian leaders, in order to decide the form of the constitution-making body, had been made and announced in the 19 September 1945 statement. The Cabinet Mission was the implementation of that promise.

46. Ibid.
47. Cabinet India and Burma Committee Meeting, 14 January 1946, TP, Vol.6, p.786.

145
Sarkar's study of post-war politics had concluded that "CPI had displaced the Congress as Enemy No. 1 already by the end of 1945". The Government officials, however, held quite a different view. The Viceroy told the Secretary of State that "Neither the Communist Party nor M.N. Roy's Social Democrats have any influence". The Punjab C.I.D. authorities warned the Director, Intelligence Bureau, of the "considerable danger of putting the cart before the horse and of failing to recognise Congress as the main enemy".

Let alone leading to any major shifts in overall British policy, these three upsurges did not even occasion any change in the policy towards agitations. Interestingly, the provincial authorities responsible for maintaining law and order, who were clamouring for censorship, continuation of wartime ordinances, and even preventive arrests in the face of Congress election speeches and threats of a future mass movement, did not suggest any major measures to better handle similar outbreaks in the future, though specifically asked to do so by the Home Department. Most provinces reported that existing arrangements were adequate, one suggested changes such as re-equipping and


19. 27 December 1945, TP, Vol. 6, p. 687 and Home Poll. 7/1/46.

50. The Deputy Secretary, Home Department, noted on 4 April 1946 that "no particular measures have been suggested for avoiding such trouble in future". Home Poll 5/8/46.
strengthening the police force and another rounding up waifs and strays.

On the basis of these views from the provinces the Home Department concluded that no change in the existing policy of restraint towards agitation or violent speeches during the election period was warranted and expressed the hope that the coming negotiations would clarify the situation. It was argued that if talks succeeded, conflict would be averted, and if they failed, then policy would be 'as usual' — presumably firm handling of agitation. The Home Department concluded that the policy of restraint, followed since early December, should be continued, since that policy was necessitated by the political negotiations and cannot be expected to survive them'. When negotiations were completed, "there will either be no further hostility to the government or it will have to be dealt with in the usual way".

This same Home Department evaluation of the 'disturbances' brought out an important point. The conclusions reached were that the 'disturbances' had no organisation behind them and were the result of the inflammatory atmosphere created by Congress speeches over the past few months. The Viceroy informed the Prime

51. Ibid.

52. Ibid.

147
Minister on 24 February 1946 that the primary cause of the RIN agitation was the "speeches of Congress leaders since September last". According to the Home Department, "the real cause" behind the disturbances from November 1945 to February 1946 was "the general atmosphere induced by the inflammatory speeches and writings of Congress leaders." It also concluded that the Communist party had not organised them, but local Communists only 'exploited' them when the 'riff-raff' became involved in them.

The Central Intelligence Officer, Calcutta, reported on 28 November 1945 that "on the night of the 22nd there was a definite move on the part of both the CPI and the Congress to take active steps to stop further disorders and on the 23rd it was decided to send leaders into the affected areas to address mobs to this effect". It was felt that action against the CPI would have little meaning as long as the major parties like the Congress continued unchecked: "The Punjab Government also point out that Congress is the real danger and action against minor parties so long as Congress is left free to pursue its plans would be misconceived".

It is our contention that the extent to which the immediate

54. Home Poll.21/16/45.
55. Deputy Secretary in Home Department, 1 April 1946, Home Poll. 5/8/46.
situation in late 1945-early 1946 forced its way into the arena of imperial policy-making, into which generally wider, long-term considerations were allowed access—it was the threat of another Congress-led movement in the given situation of increasing hegemony of the anti-imperialist forces and the corresponding erosion of British hegemony, that kept the British Government tied to their promises and finally forced it to implement them. What took place was neither a voluntary withdrawal on the part of the British, as the imperialist historians would have it, nor were the British pushed out by the popular outbursts, as some left historians argue—the reality clearly lay elsewhere, as we shall see.

