CHAPTER VII

RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE FAILURE OF THE MISSION

1. ATTITUDE OF SIR STAFFORD CRIPPS

If we have a better idea of the immediate background and purpose of the Cripps Mission, which has been discussed at length in chapter four, the same can be said about the causes of its failure. These have been the subject of speculation ever since the announcement of the termination of Mission on 11 April, 1942, particularly in view of the last phase of the negotiations between Cripps and the Congress.

Maulana Azad, the Congress President, accused Cripps that he had retracted from his steps. Azad's letter to Cripps on April 11th, categorically asserted: "As you told me then (in the earlier meeting) that there would be a National Government which would function as cabinet and that the position of the Viceroy would be analogous to that of the King in England Vis-a-vis his cabinet."1

On receipt of this letter of rejection, like an astute lawyer that he was, Cripps endeavoured to show to the world

1. Azad A.K. India wing freedom; see Appendix IV for full text of the letter.
that the responsibility for the breakdown rested upon the Congress. He had written a letter on April 10 to Azad contending that the Congress Demand for treating the Executive Council as Cabinet Government was utterly illogical: although he himself had in the earlier stages indicated the possibility of converting the Executive Council to National Government by convention, now he wrote:

"Were such a system to be introduced by convention under the existing circumstances the nominated Cabinet (nominated presumably by the major political organisations)"
responsible to no one but itself, could not be removed and would in fact constitute an absolute dictatorship of the majority. 2

But Cripps was wrong and Azad seems right. The documentary proof of this fact is the letter of the Viceroy Lord Linlithgow. His letter to Amery confirms Azad's statement. He wrote:

Cripps in his extreme anxiety to meet Congress claims and to secure the support from them which might have resulted in securing the support of other parties, may have taken chances in discussion which were dangerous, and I am confirmed in that view by statements such as those positively made by Kalam Azad in his letter of 11th April to Cripps and not contradicted by the latter, that Cripps had talked freely of a 'National Government' presided over by a Viceroy who would stand in much the same relation to it as the King does at home. 2

From this document and the letter of Maulana Azad, it is clear that in the initial stages of negotiations Cripps promised the Congress President that Executive Council constituted of all the Indian members, would

1. Ibid., Document Number: 590; Sir S. Cripps to Maulana Azad, April 10, 1942, p. 733.

2. Ibid; Document Number: 626; The Marquess of Linlithgow to Mr. Amery (Extract); 14 April 1942; p. 774. Field Marshal Wavell, Commander-in-chief, India, who later succeeded Lord Linlithgow as Viceroy has noted in his Journal "He (Linlithgow) said that Cripps did not play straight over the question of the Viceroy's veto and Cabinet responsibility and did make some offer to Congress through the American Louis Johnson. He (Linlithgow) said Cripps was crooked when up against it". See Moon Penderel; Ed; Wavell : The Viceroy's Journal; Oxford; 1973; p. 33.
exercise power and the Viceroy would function as a constitutional head like the King in the U.K. On the basis of this promise negotiations were carried on, otherwise Congress was least interested in the offer and it would have rejected the offer even in very initial stage. Nehru, who had been closely associated with the negotiations, was astonished that "All the premises and assumptions which we had had in our mind for ten days and which we had been arguing, had no foundation".¹

Nationalist leader and the member of the Congress Working Committee Pandit Pant made a press statement on April 25, which also conform that Cripps went back at last moment, just when success seemed very near, on assurances he had given. Pant said in the press statement.

Cripps volunteered to take entire blame for breakdown upon himself. But when one looks at rest of his statement one is struck by rank hypocrisy of sly pose. Every time Cripps has spoken since breakdown, he has repeated this nauseating cant but simultaneously has laboured hard to foist myth that responsibility for breakdown rested entirely on Indian leaders, that it was inevitable result of their irreconcilable differences and mutual distrust. This is mischievous lie. Negotiations failed at last moment just when success seemed very near, solely because Cripps went back on assurances he had given in unequivocal terms at outset and almost throughout negotiations. In anxiety to organise

¹ As quoted by V.B. Kulkarni in his book. See Kulkarni V.B.; The Indian Triumvirate—a political biography of Gandhi-Patel-Nehru; Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay-7 1969; p. 172.
defence of country, Congress Working Committee went to extreme limit of self-suppression, but found that once again Britain was not prepared to part with any real power. In certain quarters there was feeling then that Cripps had been perhaps duped by diehards, but people have been disillusioned. Cripps has been sedulously propagating lies faithfully following in steps of Amery and others, only his methods are more subtle and insidious. 1

Much earlier Cripps had told Hodson in Delhi:

"You must realize that the Cabinet has quite made up its mind that India shall have everything in the way of de facto Dominion status and complete Indianisation of the Executive Council except for defence". 2 In discussions, Cripps had told Congress leaders that the Viceroy would doubtless do all he would by means of appropriate conventions, 3 whereas War Cabinet's view was "there can be no question of any convention limiting in any way your powers under the existing constitution". 4

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1. The Hindustan Times; April 25, 1942; Press Statement made by Pandit Gobind Vallabhb Pant.
3. At the Press Conference held on March 29 Cripps in answering a question observed "You cannot change the constitution. All you can do is to change the convention of the constitution. You can turn the Executive Council into a Cabinet"... Wavell has noted for Cripps in his Journal; "My predecessors (Linlithgow) told me, a purpose of the Cripps Mission of 1942, that Cripps was 'not quite straight under Pressure' and he (Linlithgow) was right". Penderal Moon; Op. cit., p. 310.
4. Mansergh and Lumby; Bd; TOP; Document Number : 581; War Cabinet to the Marquess of Linlithgow (Via India Office); Telegram 10 April 1942; Vol. I. p. 720.
With the perusal of documents of 10 April 1942; i.e., last day of Cripps negotiations, it is clear that until the last moments of negotiations, Congress leaders were kept under the impression that "the Cabinet was going to get absolute authority except in the sphere of defence; namely, that the Viceroy would be bound to act on the advice of the majority except in that sphere, and that this would be done by convention." When this understanding was removed on 10 April, 1942, round about 2.20 p.m., "There had been a hitch in the negotiations". Viceroy was asked to "send for Nehru or possibly Nehru and Cripps together to come and see him and see if he could clarify the matter." But the Viceroy was not prepared to do that. Wavell, who later on succeeded Lord Linlithgow has also remarked on alleged duplicity of Cripps. He has noted "Vallabhbhai Patel himself once remarked to me that they never knew where they with Cripps, he said different things to different people".

