Chapter II

PLANNING OF THE POLITICAL OFFER, THE SIMLA CONFERENCE AND ITS BREAKDOWN

I

The Government of India's Stand on the Indian Question

The suggestion for a political move mooted at the Governors' Conference in August 1944, clearly stemmed from the Government's anticipation of the post-war situation - not from their response to existing political activity. This activity, as we have outlined, was not intended as an immediate challenge. Rather, it was clearly directed towards preparation for the post-war future by way of reviving organisation and rekindling nationalist feelings. Hence, not only did it allow the authorities to be confident that "India was quiet and could be kept so till the end of the war", it underlined the importance of concentrating all attention on the future.

But the future presented a bleak picture to the Government of India. The scenario was dotted with challenges on both the political and economic fronts. When the War ended, it would bring with it large scale demobilisation of men from the armed

forces, factory workers and clerks, but no relief from the economic difficulties faced. The end of the War would also mean that the constraints on the political activity would have to be removed. All political detainees, including radical Congressmen, would be released and would begin to foment trouble. Besides, with the lid off, the accumulated discontent of the people through the war years would surface. The necessary constituents of a mass movement would be available - an anti-Government leadership, a revived organisational base and a dissatisfied, war-weary populace.

The situation was further worsened by the fact that this resurgent nationalism would have to be contained by a doddering administration. The Indian Civil Service, 'the steel frame of the Raj', was heavily strained and considered to be a virtually 'moribund' force. The Government of India constantly warned that its ability to meet a challenge was declining rapidly, and soon a point would come when they would

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2. Wavell to Amery, 20 September 1944, ibid., p. 37.
3. Ibid. Also, Wavell to Amery, 15 March 1945, ibid., p. 696.
have the responsibility for managing the situation, but no power to effectively exercise it.

**Purpose of the Move**

It was as a technique to defuse this likely explosive situation that the government evolved the plan for a political initiative from August 1944 onwards. The Congress and the League were sought to be drawn into constitutional politics before the end of the War. This channelling away of political energies from subversion into constitutional areas, was the primary purpose of the intended move.

Two additional benefits were also seen as likely to accrue from this move. Working together in a Government, it was hoped, would pave the way for the otherwise elusive agreement of the Congress and the League on the future constitution of India. Further, a successful settlement of the Indian question was

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expected to strengthen the future security of the Empire, ensure British prestige in the East, and even lead to India remaining within the Commonwealth. Public opinion the world over would be placated, and the initiative retained.

Timing of the Offer

The timing of the political initiative was considered crucial. Initially, Wavell wanted its promulgation to coincide with the end of the War in Europe, thereby not allowing the released leaders any time to arouse nationalist protest. But soon he urged greater immediacy as he felt that a stable, transitional government, functioning for some period before the end of the War would entrench the moderates more firmly within the constitutional structure.

Nature of the Offer

The political offer Wavell proposed was in the nature of a practical interim development, aimed at constituting a more

12. "The future of India is the problem on which the British, Commonwealth and the British reputation will stand or fall in the post-war period ... with a lost and hostile India, we are likely to be reduced in the East to the position of commercial bag-men", Wavell to Churchill, enclosed in Wavell to Amery, 24 October 1944, ibid., p. 127. Wavell before UCI Comme., 26 March 1945, ibid., p. 733.


representative Government. The Viceroy's Executive Council was to comprise of representatives of major political parties and groups, including the Congress and League, and coalitions were to be formed in the provinces - this would continue till elections were held and a Constituent Assembly was formed. 'A change in spirit' was seen as necessary and some innocuous measures were even suggested towards that end. However, no constitutional change was intended, nor was there to be any limitation of the Viceroy's powers vis-a-vis his Council. Neither was an alteration to be made in the relationship between the Parliament-Secretary of State-Viceroy. Any real development such as progressive Indianisation of the Indian armed forces, the transfer of External Affairs and Defence to Indian hands, the appointment of a United Kingdom High Commissioner in India, the release of detenus, were dismissed as being uncalled for and conceding a


16. These measures were- (a) Declare HMG's intention to give India self-government soon. (b) Declaration that HMG does not intend to repudiate her debt to India. (c) Transfer of ships to India against sterling balances. (d) Promise of modern ships for Indian Navy at end of the War. (e) Enhancement of status of Indian High Commissioner. (f) Raising of status of Indian representative in the United States. (g) Transfer of responsibility for Indian affairs to Dominions Office. Wavell to Amery, 26 October 1944, ibid., p.140.
too much at the outset. The sole interest was in getting a coalition government working—without involving legislation, or a Parliamentary Debate, or even declaration of Dominion Status—in short with a minimum of fuss and change.