Along with the appearance of fissures in the structure of the Raj, the limitations of British policy in handling the anti-imperialist movement became apparent by the end of the War. Co-option of the constitutionalist right wing or its break with the left wing had proved a futile hope with the resignation of Congress ministries in 1939. Further, in 1942, except for Rajagopalachari, it was the right-wing leaders, Patel, Prasad and Kripalani, who were solidly behind Gandhi's call for the Quit India movement. As far as the violence of

56. Visalakshi Menon, op.cit., pp.205-6 and 199.
Congress speeches in late 1945 was concerned, Patel's utterances were no less extreme and 'seditious' than Nehru's, rather, he was considered to be more determinedly anti-British and hostile than Nehru.

The impact of the nationalist movement on the bureaucracy was not only indirect through weakening morale under pressure from mass movements and ministries. The permeation of nationalist sentiment among the Indian element of the services, especially the subordinate services and even the police, directly affected their loyalty and reliability. Even earlier in 1937-39, the tendency of Indian officials to look up to the Congress had been apparent, but by 1945 the Indian services were assertively nationalist, though the British preferred to see

58. The Governor, Bombay, reported to the Viceroy on 2 November 1945 that Patel was "breathing forth threatenings and slaughters". The Viceroy warned the Secretary of State on 6 November 1945 that Nehru's and Patel's speeches "can only be intended to provoke or pave the way for mass disorder". *TP*, Vol. 6, pp. 429 and 450-54.

59. For details, see Viceroy to Secretary of State, 6 November; Governor, C.P. to Viceroy, 26 November; Governor, Assam to Viceroy, 11 December; and especially Viceroy to Secretary of State, 27 December 1945, *Ibid.*, pp. 453, 543, 576, 632 and 687.

60. The Orissa FR for the first half of November mentioned that Chowkidari presidents were identifying openly with the Congress and also raising funds for it. The U.P. FR for the second half of October 1945, reported that railway officials in east U.P. "decorated their stations in honour of Nehru and Pant and in one instance...detained a goods train for three hours to enable Nehru to make a speech and then travel by it", The C.P. Governor reported to the Viceroy that "most of our clerical staff voted for the Congress at the elections and presumably allowed this to be known". *Home Poll.*18/11 and 18/10/45, *TP*, Vol. 6, p. 632 and Azad, *op.cit.*, p. 127, respectively.
their feelings as merely the tendency of the natives to worship the rising, and not the setting sun.

By 1945, nationalist feeling had reached the army, which was otherwise, too, in a state of flux. Politicised elements had entered the army, especially the technical services, under the new recruitment policy, which was liberalised because the carefully selected men of the 'martial races' did not suffice. The soldiers who fought in Europe and South East Asia, who liberated countries from fascist control, returned home with new ideas. When the issue of the INA prisoners came up, the army authorities discovered that army opinion was not clamouring for punishment, as initially expected, but predominantly in favour of leniency. As seen in Chapter 3, by February 1946 the Commander-in-Chief argued that "any Indian officer worth his salt is a nationalist".

A serious evaluation was made of the integrity of the armed forces, in the event of widespread revolt. While the


Commander-in-Chief would not assure continued reliability through the coming years, it is worth noting that even as late as November 1945, after the high pitch reached by the INA campaign, he accepted the basic reliability of the Indian army for the present. Therefore, though he had earlier asked for larger deployment of British troops in India, he quite readily agreed not to have them sent (categorically saying that the Indian situation did not call for it as he intended them only as a reserve) when the British Chiefs of Staff pointed out that they had no spare troops at call and they would divert them from other countries if the Indian army needed them urgently.

The Commander-in-Chief's fears were mainly of the future, the coming months, when loyalty was likely to be further impaired, especially if a widespread mass movement began.

63. Commander-in-Chief's appreciation of the internal situation, 24 November 1945, *TP*, Vol. 6, pp. 577-84. As late as 22 March 1946, after the INA trials, and even after the RIN revolt, Wavell informed King George VI that the "great mass of the Indian Army is still sound". *TP*, Vol. 6, p. 1234.

