CHAPTER VI

TOWARDS CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE AND THE SUSPENSION OF NON-CO-OPERATION MOVEMENT
By the end of 1921 the activities of Non-Co-operation Movement reached to its climax. The leaders were not satisfied by the existing ways of the movement therefore, it was decided to make a proper atmosphere for launching Civil Disobedience Movement. Gandhiji made clear the relationship between non-co-operation and civil disobedience: "Disobedience is the acutest form of non-co-operation—more so than non payment of taxes. A civil resister becomes law unto himself. Courage and discrimination of a high order are needed for the practice of the virtue of civil disobedience. It is total denial of the authority of the state, and is permissible only when the state has proved itself corrupt beyond redemption."¹ 

Soon after, the A.I.C.C. meeting was held in Delhi on the 4th November, 1921, presided over by Lala Lajpat Rai. Here the Congress resolved to launch the Civil Disobedience Movement by non-violent means, to achieve the Swaraj.²

Consequently the A.I.C.C. authorised every province, on its own responsibility, to undertake Civil Disobedience, including the non payment of taxes, in the manner that may be considered the most suitable by the respective Provincial Congress Committees.³ The Central Provinces Congress Committee (Hindi) met on 27 November, 1921 at Saugor, under the

Presidentship of Dr. E. Raghavendra Rao to take the further step on the decision of A.I.C.C. meeting held in Delhi. During the meeting the new office bearers of Hindi P.C.C. were elected they include: Dr. E. Raghavendra Rao, as President, Umakant Balwant Ghathe, Seth Govind Das, and Abdul Kadir Siddique as Vice Presidents, while K.R. Khandekar, and Lakshman Singh Chauhan were elected as Secretaries. The Hindi P.C.C. while whole heartedly accepting the decisions of the A.I.C.C., decided to implement the plan of satyagraha in Madhya Pradesh and further resolved that, "In the opinion of the Committee, non-violence is the main condition for the individual and mass satyagraha and that the Committee should organise satyagraha in areas most suitable for the movement as soon as possible, including no-tax campaign, provided committee is satisfied that the conditions laid down by the All India Congress Committee are complete." Soon after the meeting was over, the leaders mobilised the public opinion and started a vigorous propaganda to launch the Civil Disobedience Movement in Madhya Pradesh.

The Government was keenly observing the progress of the preparations for the forthcoming C.D.M. It was decided to check the movement in the beginning. Therefore the repressive policy of the Government was given full play and thousands of volunteers were sent to jail. The history of these months

5. Appendix K
was a history of unbridled arrests and incarcerations on the one hand and a brave and undaunted acceptance of the challenge on the other. Seeing the public spirit even the Viceroy felt "puzzled and perplexed." Under such circumstances the annual session of the Indian National Congress assembled at Ahmedabad in the last week of December, 1921, not only was the President elect of the year, Deshbandhu C.R. Das, in jail but thousands of others were also locked up to prevent their attendance in the session. The Ahmedabad Congress after reaffirming the N.C.O. resolution passed at its previous session (Delhi), declared that, "Civil Disobedience is the only civilised and effective substitute for armed rebellion," and advised congress workers and others "to organise individual and mass C.D. when the mass of the people had been sufficiently trained in the methods of non-violence."  

The C.P. Congress Committee (Hindi) followed the resolution of Ahmedabad Congress. The Hindi P.C.C. met again on 16 January, 1922, at Hoshangabad and elected Dr. E. Raghavendra Rao, Thakur Chhedi Lal, and Shyam Sunder Bhargava to executive council of the A.I.C.C. Here also the P.C.C. (Hindi) accepted the decisions of A.I.C.C. and resolved that, "In the light of the resolution passed by the Ahmedabad Session the Provincial Congress Committee orders that the working committee should select a rural area of any district

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within ten days where a favourable atmosphere of mass satyagraha may be prepared. The working Committee should then start the mass satyagraha whenever and wherever it decides. 8