In his broadcast on the 30th of March, 1942, Cripps had said: "It is for the Indian people and not any outside authority, to decide under which of these forms, India will in the future govern herself. If the Indian people ask our help, it will, of course, be gladly given.

1. Ibid; Document Number: 583; Noted by Mr. Pinnell and Sir G. Laithwaite: 10 April, 1942, pp. 722-723.
But it is for you, the Indian people, to discuss and decide your constitution. But soon after these polite words, he once threatened: "We are now giving the lead which has been asked for and it is in the hands of the Indians and Indians only whether they will accept that lead... If they fail to accept this opportunity, the responsibility for that failure must rest with them. Our proposals are definite and precise. If they were to be rejected by the leaders of Indian opinion, there will be neither the time nor the opportunity to reconsider the matter till after the War".  

Also, in private conversations, Sir Stafford threatened or foretold a repression, the like of which India had never known.  

Cripps raised a controversy in England by saying that Jawaharlal first wanted to see Col. Johnson, whereas fact is that Col. Johnson himself was interested in meeting Jawaharlal and therefore he requested Mr. Shiva Rao to arrange a meeting with later.

2. Ibid. Wavell has noted for Cripps: "I am afraid that I would not wholly trust Cripps as a negotiator". Penderel Moon; Ed; Op. cit., p. 206.  
As soon as the text of the War Cabinet's proposals was released, there was a large volume of criticism in the Indian Press. The most critical were the papers which generally expressed the Congress point of view. While the Congress Working Committee was still in session, Cripps sent a letter to Azad in which he said that though 'the Hindu Press' had not welcomed the offer, he hoped that Azad would consider the proposal from a broader point of view. This reference of the Hindu Press reveals the inner mind of Cripps. He was putting the emphasis on the Hindu press because the Congress president was a Muslim! If he did not like the comments made by the press, he could easily have referred to the Indian press, or a section of it. In the published documents on Cripps Mission, word "Hindu" is omitted and there is a note that omission of this word from the White Paper was in accordance with Sir Stafford Cripps' wishes.¹

On the evening of the tenth April, there was a complete change of attitude characterized by a certain anxiety to close the talks. No sooner had they been terminated than Sir Stafford assumed a hostile attitude and went on adding to his charges against the Congress. The very first thing he did on the 10th evening after the return of the Congress President and Jawaharlal from 3,

¹ Mansergh and Lumby; TOP; Document Number: 480; Sir S. Cripps to Maulana Azad; 1 April, 1942; Vol. I. p. 585.
Queen Victoria Road was to hasten to Mr. Jinnah's place. Next morning the Working Committee received a sharp and recriminating letter accusing the Congress of a desire to dominate the minorities. It was strange that he should have written in this strain when the Congress had never spoken a word about the number of members that should be given to it or to the Muslim League and other political groups in India. Nor was there ever a talk or suggestion that out of the 14 members, that with the Commander-in-chief in addition, might form the National Government, the Congress should have majority.

That very evening (11 April), Sir Stafford gave a broadcast from Delhi in which he thought fit to omit from the oral delivery, some of the nasty passages incorporated in the written copy presented before hand and published intact latter in the press. That sentence ran thus:

"This critical and unconstructive attitude, natural enough in the Law Courts or in the market place, is not the best way of arriving at compromise." 1

On the very day, he admitted at a Press Conference that the discussions and negotiations were carried on in the most frank and friendly spirit on all sides and left no bitterness or rancour in their disagreement. He also

1. Ibid; Document Number : 609; Broadcast by Sir S. Cripps (Extract); 11 April, 1942; p. 753. Also see Sitaramayya; Op. cit; p. 327.
declared that the draft proposals were withdrawn and they reverted to the position as it was before he came out to India.

On Sir Stafford Cripps' return to England he added a further charge that the Congress Working Committee wanted a change of constitution in the middle of the war, although no effort was ever made in that behalf beyond accepting Sir Stafford's own suggestion that a slight constitutional change would be tabled and placed before the Parliament in order to obviate the difficulty arising from the provision in the Act demanding that the three members of the National Government should have put in ten years' service under His Majesty's Government.

On return to England Cripps told in a broadcast addressed to the Americans: "We offered representative Indian political leaders, immediate office in the Viceroy's Executive Council a body of ministers like those who advise your (American) President. Was it really so? Certainly not! He also said that the Congress majority wanted to tyrannize over the minorities; that Gandhiji induced the Congress Working Committee to reject his generous offer. Even he told the American people that India had refused to receive her freedom although he had travelled twenty thousand miles to offer it!!!

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On April 28, Cripps opened the debate on his mission to India in the House of Commons. He made out a case defending the honesty of British motives and the sincerity of purpose of the Government. He attributed the failure of the mission to the :

a. Involvement of Government in the war.

b. The propaganda of the Axis powers producing a defeatist atmosphere.

c. The growth of communal antagonism, and the conflicting demands of the parties and communities, and

d. The objections of the Congress—primarily to the first part of the Declaration and to the second part about the form and character of the Executive Council and the position of the Defence Member in it.