II

Whitehall's Attitude to the Indian Problem and the Political Move

The Home Government accepted completely the Government of India's sketch of the post-war future: mounting challenges and dwindling capacity to meet them. However, they did not share the hope of the Government of India that the political move would have the simultaneous benefits of securing communal agreement through day-to-day participation in a government and ensuring British prestige. The Home Government felt that reports from India did not indicate a deteriorating situation compelling early

17. Wavell before WCI Comme., 5 April 1945, ibid., p.832; “I am fairly sure that Indians do not really expect the portfolio of External Affairs or particularly desire it at the moment. It would certainly be much better for me to be allowed to keep it as a possible bargaining counter during the Conference”. WCI Comme. Paper by Wavell, 17 April 1945, ibid., p.896. Also see Wavell before WCI Comme. 18 April 1945, ibid., pp.898-9,901.

18. Anderson before War Cabinet, 30 April 1945, ibid., p.995.
Amery's primary objection to Wavell's plan was that handing over control to representatives of political parties during the war would be dangerous, especially as important operations in the East were expected in 1945, and perhaps even in 1946.

HMG rejected Wavell's notion of an informal offer involving consultations with Indians. On the one hand, it was expected to disturb the whole administration of India, frighten the loyalists and the Princes and have a bad effect on the Punjab. On the other hand, at a time when "India had never been so quiet...

19. The Viceroy's proposals "brought Gandhi before the public again, and raised his stock at a time when he had failed politically". Points of discussion, WCI Comme., meeting, 6 December 1944, p.276; Wavell himself, in his appreciation of Gandhi's movement noted that the "country is very quiet" and "there is at present no serious threat to law and order," Wavell to Amery, 25 February 1945, ibid., p.616; "I cannot see the least sign in any of the reports that have been circulated that the internal situation in India is deteriorating in any way, or that the delay that there has been has made any difference, and that is a further relevant fact," Attlee to Amery, 13 March 1945, ibid., p.686; Grigg saw no reason why "something must be done" at a time when "India had never been so quiet or Congress prestige so low" since the early 1930s, Grigg before WCI Comme., 18 April 1945, ibid., pp.396-7; Grigg repeated his view that India was "fairly quiescent", Grigg before WCI Comme., 23 April 1945, ibid., p.932.

20. Amery to Wavell, 10 October 1944, ibid., p.97.


22. Grigg before WCI Comme., 18 April 1945, ibid., p.904.

or Congress prestige so low", negotiations, it was feared, would "raise the stock of Congress," and put it "back on the map," while also giving a handle to various other political elements to raise a "babel of conflicting demands". More generally, there was the dual danger of informal talks carrying the British further than they wished and of the undefined parameters of the Viceroy's position leading unwittingly to a cessation of control over areas of decision-making.

27. Attlee before WCI Comme., 3 April 1945., p.815; Wavell's plan"is not in the nature of an arbitral offer, but a starting point for negotiations which might end up anywhere," Grigg before WCI Comme., 23 April 1945, ibid., p.933.
28. "There was the danger in the Viceroy's scheme that without any Parliamentary approval or any formal Act we should find ourselves slipping into a position in which the Viceroy would be bound by convention to carry out the views of Ministers". Attlee before WCI Comme., 5 April 1945, ibid., p.842; "He (Wavell) would soon find himself pushed into a position in which he was practically a constitutional monarch", Attlee before WCI Comme., 10 April 1945, ibid., p 851; "with no clear line defined the tendency would be to take refuge in general statements, and the Viceroy would find himself slipping gradually into the position of a Dominion Governor-General and gradually yielding to pressure in order to avoid a breakdown," Attlee before WCI Comme., 18 April 1945, ibid., p.904; "May not the effect of the new step be prejudicially to affect the Viceroy's position and to lead to his authority and powers being whittled away without a full realisation of what is happening until it is too late to check the process?", Final WCI Comme. Paper on the Constitutional Position in India, 27 April 1945, ibid., p.981.
The form of the offer envisaged by the Home Government was a clear and precisely outlined statement, formally laying down the change entailed. HMG were to directly declare their decisions, stressing that they were firm and non-negotiable.