Able leaders sprang up to carry forward the work of C.D.M. in Madhya Pradesh. Pandit Mahatma Ghurvedi and Pt. Madhava Rao Sapre had already created a powerful organ in Karamavir at Jabalpur. Others like Seth Govind Das, Shyam Sunder Bhargava, Nathuram Modi, and Cyanchandra Verma, in Jabalpur, Keshava Ramchandra Khandekar in Saugor, Umakant Balwant Ghathe and Salpekar in Chhindwara, Pt. Ravishankar Shukla and Dr. E. Raghavendra Rao in Chhattisgarh, mobilised the public enthusiasm and support in these areas. In Marathi C.P., it progressed under the able leadership of B.G. Khanarde, Dr. Moonje, M.S. Aney, Vinoba Sheve, Veer Waman Rao Joshi, and Jamnalal Bajaj. The members of the working committee of C.P. C.C. visited Marsinghpur, Seoni, Chhindwara, Balaghat, Damoh, and Saugor districts, from 20 January 1922 to select the place for launching the civil disobedience movement. Finally the working Committee met at Saugor on 27 January, 1922, and decided to start Civil Disobedience Movement at Rehli, a small pargana of Saugor district. The P.C.C. sanctioned one thousand rupees for initial expenses and rupees five thousand

for Khadi propaganda. 9

The Government made all the preparations to check the
C.D.M. All the Provincial Governments were asked "to provide
to the Government of India telegraphic information of the
systematic inauguration in any area of Mass Civil Disobedience." 10
In reply to the circular the chief secretary of C.P. informed
to the Government of India about the no tax campaign being
launched in the forests of Chhattisgarh region. 11

In the mean time the national leaders of A.I.C.C.
requested the Viceroy to release all the political prisoners
unconditionally. But the Viceroy remained adamant on the
question of the release of prisoners and the proposal of
Congress was rejected. All the negotiations with the Govern-
ment broke down. The senior Governors were opposed to a policy
of appeasement and the British Cabinet also "disapproved it." 12
Lord Reading was now ready to take the strong line. Repression
was let loose at full blast. Government suppressed the right
of association by declaring the Volunteer Organisations illegal,
and denied the right of free speech by proclaiming the
"Seditious Meetings Act" in various parts of India. Till now

9. NML, A.I.C.C. Papers, F-6/1922, "Report of the Secretary
Hindi P.C.C. (Jabalpur).
10. NAI, Home Pol. F.489/1922, p. 7, "Confidential Note Pre-
pared by the Home Secretary to the Government of India."
11. Ibid., Appendix, 13, p. 5.
12. NAI, Reading Papers, Montagu to Reading, Telegram, 20 Dec.
1921; Home Pol., F-89/1922, Telegrams from Governors to
Viceroy.
Gandhi was hopeful of getting favourable response from the Viceroy. At last he addressed a letter to the Viceroy on 1 February, 1922, giving notice of his intention to start civil disobedience movement at Bardoli, in case the Government failed to settle the Khilafat question and undo the Punjab wrongs. The response of the Viceroy was negative, as he was fully prepared to suppress the movement.

CHAURI CHAURA INCIDENT:

The preparations for Bardoli civil disobedience movement, which was to commence on 8 February 1922, were going on. In the meantime, on February 5, a tragic event occurred at Chauri-Chaura, a small town in the district of Gorakhpur, in the United Provinces. A number of Policemen came into conflict with a Congress procession. Being overwhelmed, they took refuge in the Thana (Police Station). The violent mob set fire to the building reducing men and all to ashes. Other violent deeds had taken place elsewhere, e.g., in Madras, at the time of the visit of the Prince of Wales.

The outrage at Chauri-Chaura close on the heels of the series of riots at other places, came as a rude shock to Mahatma Gandhi, and made him realize that the time was not yet ripe for civil disobedience on a mass scale. In agony and despair, he confessed that he had committed a "Himalayan Blunder" in organising a mass movement to enforce a programme.

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13. Bardoli: A taluka place of Gujrat Province, having a population of 87,000 people.
hitherto untried and on principles which were novel and to which the people as a whole were unacclimatised.