As the Congress had not laid much emphasis upon the first part, Cripps' opinion was that "none of these differences would have been decisive of a negative result, for all the parties would have prepared to co-operate upon the immediate situation" provided their demands relating to this part were satisfied. Therefore the success of the mission depended upon the solution of the two questions relating to (a) the form of the temporary Government and (b) Defence. Concerning the first Cripps averred;

"I had from the outset made it clear to those whom I saw}
that it was not possible to make any constitutional change, except of the most insignificant kind, prior to the new constitution coming into operation. With regard to Defence he pointed out that as numerous aspects of Defence such as Civil Defence, Defence Communications, Labour, etc., were already in the hands of the Indian member of the Viceroy’s Council, it was impossible for the British Government to go further with safety, and no risk could be taken at such a moment on so vital and immediate a matter as the defence of India. He added, "Moreover I do not believe that the minorities ... would have consented at this stage to any further devolution of Defence responsibilities."

He repeated the argument against the transformation of the Executive Council which he had first advanced at Delhi. It was because the Congress insisted upon this impossible demand that the negotiations finally broke down.

Thus in the exciting drama staged in Delhi in March-April 1942, Cripps played the leading role and he alone stands out as a tragic figure. He has been blamed by Indians for trying to be clever with them and by Hodson for his faulty method of negotiation in as much as

from a very early stage he went to the limits of his brief or even beyond it with the result that when it came to negotiation in detail he had nothing further to offer.\textsuperscript{1} Glendevon, an apologist of his father Linlithgow, goes to the extent of accusing him of "not running straight with them (Indians)" and indicately adds that "the same charge must be levelled at him over his dealings with the Viceroy".\textsuperscript{2}

He further asserts that in his earlier discussions with the Congress leaders on the nature of the new Executive Council, Cripps went "Well beyond his brief".\textsuperscript{3} Apparently agreeing with this, Eric Stokes writes that "Cripps' actions will require a great deal of explaining".\textsuperscript{4} Whereas D.A. Low describes such views as unwarranted, and remarks that Cripps was not only careful never to travel beyond his brief, "but convinced he should not".\textsuperscript{5} R.J. Moore broadly agrees with this view, but remarks that the allegation of Volte face levelled by the Congress against Cripps was "substantially warranted".\textsuperscript{6}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{1} Hodson, H.V.; \textit{Op. cit.}, p. 105.
\item \textsuperscript{2} Glendevon, John; \textit{The Viceroy at Bay}; London; 1967, p. 230.
\item \textsuperscript{3} Ibid., p. 232.
\item \textsuperscript{4} See his article "Cripps in India" \textit{Historical Journal}, Vol. 14, No. 2, pp. 427-34.
\end{itemize}
But now it has, of course, been generally accepted that in the beginning Cripps had freely mentioned the prospect of the Viceroy's Executive Council functioning as a cabinet, but changed his stand later and emphasized the difficulties in the way of such a development. We are no longer constrained to depend on hints and speculations for unravelling the mystery of the failure of the Cripps Mission. It is now clear, on the basis of hard documentation, that the Congress version of the sequence of events leading to this failure is quite correct.

There is no doubt that in the beginning Cripps did envisage the Viceroy's Executive Council functioning like a cabinet.

The standing of Cripps at this time in Britain was high; he was regarded almost as the alternative Prime Minister. With an Indian settlement under his belt, he could have overborne any resistance to its working. But when his hopes were shattering and his mission was drafting towards the failure he acted as an English patriot. He was a minister in a war-time government when his country was in extreme crisis. Burma and the Andaman Islands were lost; the Indian Ocean was in enemy hands; the loss of the Calcutta area and the Orissa coast was probable; and a Japanese landing in South India as part of a pincer operation against Ceylon could not be ruled out. At this stage for the failure of the mission a weaker man would have resigned. But Cripps acted in line with
that of another great British socialist, Robert Blatchford: "When England is at war, I'm English. I have no politics and no party. I am English." So patriotic motives doubtless led Cripps to stick to his post and to retract his commitments. He, intensely disappointed at the setback to his hopes and his career, most unfairly made the Congress the scapegoat; and it is for this that he has to be severely faulted. He also wrongly blamed Gandhiji for his failure.

However, the voluminous record on his mission, now available to us, mistakenly proves that Cripps meant to serve India well, and even with failure had succeeded in laying the foundation of the edifice of Indian independence, which came into being five years later. His mistake lay in coming to India without prying into the motives of Churchill and anticipating the amount of opposition to be encountered from Linlithgow. He also over-estimated the influence of Nehru over the Congress Working Committee and failed to find out that India of 1942 was not the India of 1939, when he had visited it last. Attlee, Roosevelt and Chiang Kai-Shek were certainly on his side but Attlee could not subsequently go back on the declaration to which he had agreed and the other two, although allies in the war, were leaders of foreign

countries and could influence the Stubborn Churchill only to a limited extent.

The offer was a package deal and left no room for negotiation. The offer required merely a salesman and Cripps was chosen as such. In his negotiations with the Maulana he was always inclined to see the other point of view. But he failed to settle the "case out of court" only because his clients, Churchill and Linlithgow were not "moderate" in the least, but rank diehards.

Why then did he accept the role of a salesman with open eyes? The answer appears to be that he thought that a firm promise of complete independence after the war, and the right to settle the future constitution through a constituent assembly would satisfy the Congress leaders. Nehru's anti-fascist and pro-Allies propaganda must have made him believe that the Congress would be willing to wait for the short period of the war. It is possible that had he come before, the Japanese had made a push towards India there would not have been so much insistence by the Congress upon the control of the Central Government. Although it is totally false that Gandhi or any of his associates was pro-Japanese, it is true that when Japan knocked at India's eastern gate they had to resolve that they must immediately control the Central Government not only with a view to defend their own motherland, but also let Japan know that she was now invading not British India.
but an independent India. But Cripps brushed aside all these considerations due to his complete faith in Nehru's support.

2. NEHRU AND CRIPPS MISSION

That the confidence of Cripps in his friend Nehru was not misplaced, is proved by what Maulana has revealed in his autobiography: "During the whole of this period Jawaharlal was living under a terrible mental strain. He had recently returned from China where he had been greatly influenced by Generalissimo and Madame Chiang Kai-Shek. It was clear to him that India's help was essential if China was to resist Japan successfully. One evening during the meeting of the Working Committee, Jawaharlal came to me and our discussion convinced me that he was in favour of accepting the Cripps offer even though there was no change in the British stand. He argued that in view of the favourable assurances given by Cripps, we should not hesitate. Jawaharlal did not say this in so many words but this was the trend of all his arguments."