In contrast to Wavell's approach, all the changes were intended to be openly proclaimed and formalised. Limitation of the

29. There was unanimity on this question. Anderson "attached the greatest importance to doing whatever it might be decided to do in the most clear and open way," with an "explicit statement" to that effect, Anderson before WCI Comme., 3 and 5 April 1945, ibid., pp. 817, 833; Simon felt it "important that we should clearly show what we were doing", Simon before WCI Comme., 5 April 1945, ibid., p. 840; Cripps stressed that "whatever was done should be done in a very formal way, and that there should be a very carefully worded statement in the House of Commons here", Cripps before WCI Comme., 10 April 1945, ibid., p. 857; Grigg was in favour of making an "offer as near as possible cleanly [clearly?] defined," Grigg before WCI Comme., 18 April 1945, ibid., p. 904; The final WCI Comme. Report on the Constitutional Position in India reflected this preference for clear proposals- "whereas the Viceroy's plan set no precise boundaries to the area of negotiations, the proposed statement would define these boundaries strictly", WCI Comme. Paper, 27 April 1945, ibid., pp. 982-3.

30. Cripps stressed that His Majesty's Government must themselves make a declaration that they had come to a decision on the Indian question, Cripps before WCI Comme., 29 March 1945, ibid., p. 776.

31. Amery urged acceptance of the WCI Comme. draft plan on grounds that "there was no question of negotiation and the statement represented a firm offer" and the Cabinet agreed with this interpretation, Cabinet meeting, 30 May 1945, ibid., p. 1066.

32. Anderson was emphatic about "showing any new relationship in precise and unmistakable language" and having full recognition of the fact that a Government of India Contd/---
Viceroy's powers in practice, especially restricted use of his veto, was seen as clearly entailed by the new proposals.

However, rather than maintain silence on this point as preferred by Wavell, the India Committee wanted to publicly proclaim this change.

constituted, as suggested by the Committee, would differ in fundamental respects from a government constituted and working under the existing constitution), Anderson before WCI Comme. 3 and 5 April 1945, ibid., pp.817 & 833 resp. The final consensus was similar—"it is made public for all to recognise its nature and to appreciate the importance of the changes involved", Final WCI Comme. Paper on the Constitutional Position in India, 27 April 1945, ibid., p.983.

33. Attlee and Grigg likened the Viceroy's new position to that of a constitutional monarch or a Dominion Governor-General, WCI Comme. meetings, 26 March and 10 April 1945, ibid., pp.733,849 respectively.

34. Wavell "could not see any reason for formally giving anything away by statute, as proposed by the Committee" Wavell before WCI Comme., 5 April 1945, ibid., p.837; "If it is announced that the powers of the Governor-General are to be in any way limited, there is bound to be pressure for them not to be exercised at all", so it would be better if the "announcement should contain nothing about the Viceroy's powers except section 27 of the Draft Statement." WCI Comme. Paper by Wavell 17 April 1945, ibid., p.896; WCI Comme. Paper by Wavell, 21 April 1945, ibid., p.921; "an announcement that it was proposed to limit the Viceroy's powers would make his negotiations very difficult", Wavell before War Cabinet, 23 April 1945, ibid., p.936.

35. Amery conceded that a public definition of the Viceroy's limited powers would weaken his position, but still felt that Parliament should be informed of the likelihood of the Viceroy's position changing with a representative Executive Council, WCI Comme. Paper by Amery, 20 April 1945, ibid.,

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Similarly, the feature of political parties nominating their representatives to the Viceroy's Executive Council was seen to involve a basic constitutional change. Prior to making a general declaration of intent, getting Parliamentary approval was felt to be crucial. An altered Instrument of Instructions for the Viceroy and formally drawn-up statements were prepared to be legislated upon by Parliament.