64. Chiefs of Staff in Britain to Commander-in-Chief, 11 December 1945, Commander-in-Chief to Chiefs of Staff, 22 December 1945 and Chiefs of Staff in Britain to Defence Committee, 22 February 1946, *TP*, Vol. 6, pp. 638-9, 675 and 1042.

65. On 24 November 1945, the Commander-in-Chief, while stressing that the army was reliable at present, felt that political influences would steadily impair its morale over the months till spring 1946, when a mass movement might be launched by the Congress. Commander-in-Chief's appreciation of the internal situation, 24 November 1945, *ibid.*, pp. 577-84.
In 1945, it was from a position of eroded hegemony that the British contemplated the present and the future. The present posed incalculable problems, the chief among them being the means by which to secure a representative national government and the need to contain the snowballing anti-British feeling before it reached ungovernable proportions. The possibility of an immediate explosion of this discontent was unlikely. The real danger was perceived to be in the not too distant future, sometime around the spring of 1946, when, having won the elections and formed provincial ministries, the Congress, from a position of accreted strength, would "organise a mass movement on the 1942 lines but on a much larger scale". By then, the bureaucracy and the army, it was feared, would be in a worse state, with communal divisions having further rent the fabric and provincial ministries likely to be aiding the movement, rather than the administration.

66. This was realised and stressed by Wavell as early as the end of 1944. Wavell to Churchill, 24 October 1944. Wavell's Journal, op.cit., pp. 98-99.

67. Viceroy to Secretary of State, 6 November 1945; Commander-in-Chief's appreciation of the internal situation, 24 November 1945; Governor, Orissa to Viceroy, 6 November 1945; and Azad's letter to the Viceroy, 7 November 1945, TP, Vol. 6, pp. 450-54, 577, 447 and 455.

68. Viceroy to Secretary of State, 27 December 1945 and 29 October 1945, Commander-in-Chief's appreciation of internal situation sent to the Cabinet, 14 November 1945, C.P. Governor to Viceroy, 10 January 1946, ibid., pp. 687,420,577, 482 and 756, and Epstein, op.cit., p. 518.
It was increasingly clear to the British that the old basis of British rule would not continue for long, and a new structure would have to be devised, if rule was to continue. Later, in mid-1946, many officials, including the Viceroy, were to argue that in the face of such an eventuality the whole nature of British rule could be transformed to one of strong, autocratic authority, replenished by new officials, which could then maintain British rule for 15-20 years. Even then, their argument was turned down, but in early 1946 this option was not even proposed. In late 1945, when the British saw the imminence of collapse, they sought to avert it by offering constitutional concessions. They could not take the risk of the concessions being rejected, for if that happened a mass movement would follow which they might not be able to contain.

With the need being to avoid a contingency of negotiations breaking down, the concessions had to be of substance, which largely met the demand of the Congress. And so, faced with the Congress demand of Quit India, with the large majority of people affirming it, the Cabinet Mission went out from England in 1946 to negotiate the setting up of a national government and set

69. Viceroy to Secretary of State, 24 July 1946, TP, Vol. 8, p. 115.
70. Secretary of State to Viceroy, 26 July 1946, ibid., pp. 123-4.
71. Wavell foresaw the difficulties that total repression would involve. Viceroy to Secretary of State, 6 November 1945, TP, Vol. 6, 452.
into motion the machinery for transfer of power. It was not an empty gesture like the Cripps Mission in 1942; they intended to stay till they succeeded in securing some agreement. The reality was that they could not afford failure, for failure would lead to a humiliating surrender before a mass movement or would necessitate a basic change in the character of British rule from semi-hegemonic to repressive and autocratic. The first was obviously to be avoided at all costs; the second was also not likely to appeal either to the Labour Government that was in power, or to British and American public opinion which was still conditioned by the pro-democratic and anti-Fascist euphoria of the War years.