Maulana states that he had advised members of the Working Committee not to meet Cripps separately. A reference to the daily newspapers of that time also shows that Nehru continued to remain in Allahabad for three or four days after Cripps' arrival in New Delhi on 23rd

March. But Nehru automatically and naturally played a most prominent and important part in the Cripps negotiations. His leadership in India could not be denied. At a big demonstration in Trafalgar square, portraits of Roosevelt, Churchill, Chiang Kai-Shek and Nehru were prominently displayed. Nehru had already attained an international reputation. Thus, for obvious reasons, during the latter stages of the negotiations, Maulana himself took Nehru along almost every time he met Sir Stafford Cripps.

Nehru's attachment to the democracies was emotional. Even after the termination of the negotiations with Cripps, his concern for the success of the Democratic Front did not cease. Maulana stated: "Jawaharlal gave an interview to the representative of the News Chronicle soon after Cripps left. The whole tone and attitude of the interview appeared to minimize the difference between the Congress and the British. He tried to represent that though Congress had rejected the Cripps offer, India was willing to help the British.

I also learnt that there was a proposal that Jawaharlal should make a broadcast from All India Radio. From what I knew of his attitude, I was afraid that his statement might create confusion in the public mind. Jawaharlal had already left for Allahabad and I had also made arrangements for returning to Calcutta. I decided
that I would stop on the way and have a further talk with him. I did so and told Jawaharlal clearly that now that the Working Committee had passed a resolution, he must be very careful regarding what he said. If he gave a statement which created the impression that Congress was not going to oppose the war effort, the whole effect of the Congress Resolution would be lost. The Congress stand was that India was willing to help Britain but could do so only as a free country. I was sure that this was also his attitude. If he said anything which created the impression that India was willing to support war effort regardless of the British attitude, the Congress resolution would become meaningless. I, therefore, requested him to refrain from making any statement. At first he argued with me but in the end he saw my point of view. I was very glad when he declared that he would make no statement at all and would cancel the broadcast which he had promised to make.¹

As a matter of fact Nehru did all that he could to help Cripps but failed to come up to his friend's expectations. According to Hodson: "Sir Stafford Cripps, who had believed that through his personal friendship and understanding with Nehru he could soon gain the latter's agreement and that the Working Committee would follow, was grievously disappointed in him" and that "he thought

¹ Ibid., pp. 61-65.
Pandit Nehru weak and uncertain. While Cripps' "grievous" disappointment is understandable, he should not have forgotten that in the ultimate analysis Nehru was as much an Indian as he himself was an Englishman. After his failure in his press conference and also in the House of Commons, Cripps supported the British side. Even Attlee had acquiesced in what Churchill had done in order to preserve unity in the war cabinet. If both these were justified in doing what they did why should Nehru be expected to divide the working committee just to please an English friend? Cripps failed and felt disappointed only because he knew Nehru the anti-fascist but not Nehru the Indian patriot. Also Jawaharlal liked Cripps but had no high opinion of his judgement, and that the fate of India was not an issue which Jawaharlal would be willing to determine at a personal level.

When Cripps saw that his mission was meeting with failure, in despair, he appealed to Jawaharlal, as an old friend, to save him:

Personal and Private

My dear Jawaharlal,

Let me make a final appeal to you, upon whom rests the great burden of decision - a decision so far reaching

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2. See Jawaharlal to Mahadeva Desai, 9 December 1939; A Bunch of Old letters; pp. 402-403.
in its bearing upon the future relations of our two peoples that its magnitude is indeed portentous.

We can and must carry out people through to friendship and co-operation - I in my sphere, you in yours.

The chance which now offers cannot recur. Other ways may come if this fails but never so good a chance to cement the friendship of our people.

Leadership - the sort of leadership you have - can alone accomplish the result. It is the moment for the supreme courage of a great leader to face all the risks and difficulties - and I know they are there - to drive through to the desired end.

I know your qualities and your capacity and I beg you to make use of them now.

Yours always

affectionately,

Stafford

This letter also supports the assumption that Cripps had relied on Nehru's support and he knew Nehru the antifascist but not Nehru the Indian patriot. Jawaharlal's hands were bound - not by Gandhi or his colleagues in the Working Committee but by Cripp's own shifts of position. He told Cripps that there were limited beyond which he

1. Ibid., p. 468.
could not carry the Congress and the Congress could not carry the country; but Cripps would not believe him.¹

About the attitude of Cripps, Nehru observed: "I was surprised at his woodenness and insensitiveness, in spite of his public smiles. He was all the time the formal representative of the War Cabinet, in fact he was the War Cabinet speaking to us with a 'take it or leave it' attitude. Always he seemed to impress upon us that he knew the Indian problem in and out and he had found the only solution for it. Anyone who did not agree with it was to say the least of it utterly misguided."²

3. CRIPPS MISSION AND MAULANA AZAD, THE THEN CONGRESS PRESIDENT

On the Indian side, the man who came out of the negotiation with flying colours was the Maulana. He had advised members of the working committee not to meet Cripps separately. He conducted the discussions with dignity, wisdom and a sense of responsibility. It was perhaps the finest hour of his political career and he rose to the occasion like a seasoned statesman as he himself narrates: Gandhi was against acceptance. Jawaharlal favoured the proposal. I differed from both of them. Gandhi was

2. Ibid; p. 286.
opposed to the proposal because of his opposition to war. Jawsharlal was in favour because of his attachment to the democracies. He was also influenced by the appeal which Marshal Chianne-Kai-Shok had addressed to the Indian people. He was, therefore, for acceptance of the proposals if this could be done without compromising the Congress position.

"As for me, I had only one test by which to judge the proposals. Was the offer of the British Government leading to the freedom of India? If so, we should accept the offer gladly and without any mental reservations. If not, we should reject it categorically, For me, the only test was the issue of Indian freedom."¹

In fairness to his other colleagues in the working Committee, Maulans should have added that this was also their test.