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p.915; Anderson held the opposite view. He felt that recognition openly that a representative Executive Council would curtail the Viceroy's powers and entail a constitutional change would strengthen the Viceroy's position, Anderson before WCI Comme., 23 April 1945, ibid., p.932. He argued that a paragraph on the precise limitation of the Viceroy's functions must be included in the statement, else the situation would deteriorate rapidly, Anderson before WCI Comme., 25 April 1945, ibid., p.962. The Final WCI Comme. Paper on the Constitutional Position in India recommended an open avowal of increased authority to the representative Executive Council and limited powers to the Viceroy, 27 April 1945, ibid., p.979.

36. Attlee before WCI Comme., 27 March 1945, ibid., p.760.

37. "...without formal Act or Parliamentary approval, things would move much faster than he imagined in the direction of which he was now apprehensive", Attlee before WCI Comme., 5 April 1945, ibid., p.836; Attlee before WCI Comme., 18 April 1945, ibid., p.897.

38. WCI Comme. Paper by Amery, 2 April 1945, ibid., p.805.

39. Draft by Cripps of Viceroy's declaration; Draft memorandum by Amery of HMG's declaration, Draft by Cripps of statement by WCI Comme. to Parliament; Final draft made by Cripps accepted by WCI Comme. and sent to the Prime Minister, WCI Comme. Papers, 31 March, 2,11 and 25 April 1945, ibid., pp.796,803, 866, 952, respectively.
Whereas the India Committee felt that the new set of proposals and their attendant measures warranted a radical change in constitutional practice, Wavell felt they involved no constitutional change. Further, while Wavell chose to proceed quietly, bypassing all debate and discussion on grounds that it would lead to alarm, the India Committee was anxious to emphasise the significance of the scheme and even portray it

40. Anderson declared boldly that the WCI Comme.'s stand "did not purport to be an approach involving no constitutional change," Anderson before WCI Comme., 5 April 1945, ibid., p.833; Cripps outlined that the new manner of constituting the Executive Council had "behind it a very great constitutional innovation", Draft by Cripps of statement by India Committee to Parliament, 11 April 1945, ibid., p.868; "Lord Wavell seemed to have no conception of the constitutional implication of his plan", Attlee before WCI Comme., 10 April 1945, ibid., p.851; Amery felt that "...what was involved was an important development of what had already taken place, and which did involve constitutional implications," while Anderson noted that "The feeling of the Committee was that the method proposed by the Viceroy would in fact represent a constitutional change", Amery and Anderson before WCI Comme., 18 April 1945, ibid., pp.899,900 respectively.

41. "As regards conventions, or changes in the Constitution; his object and policy was to avoid any such change," Wavell before WCI Comme., 27 March 1945, ibid., p.761; "...what was involved was not a constitutional change, but merely a development", Wavell before WCI Comme., 18 April 1945, ibid., p.901.

42. Wavell before WCI Comme., 5 April 1945, ibid., p.832.

43. Anderson before WCI Comme., 18 April 1945, ibid., p.897; "it is the essence of the proposed statement that it is made public for all to recognise its nature and appreciate the importance of the changes involved", Final WCI Comme. Paper on the Constitutional Position in India, 27 April 1945, ibid., p.983.
as an attempt to promulgate the Centre part of the 1935 Act which had never got off the ground.

HMG consistently rejected Wavell’s persistent demands for a brief to negotiate with Indian leaders and for permission to come home for talks. In March 1945, Wavell declared his intention to visit England immediately, and he was allowed to proceed home, albeit grudgingly.

The preliminary debate revealed a basic difference of approach. A segment of opinion even argued for sending the Viceroy back to India. Others felt that though the Viceroy’s visit may have been premature, he could not be asked to return empty-handed. A political move, but one significantly different from Wavell’s original scheme, was proposed.

44. Cripps repeatedly linked the offer to the 1935 Act, Cripps before WCI Comme., Draft by Cripps of Viceroy’s declaration, Draft by Cripps of Statement by WCI Comme. to Parliament, WCI Comme. Papers, 29 and 31 March and 11 April 1945, ibid., pp. 776, 796, 866 respectively.

45. See Minute by Churchill to Amery, 1 January 1945, ibid., p. 347; Amery to Wavell, 5 January 1945, ibid., p. 347; Amery to Wavell, 5 January 1945, ibid., p. 365; Amery to Wavell, 11 January 1945, ibid., p. 392 respectively.