A halt was, therefore, called to the movement by a meeting of the Congress Working Committee held on February 12, at Bardoli. Civil Disobedience and all other forms of direct action like non-payment of taxes and meetings and processions to defy Government orders were called off.\(^{14}\)

The sudden stoppage of the movement which had raised enthusiasm to a very high pitch was bound to create confusion. C.R. Das was greatly upset by the decision. Narrating the reaction of C.R. Das, Subhash Chandra Bose records: "Deesh-bandhu was ... with sorrow and anger at the way Mahatma was repeatedly bungling. The Bardoli retreat came as a staggering blow."\(^{15}\) Furiated Lala Lajpat Rai also addressed a letter to the Congress Working Committee saying that, "the Congress had to swallow the bitter pill of ignominious defeat today."\(^{16}\) A few leaders of Marathi C.P., including Dr. B.S. Moonje, strongly criticised the decision of Gandhiji.\(^{17}\) Whereas the newspapers of Madhya Pradesh expressed different views.\(^{18}\)


16. \textit{Ibid.}

17. Dr. B.S. Moonje quoted by V.B. Kulkarni, "British Statesmen in India.", p. 320.

The halt ordered after Chauri-Chaura tragedy was regarded by some one of the greatest blunders in the history of political tactics. But, true to his principles, Mahatma Gandhi could see no other course left open to him. His religious principles could allow him no other alternative. In fact he was greatly shocked by the inhuman act of violence, committed at Chauri-Chaura. He accepted, "no provocation can possibly justify the brutal murder of men who had been rendered defenceless and had virtually thrown themselves on the mercy of the mob."\(^{\text{19}}\) While condemning the act of violence he made it clear that, "If we are not to evolve violence out of non-violence, it is quite clear that we must hastily retrace our steps and re-establish an atmosphere of peace, re-arrange our programme and not think of starting mass C.D. until we are sure of peace being retained ... in spite of Government provocation."\(^{\text{20}}\)

By the sudden stoppage of the movement the Congress leaders were divided into two groups: (i) those in favour of continuing the non-co-operation and the boycott programme, (ii) those who desired to abandon the boycott of the councils in order to use them for the national purpose, viz., Swaraj. The Khilafatists were also divided into two groups.

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The secret service of the Government was of the opinion that "the movement was suspended because Bardoli was not ready for it."\(^{\text{19}}\) NAI, Home, Pol. No. 580, II, 1922, Report of a secret agent called "Justice" Dated 12 Feb. 1922.


20. Ibid., p. 997.
Taking advantage of this division among the nationalist forces, the Government which had hesitated to move against Gandhi so far, took a quick decision and arrested him on 10 March, 1922. A historical trial began a week later on the 18th March, 1922. Gandhi offered no defence. On the contrary, he pleaded guilty to the charge of promoting disaffection towards the Government and asked for the severest punishment. He made, however, a statement, frank and dignified, to explain why he, who was loyal to the British Empire heretofore, became disaffected towards it. Finally he asked for highest penalty and said, "Non-violence implies voluntary submission to the penalty for non-co-operation with evil. I am here, therefore, to invite and submit cheerfully to the highest penalty that can be inflicted upon me for what in law is deliberate crime, and what appears to me to be the highest duty of a citizen."  

The judge convicted him and sentenced him to six years imprisonment. He was confined in Yeravada Central Prison in Poona. Gandhi's trial had attracted world wide attention. On hearing the judgement the whole Nation observed hortial. Paying rich tributes on Gandhi, C.R. Das expressed, "great in taking decisions, great in executing them, Mahatma Gandhi was incomparably great in the last stand which he made on


on behalf of his country. He is undoubtedly one of the greatest men that the world has ever seen."  

The contemporary newspapers of Madhya Pradesh described the trial as an "unique instance throughout the annals of criminal trials."  

The first chapter of a unique experiment terminated with its fundamental objectives unattended, no doubt, but after inculcating some valuable lessons to the people and particularly to its organisers. Although Gandhiji suspended the movement, the leaders of Madhya Pradesh continued the activities of Civil Disobedience for some time and popularized the constructive programme of Non Co-operation.  