**GANDHIJI, AND CRIPPS MISSION**

According to Cripps responsibility of failure rests upon Gandhiji. He declared that Gandhiji influenced the

To ascribe to Gandhiji the attitude of a defeatist was quite wrong. Gandhiji was an optimist by nature, and his belief in the triumph of right was unshakeable. Between the two parties in the war he had no doubt that the cause of the allied nations—U.K., U.S.A., France, above all of Russia and China, was just, and he ardently desired its success. So far as Britain was concerned he was even sentimentally attached to its people and would not even in thought wish them ill. What, however, he denounced openly and without reserve, was Britain's imperialist role. For him British imperialism was the same kind of aggressive domination over the peoples of Asia and Africa, as the Japanese militarists. British imperialists of all parties conservative, Liberal and Labour, deluded themselves to look upon an enemy of imperialism as an enemy of Britain desirous of its downfall.

Gandhiji also held that the Japanese had entered in the war against Britain because they were envious of the
British Empire and wanted its destruction, otherwise they had no reason to invade India. It was, therefore, possible for India to dissuade them from attacking India if the British voluntarily liquidated their empire in India. But in case the Japanese did not desist from their plans, two courses were open: (a) the allied forces could remain in India to resist the Japanese with India's consent, (b) India would offer total non-violent non-co-operation on the widest scale to render Japanese occupation impossible.

Gandhiji's role during the negotiations between the Congress and Cripps was travestied by British spokesmen. The fact is Gandhiji was reluctant to see Cripps at all. But Cripps wired to him who was in Wardha that he would be glad to have an opportunity of having a talk with him. Gandhiji replied: "Thanks for your wire. In the Congress Working Committee it is agreed that on behalf of the Congress only the President and Pandit Nehru should see you, You know my anti-all war views. If despite that you would like to see me I shall be glad to see you."¹

When pressed by Cripps, he consented, travelled to Delhi and met him on March 27. Cripps showed him the Draft Declaration which he immediately rejected and even asked Cripps not to publish it and return home. Gandhi as noted by Cripps himself frankly told the visit that "the Congress would not accept the document" and stressed his personal objection to paragraphs dealing with Indian states and accession or non-accession of the provinces to the Indian Union proposed to be formed after the war. He referred to the autocracy of the rulers of the Indian states and said that the Congress could not tolerate their continuance. In regard to the second point dealing with accession or non-accession, he asserted that the document was an invitation to Muslim to create Pakistan. According to Cripps, Gandhi left him expressing / his hopes that I should succeed in
spite of what he had said on April 14 Gandhiji left Delhi and did not return during Cripps' stay.

In fact, Gandhiji did not come into the picture at all. Azad writes in his book:

"Gandhiji's views on the subject of participation in any war were well known and it would be entirely untrue to suggest that the Working Committee decisions were in any way influenced by those views.

"Gandhiji made it clear to the Working Committee that we were perfectly free to come to our own decisions on the merit of the proposals. He did not want to participate even in the earlier sittings of the Working Committee and it was only because of my insistence that he agreed to stay on for several days. Eventually he felt that he could not stay any longer and all my persuasion failed to move him."

1. Mansergh and Lumb (Eds.): TOP: Document Number :397:

Nehru also wrote: "After Gandhiji left Delhi there was no consultation with him of any kind and it is entirely wrong to imagine that the rejection was due to his pressure". Even Gandhiji himself said: "They have asserted that I had influenced the negotiations after I left Delhi. But that is a lie".¹

Even C. Rajgopalacharia also publicly declared that: "I was present from beginning to end during these talks, and I can say authoritatively that Mahatmaji who was absent from Delhi during the later stages, was not responsible for anything that took place. In spite of Mahatmaji's adverse opinion expressed at the preliminary stage, the Working Committee entered into discussions with Sir Stafford and carried on according to their own policy and Mahatmaji did not interfere".²

Cripps, however, blamed Gandhiji for his failure. This interpretation of him has now become a part of conventional history.³ It appears that British Spokesmen have given

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² The Hindu; Madras; 22 August, 1942.

³ For example, Roy Jenkins wrote: "Nehru, even Jinnah, were tempted. But Gandhi, who cared little about the threat of the new invaders, moved in and snatched the prospect of achievement away from Cripps". *The Times*, 27 November, 1972.
currency to the belief that Gandhiji had characterized his proposals as a "post dated cheque on a falling bank" though actually Gandhiji was not the author of this unkind remark. Even most Indians attributed the authorship of this biting phrase to Gandhiji which had unfortunate repercussions in England. Actually the phrase was coined by the Roy's Weekly of Delhi.¹ For the manufactured propaganda Gandhi, gave expression to his feelings in these words: "All the manufactured criticism that I find being made today is sheer tomfoolery, meant to overawe me and to demoralize the Congress ranks. It is a foul game, they do not know the fire that is raging in my breast".²

5. RAJAJI AND CRIPPS OFFER

Dr. Rajendra Prasad writes in his autobiography about the attitude of Rajaji towards the Cripps offer. According to him: "C. Rajgopalachari, alone of the Working Committee, was first in favour of accepting the Cripps plan, because he felt that, except for Defence and War, Indians would have full power in all other departments. But even his opposition to our stand melted away when it became clear that the Viceroy was not willing to relax his special powers".³ It

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3. Prasad Rajendra; Autobiography; Asia Publishing House; Bombay; 1957; p. 527.
is true that Rajaji had almost completely identified himself with the views of Cripps; however, in his interview with Cripps, which took place on 28th, March, he forewarned later about the objections to be raised by the Congress and gave him this advice as noted by Cripps: "So far as the whole scheme was concerned, he said that he was in favour of its acceptance and that the crucial question would be whether Nehru could be got to take the same point of view; if he could, he had no doubt that they would carry the scheme through the Congress Working Committee. He begged of me to try and make some adjustment of the final paragraph in order to meet what he knew would be Nehru's reaction." 1

After the failure of the Mission Rajaji rebelled openly, resigned from the Congress Working Committee, and advocated the acceptance of the Muslim League demand, and the revival of Provincial popular governments which had ceased to function since October-November, 1939.