46. The debate took place at the WCI Comme. meetings of 26, 27 and 29 March, 3, 5, 10, 18, 23 and 25 April 1945, ibid., pp. 733, 760, 776, 832, 849, 897, 932, 962 respectively.

47. Simon, Grigg and Butler were its spokesmen.

48. Anderson, Attlee and Cripps were its proponents.
The India Committee laid the onus for the decision on the Cabinet, but clarified that, should the Cabinet endorse the need for a move, Anderson’s scheme, and not Wavell’s, should be accepted. With elections looming on the horizon, Amery urged Churchill to clinch the Indian issue before the coalition broke up. This, he argued, would “put an end to any attempt by the Socialist Party to make capital against us over India—Attlee and Cripps would have to bless it in the House”. Churchill, however, felt unable to advocate a move unless it was “sound on its merits”. It was only when Wavell demonstrated the extremely limited nature of the move, which conceded virtually nothing, that Churchill became favourably inclined towards it. He laid down three conditions—no legislation to remove the official element from the Council, no public reference to Indianisation of the Indian Army, and no negotiation on the terms of the offer.

The plan was approved by Parliament and, in early June 1945, Wavell left for India with the brief to make a political move he had pressed for and been denied for almost a year.

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51. Churchill before Cabinet, 30 May 1945, ibid., pp. 1069, 1073 respectively.
52. Wavell before Cabinet, 31 May 1945, ibid., p. 1073.
53. Cabinet Conclusions, 31 May 1945, ibid., p. 1083.
But the scheme authorised by the Cabinet was neither Wavell's original proposal, nor the India Committee's plan in its entirety, but a curious mixture of both. It was limited enough for a Conservative like Churchill. It was defined and firm enough too. If it failed, as Churchill was assured it would, the positive benefits of having made a move would accrue without any ground being lost. Even if it was accepted, little harm, besides involvement of Indians in the administration, would be done. The risk of the Viceroy making concessions in order to achieve a settlement had been removed by declaring the offer to be closed to negotiations.

The India Committee scheme was barely recognisable, its political content depleted by the vetoing of some of the concrete political concessions they had included to make the offer generous enough to be acceptable to Indian parties and to be helpful with public opinion, even if rejected. The important clause of Indianisation of the armed forces was removed and the feature of unilateral release of political prisoners simultaneously with the announcement of the offer was modified to negotiated release after acceptance of the offer. Only the symbolic concessions of the appointment of a United Kingdom High Commissioner in India and the entrusting of the External Affairs portfolio to an Indian Executive Councillor were retained.
The political approach of the India Committee's plan weathered the Churchillian storm better. The explicit reference to limitation of the powers of the Viceroy and of Parliament was deleted. The stress on the need for Parliamentary sanction was, however, upheld and the move was linked, as desired by the India Committee, to the last constitutional development, the Cripps Offer. The most crucial part of the entire India Committee's approach was its emphasis on a clearly defined declaration of a firm official decision not open to any negotiation. This was specifically affirmed by Churchill and included in the offer.

If the approach of the India Committee's plan survived while its content did not, the basic core of Wavell's scheme remained intact, but not his method. The final scheme, known as the Wavell Plan, announced the convening of a conference to get together a politically representative Executive Council, which was in any case Wavell's original proposal.

But two vital aspects of his political approach, his avoidance of both formalisation of the scheme and its sanction by Parliament were clearly absent from the final plan. Now he was given a specific mandate by the Home Government to promulgate an official decision, ratified by Parliament. There was no scope for negotiation and no latitude for ensuring the smooth functioning of the Council, and no credit was given to Wavell.
The Wavell Plan was not the undefined brief, the free hand, to resolve the Indian crisis that Wavell had demanded from September 1944 onwards. The limited political content of Wavell's plan was yoked to the firm political approach of the India Committee's scheme.