6. THE THEN VICEROY LORD LINLITHGOW'S ATTITUDE

Linlithgow did not believe from the beginning in the success of Cripps Mission. As early as March 14th, he told Hodson, the Reform Commissioner, "Personally, I think he'll fail with H.M.G.'s policy, don't you?" 2 About Cripps offer


2. Hodson H.V., The Great Divide; p. 95.
he remarked it is "like hawking rotten fish".¹

Actually Linlithgow complained that he was never consulted though kept informed generally, by Cripps. His executive council was never in the picture and made a grievance of this discourtesy on the part of Cripps.

Cripps and the Viceroy worked at Cross purposes, one attempting to persuade the Indian leaders to join in the task of preparing the constitution of self-governing India, the other having no faith in a free and united India, and breathing a sigh of relief on the departure of Cripps from India.

In fact Cripps had to deal with a hostile Viceroy, supported by a hostile bureaucracy, who had more friends in the British Cabinet than he had. The India committee of the War Cabinet, on whose advice Churchill relieved those days, consisted of five members, four of whom were notorious reactionaries so far as India was concerned. Lord Simon

¹ Ibid; Linlithgow told Durga Das just before his departure from India: "India could not hope to become free for another fifty years. This country was new to Parliamentary institutions and would require a large leavening of British officials and Europeans to ensure their successful functioning. With the advent of air-conditioning, it was now possible for Britain to settle down in India permanently in areas like Dehra Dun, and when there were some six millions of them to buttress a domestic administration India might except to make substantial progress towards self-government. See Durga Das; India from Curzon to Nehru and After; p. 208.
had headed the fateful Simon Commission. The Lord President of the Council, Sir John Anderson, had been Governor of Bengal when Government terrorism was let loose on the people. Sir James Cripps, the Secretary of State for War, had served as Finance Member in the Viceroy's Cabinet. He had shown extraordinary forensic ability in the Assembly to assail the Congress Opposition, not without an element of contempt, leading to uproarious protests. Mr. Amery, the Secretary of State, had not been to India, but ever since his appointment he had rarely said a kind word about Indian politicians. So, naturally at the critical stage of the negotiations, the Cabinet rejected the recommendations of Cripps and accepted Linlithgow's suggestions.

On the termination of the mission Linlithgow wrote a letter to Amery on April 11, complaining that he was not informed about the proposed reconstitution of the Executive Council. Then on Amery's despatch he made the marginal remark: "How could I help when I was consulted by Cripps about nothing".

Again he noted that Cripps had committed himself to the new composition of the Executive Council consisting of

1. Sahni J.N.; The Lid Off; Fifty Years of Indian Politics; Allied Publishers; Bombay; 1971; pp. 166-67.
2. Mansergh and Lumby; TOP; Document Number: 610; Mr. Amery to the Marquess of Linlithgow; 11 April, 1942; p. 756.
all Indians except the Defence Minister, "without consulta-
tion and protected against, by me the moment (Cripps) told
me he had done it". On being cornered on this "Cripps
told me (Linlithgow) that Cabinet had given him permission
to go the length of 100 per cent Indianisation, if necessary".¹

On April 25, Linlithgow again complained to Amery,
"While Cripps kept me in general touch, there was little,
if any, consultation".²

Amery, in a letter to Linlithgow wrote his thought
of the Congress leaders like Gandhiji and Nehru; describing
them as "miggling unpractical creatives" about whom he was
doubtful "whether people of that type would ever run
straight".³ Linlithgow's concept was "They could never
run straight. One will have to plough through the old gang
down to better and younger stuff".⁴ These comments of
Amery and Linlithgow are enough to show their bias and dis-
liking of the great and dynamic leaders of India.

1. Ibid; pp. 756-57. Linlithgow was annoyed by the views
of Cripps on the formation of Executive Council. He
had seen the list of members of the Executive Council
prepared by Cripps and found that all of them were
Indians except the Commander-in-chief and the Viceroy.
His blunt reaction was "that's my affair". Cripps was
trying to "bait the trap with my cheese". See Hodson,

2. Ibid; Document Number: 690; The Marquess of Linlithgow
to Mr. Amery; Telegram; 25, April, 1942; Vol. I. p. 851.

3. Ibid; Document Number: 58; p. 108.

7. CHURCHILL AND CRIPPS MISSION

Roosevelt who had been closely watching the proceedings in India was shocked at the news of the collapse of the negotiations. So he wired to Churchill through Henry Hopkins on the 12th and asked him to postpone Cripps' departure and meanwhile to make an effort to restart negotiations on the basis that India would be given immediately the opportunity to set up a national government this might lead to an agreement. "I am" President wrote, "unable regretfully to agree with the point of view you express in your message to me that American public opinion believes that negotiations have failed on general broad issues. The general impression here is quite the contrary. The almost universal feeling is that the deadlock has been due to the unwillingess of the British Government to concede the right of self-government to the Indian people notwithstanding the Indians' willingness to entrust technical military and naval defence control to the competent British authorities. The President felt that a settlement with India was still possible and essential.

Churchill wired back that he would not decide the matter without the consent of the Cabinet which could be obtained only on today the 13th. In the meanwhile Cripps

had already left India, and the suggestion of the President could not be put into effect as Cripps could not be contacted and everything could not be thrown into the melting pot.

However, he assured the President, "You know the weight which I attach to everything you say to me". He protested, "Anything like a serious difference between you and me would break my heart". But his private reflections on Roosevelt's intervention were: "I was thankful that events had already made such an act of madness impossible. The human race cannot make progress without idealism, but idealism at other people's expense cannot be considered as its highest or noblest form".