III

The Simla Conference, June-July 1945

The next hurdle, the Parliamentary Debate, was skirted successfully and the scheme was "blessed on all sides". Statements of policy announcing a new political move and proposing a conference at Simla were made simultaneously by the Secretary of State for India and the Viceroy on 14 June 1945. Acceptance of invitations issued to leaders of various political groups came in, except from the two main parties, the Congress and the League. Their attitude was assessed by Wavell as "preliminary manoeuvring" and "showing off" which was "typical"

54. Statement of the Policy of H.M.G. made by the Secretary of State for India, and Broadcast Speech by Field Marshall Viscount Wavell at New Delhi, 14 June 1945, ibid., pp. 1118 and 1122 respectively.

55. Telegrams exchanged between Viceory and Gandhi and Viceroy and Jinnah were repeated by Wavell to Amery, 16 June 1945, ibid., pp. 1129, 1131 respectively. Gandhi pointed out that he had no official position in the Congress any longer, but offered to be present before and during the Conference if the Viceroy desired him to do so, Gandhi to Wavell, 16 June 1945, ibid., p. 1132. Jinnah pressed for postponement on grounds of difficulty of getting his Working Committee together, Jinnah to Wavell, 16 June 1945, ibid., p. 1132.
and "expected" - but it made him confess to Amery that he was not too optimistic. After discussions with Azad, Gandhi and Jinnah on 24 June, the Simla Conference met on the stipulated date, 25 June 1945.

Only two days later, Wavell warned Amery that "we have arrived at the critical point of the conference". "The main stumbling block" was not the attitude of the Congress, which was reported to be "conciliatory and reasonable", but Jinnah's stand. On the eve of the Conference itself Jinnah had indicated his position by claiming the right of the League to nominate all Muslims.

Wavell's efforts to secure agreement continued, with his asking the parties to submit lists of names from which the Viceroy would make the selection. Yet, his optimism about the future of his plan was heavily discounted and he confessed to the prospect of failure. He also faced up to the contingency of pressure to form an Executive Council with the Congress and others if Jinnah refused to cooperate, though he made it clear that he did not expect such a Council to be viable.

56. Wavell to Amery, 17 June 1945, ibid., p. 1136.
57. Wavell to Amery, 25 June 1945, ibid., p. 1151.
59. Wavell to provincial Governors, 30 June 1945, ibid., p. 1175.
The Home Government agreed with the Viceroy's view that Jinnah's claim was unacceptable but still considered it important that a breakdown be avoided as they were "afraid of the whole onus of failure being thrown on Muslims" and the League being "held up as the one obstacle to progress".

Faint hopes, too, receded when Jinnah finally refused to submit his list. Wavell's compromise of himself selecting a non-League but non-Congress Muslim himself, and getting Jinnah to accept that, failed too. Jinnah declined to discuss any names unless the Viceroy accepted the League's exclusive right to nominate all Muslims. He also insisted on the fulfilment of his demand for "a special safeguard ... that no decision objected to by Muslims should be taken in Council except by clear two third majority". Wavell ultimately rejected both of Jinnah's claims. This amounted to breakdown of the Conference, for

60. Cabinet Conclusions, 10 July 1945, Amery to Wavell, 10 & 11 July 1945, ibid., pp. 1221, 1224-1228.
63. Cabinet Conclusions, 10 July 1945, ibid., p. 1221.
64. Wavell to Amery, 11 July 1945, ibid., p. 1225.
65. "I told Jinnah I could not accept these conditions... The Conference has therefore failed", Wavell to provincial Governors, 11 July 1945, ibid., pp. 1227-8. "I told Jinnah I could not agree, and it was then clear that the conference had failed", Note on the Simla Conference sent for Amery's use, enclosed in Wavell to Amery, 15 July 1945, ibid., p. 1262.
Wavell considered that a government with only Congress and non-League Muslims "would not (repeat not) work".

Declaring that the "responsibility for the failure is mine", Wavell convened a final meeting of the Conference on 14 July 1945, and formally announced the breakdown.

IV

A study of the Simla Conference is a revelation of the 'communal' roots of British policy--roots which penetrated the terms of the offer, the actual proceedings of the Conference, its breakdown and even the subsequent post mortem.

A communal conception of politics underlay the offer itself. 'Caste Hindus' and Muslims were put on a par, as were Congress and League, by being recognised as the main representative parties of the two communities.

Even the government's denial of the legitimacy of Jinnah's claim to be the sole spokesman of the Muslims did not

66. Wavell to provincial Governors, 30 June 1945, ibid., p. 1175.

67. Text of Wavell's Statement to Conference conveyed to Amery, 13 July 1945, ibid., p. 1239.
constitute, as would seem at first sight, a digression beyond the communal parameters of British policy. For the ground for rejection was not the necessity of including a Congress-nominated Muslim but the need to reward the loyalism of the Punjab Muslims. Wavell's counter-proposal of four nominations from the League and one selection from the Unionists was a balance between the claims of the communalists and those of the loyalists, the other bulwarks of British rule. The '4 plus 1' formula was "virtual refusal to regard the Congress as a non-Hindu, secular organisation, and acceptance of Jinnah's contention that it was as much a communal party as the League". Secularism was to remain at a discount.

The handling of the breakdown of the Conference showed clearly the political alignment of the British with communal forces. Despite declaring consistently that Jinnah's demands were unreasonable, Wavell chose to abandon his own proposal and declare the Conference a failure, rather than consign the League to political oblivion. He ignored the willingness of the Congress to form a government immediately and allow the League to come in later. By allowing Jinnah to wreck the British initiative, the Government revealed that it was "Jinnah's

wishes that mattered above all else." Once again, officialdom extended its patronage to communalism.

It is significant that it was not only in public that Jinnah and the League were sought to be absolved of responsibility for the breakdown. In private confidential correspondence as well, the failure of the talks was assessed in terms that not only shifted attention away from the League, but, even more notably, cited the failure as a further proof of the continuing validity of the 'communal' British view of the Indian reality - that the issue of political progress in India was a result of the Hindu-Muslim divide.

The first premise was the classic British notion that political progress in India was stalled because of the disagreement of the two communities -"the difficulty does not lie as between India and His Majesty's Government, but within India itself".

The second communal premise seen to be justified by the breakdown was the genuine basis of this communal disagreement in the "real fear on the part of the Muslims... of Congress domination, which they regard as equivalent to a Hindu Raj", it was not merely the intransigence or obduracy of a particular individual. In Wavell's later assessments of the conference and its breakdown, Jinnah's assertive obduracy was clearly displaced in its primacy as the "real reason" by the "deeper cause" of the

69. Ibid.
71. Wavell to King George VI, 19 July 1945, ibid., p.1279.
real distrust of the Muslims". The earlier characterisation of the attitude of the Congress as "conciliatory and reasonable" was notably absent.

The making of a gesture was the crucial part, its result made little difference. This value of a move was conceded even by those who were strongly against making a move. The comparison drawn with the Cripps Offer, which had effectively silenced the clamour for a political initiative in India despite being a failure, appealed to the India Committee.

The death-knell of the past year's effort having sounded, planning for the future began. Wavell reported the breakdown of the talks to his provincial Governors and invited them to New Delhi for discussions on future strategy. Policies on specific issues such as the future of the central government, the release of detenus, the timing of central and provincial elections, the revival of ministries in provinces under Governor's rule, were to

72. Text of Wavell's Statement to the Conference conveyed to Amery, 13 July 1945, ibid., p. 1239 and Wavell to Amery, 14 July 1945, ibid., p. 1248.

73. Wavell to Amery, 27 June 1945, ibid., p. 1167.

74. Amery assured Wavell—"Whether it now comes to fruition or not, we shall stand justified as having made a really honest attempt to help India forward to the fullest extent possible so long as there is no agreement upon the ultimate constitution", Wavell to Amery, 18 June 1945, ibid., p. 1141.
be formulated too. He considered the Government of India to be weakened .. as an administrative machine" with "the performance of the departments.. getting worse". His Executive Council had seven members who had not supported his proposals and he had "little confidence in his Indian colleagues, individually or collectively". He approved of elections as a "political diversion", but the likelihood of their becoming a "trial of strength" and causing "intense communal bitterness" was disquieting.

Maintaining the status quo while assessing the situation, past and future, and then beginning all over again the arduous process of arriving at a consensus of policy - this was the timetable for the future. British officialdom had made its move and then allowed it to be checkmated. No new move was contemplated in the near future.

75. Wavell to provincial Governors, 11 July 1945, ibid., p. 1227.
76. Wavell to Amery, 22 July 1945, ibid., pp. 1287-8.