Here one can see that Churchill considered Roosevelt's suggestion as "an act of madness" and "idealism at other people's expense". He took up the contents of Roosevelt's cable with Hopkins, who was still in London, and told him that if the policy suggested by Roosevelt was pursued the whole subcontinent of India would be thrown "into utter confusion while the Japanese invader was at its gates". After

2. Singh Harnam; The Indian National Movement and American Opinion; p. 372.
4. Ibid.
pointing out the damage that would be done to the Allied war
cause, he told the American diplomat that serious differences
would develop between the U.S. and the U.K. if any attempt
was made "to reopen the Indian constitutional issue in this
way at this juncture".¹ This was sufficient indication for
Hopkins that "The subcontinent of India was one area where
the minds of Roosevelt and Churchill would never meet". He
told his boss in Washington that the matter should not be
emphasized "at the present time" The Chief Executive
followed the advice.²

It is clear that the British Prime Minister adopted a
hostile attitude toward the Indian demands from very beginn-
ing. He was, concerned about the solidarity of the British
Empire. Since 1931, he had been fighting "Obstinely and
often fiercely" to retain the British rule in India. "The
spectacle of Gandhi" as Alan Moorehead has put it, "affronted
him". "It was alarming and also manseating to see Mr.
Gandhi, a seditious Middle Temple Lawyer, now posing as a
fakir or a type well-known in the East; striding half-naked
up the steps of the Viceregal palace".³ After he became,
on "May 1940, the Prime Minister of Coalition Government, he

   Vol. II; p. 531.
2. Ibid.
3. Allan Moorehead; Churchill; Thames and Hudson, London;
   1960; p. 69.
openly stated that he had not become the First Minister of Her Majesty's Government "to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire." Harry Hopkins wrote about him: Churchill is the British War Cabinet, and no one else matters.\(^1\)

As early as 7 January, 1942, Churchill noted: "I hope my colleagues will realize the danger of raising constitutional issues, still more of making constitutional changes in India at a moment when enemy is upon the frontier. The idea that we should 'get more out of India' e.g., putting the Congress in charge at this juncture seems ill-founded. "Bringing hostile elements into the defence machine", he felt, "will paralyse action."\(^2\) During March-April, the resources of Britain were "slender and strained to the full".

"The armies"\(^1\) as Churchill has pointed out, "had surrendered or were recoiling before the devastating strokes of Japan. Our Navy had been driven out of the Bay of Bengal and indeed out of most of the Indian Ocean. We had apparently been out-matched in the air." "This was no time". The British Premier recorded, "to determine the figure relationship of India to the British Empire."\(^3\)

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Hopkins revealed, later on, that during the entire war no suggestions from Roosevelt were "so wrathfully received" by Churchill as those relating to solution of the "Indian problem". One of Churchill's closest and most affectionate associates told Hopkins; "The President might have known that India was one subject on which Winston would never move a yard".¹ Sherwood also wrote thus: "It was indeed one subject on which the normal, broad-minded, good-humoured, give-and-take attitude which prevailed between the two statesmen was stopped cold. It may be said that Churchill would see the Empire in ruins and himself buried under them before he would concede the right of any American, however great and illustrious a friend, to make any suggestions as to what he should do about India".² Churchill himself has recorded: "The President had first discussed the Indian problem with me, on the usual American lines, during my visit to Washington in December 1941. I reacted so strongly and at such length that he never raised it verbally again".³

Churchill's reaction to the failure of Cripps Mission is recorded as follows:

(a) "Churchill had made his gesture of appeasement to the United States and the Labour members of the War Cabinet.

2. Ibid.
It was a gesture without any meaning".  

(b) "When Churchill received news from India that the Cripps mission had failed he is reported to have danced around the Cabinet room. No tea with treason, no truck with American or British Labour sentimentality, but back to the solemn-and exciting-business of war".  

(c) "When Mr. Churchill learned of the breakdown of the Delhi negotiations he put on an act of sham tears and sorrow before his guests at chequers, not troubling to conceal his own pleasure".  

Churchill's own account of his reaction to the news of the failure is also an important evidence and reveals real intentions behind the Cripps Mission. He wrote: "I was able to bear the news, which I had thought probable from the beginning, with philosophy". He was not only 'able to bear the news' but was very glad after receiving the news, as he cabled to Cripps on April 11: "You must not feel unduly discouraged or disappointed by the results... The effect throughout Britain and in the U.S. has been wholly beneficial. I am very glad you are coming home at once,"

2. Ibid., p. 79.
where a most cordial welcome awaits you. Even though your hopes have not been fulfilled, you have rendered a very important service to the common cause.  

Here one can ask the question why this most cordial welcome for failure? In fact years after the Cripps Mission Churchill himself confessed later on in a speech in the House of Commons on 12 December, 1946 that Her Majesty's Government were not prepared to support Cripps to the extent he was prepared to go. 

Churchill's disastrous record in relation to India both as the member of Government and in opposition is well known. His intervention has every time been exercised to the violet prejudice of India. In the words of Sardar Patel, Churchill was "an unashamed imperialist". According to Sardar "Many attempt to build friendship between India and Britain has been wrecked by his refusal to face facts and attempts to mould them to suit his own predilections. It is well-known that when the Cripps' offer was made, it was he who prevented negotiations from achieving success. It was he who every time thwarted the attempts of Mr. Roosevelt to see that justice is done to India's legitimate aspirations.

1. Ibid; also see Mansergh and Lumby; TOP; Document Number : 597; Mr. Churchill to Sir S. Cripps Via: India Office and Viceroy, Telegram, 11 April 1942; p. 739.
and its free and willing co-operation enlisted in the war effort. ¹

Wavell has recorded in his Journal about Churchill that: "He hated India and everything to do with it."²

Again on August 15, 1943, Wavell stated in his letter to Amery, the Secretary of State for India that "I feel that many of our troubles in India, both administrative and political, are due to ignorance and prejudice among your colleagues". Obviously he was referring to Churchill & Co.

He has recorded on September 7, 1943 that: Lord Amery, who does stand up to him, had accused P.M. of a 'Hitler like attitude to India.'³

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1. On June 26, 1948, in his speech to a conservative party rally, Mr. Winston Churchill made an unwarranted attack on India. In reply, the Deputy Prime Minister issued this statement from Dehra Dun on June 29, 1948. See Patel Sardar: On Indian Problems: (Deputy Prime Minister of Indian Union): Publications Division Ministry of Information and Broadcasting: Government of India: Old secretariat: Delhi: 1949: p.114


3. Ibid., pp. 86-89
Here one can clearly see that even after the failure of the Cripps Mission Churchill's attitude—his attitude towards the Indian aspirations—remained hostile towards the Indian aspirations. Before Cripps undertook the mission to India it was being widely rumoured both in England and India that Cripps, by his success in bringing about a breach between Germany and Russia as British ambassador to Moscow, had become a rival to Churchill for Prime Ministership. The failure of his India mission really silenced these speculations. Thus Churchill killed the political career of his potential rival and at the same time he also tried to convince Roosevelt and Chiang Kai-Shek, that he valued their advice also in matters which were principally his own concern.

OTHER DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCES ABOUT THE BRITISH PURPOSE

From the following extract of various documents also it becomes more clear that British Government was only interested in specifying international critics and critics at home of its policy towards India, rather than success of
had sabotaged the Cripps Mission. But for Churchill's rigidity, Cripps would have secured an agreement. The Viceroy and others in authority had been determined, and were still determined, that necessary concessions should not be made. They were prepared to lose India, like Burma, rather than make concessions, for they believed that India would be restored to them after the war with the status quo ante prevailing. Johnson related how a satisfactory settlement on the defence issue had been in sight and how Churchill, the Viceroy and Wavell did not allow it. The State Department officials did not fully share Johnson's views. Before his arrival in Washington, two different versions of the failure of Cripps Mission had been conveyed to the Department. Sir Girija Shankar Bajpai, the Agent General for India, in his assessment to Murray, the Chief of Near Eastern Division, had observed that Nehru and Rajgopalachari had every desire to arrive at a negotiated settlement with Cripps, but the Congress Working Committee had defeated the negotiations. Graham Spry's testimony to the State Department also blamed Gandhi and his associates, who were unwilling to accept responsibility during the war. These

2. Ibid., p. 640.
distorted and pro-British accounts ran counter to Johnson's assessment. The State Department, therefore, concluded that the charge of British sabotage was not substantiated'. Lord Halifax, British Ambassador in America, sensed the mood of Department Officials and observed that, "Cripps Mission did much to dispel the American illusion of British transigence to that country."2 The proposals lingered in the American mind, as a far-reaching step in the right direction which the Indian leaders had turned down".3 British propaganda, thus, for time being succeeded and henceforth harped on this theme, and clouded the official American attitude against the Indian nationalists.

The British diplomats were aware that the offer would be most probably rejected by Indians; but it (the offer) would prove the sincerity and honesty of the British Government in world. Now we can see this fact on the basis of hard documentation. Amery wrote to Linlithgow on 9 February 1942: "However, Winston does not feel that failure of his effort would discredit him or the Government, but would show our goodwill and only expose the unreasonableness of Indian

1. Ibid., p. 622.
parties". Again he wrote to Linlithgow on 2 March 1942:
"... As a matter of fact it seems to me that the bark of the
new declaration is in many ways more alarming than its
bite... My impression as to the whole business is that
Congress will not accept". On 5 March he wrote to the Prime
Minister Churchill that in case of failure "reasons would be
so convincing to the world that we might be left alone for a
while to carry on the war". The Prime Minister wrote to
Viceroy on 10 March that if the offer "is rejected by the
Indian parties for whose benefit it has been devised, our
sincerity will be proved to the world". Same day Amery
too wrote to Linlithgow: "By the time these matters have
been discussed by Cripps and accepted or more probably
rejected... We shall have shown our goodwill to the world
and India".

Thus it can be said without any doubt that the offer
was made to show the world the goodwill of Britain
towards India and not for any kind of political settlement
between India and Britain.

1. Mansergh and Lumby; TOP; Document Number: 89; Mr.
Amery to the Marquess of Linlithgow; 9 February 1942;
2. Ibid; Document Number: 218; p. 295.
3. Ibid; Document Number: 240; p. 324.
5. Ibid; Document Number: 302; p. 400.
The offer was in essence a fairly conservative, reactionary and limited one. Sir Strafford Cripps was selected for the Mission because he was extreme Left Winger and in close touch with Nehru and Congress. Cripps was knowing the prospect of his being denounced both by Congress in India and by the Left Wing in Britain, for having lent himself to so reactionary and limited a policy, but he was determined to play the game by the Government policy. Amery in his dispatch of 10 March, 1942, writes to Linlithgow:

"From the point of view of putting across what is essentially a conservative policy, both as regards the future and as regards the immediate refusal to transfer control of the Executive, there is much to be said for sending out someone who has always been an extreme Left Winger and in close touch with Nehru and Congress... the result in the end should be both to increase the chances of the success, slight as they are, and to mitigate any blame thrown upon the Government as a whole for failure." ¹

Further he observes: "I think Cripps fully realises the difficulties in front of him, and the prospect of his being denounced both by Congress in India and by the Left Wing here, for having lent himself to so reactionary and limited a policy... he really means to play the game by the

¹. Ibid; Document Number: 304; p. 402.
Government policy and by you*.1

Thus, it is clear without any doubt that the British Government was playing foul game with the Indian aspirations. Here Amery took it granted that Cripps was also actively involved in the game, but in fact he was engaged in his own game. He was over anxious to win the credit of solving the Indian political deadlock.

The reasons Amery gave for the appointment of Cripps sound curious, but it reveals the inner working of the mind of those dealing with the Indian situation which had assumed grave importance. Churchill's Government wanted to win the favour of the American public opinion and to satisfy all its international critics, but had no intention to transfer power. They drew up a scheme to fob off India with constitutional gimmicks and if Cripps' persuasive advocacy and friendship with some Congress leaders could carry the day it would be an additional triumph.