Tall, thin, austere vegetarian, son of a Labour Lord and nephew of Beatrice Webb, the famous Fabian Socialist writer, Stafford Cripps attended exclusive schools and became an unorthodox, left-wing Laborite Member of Parliament. A brilliant lawyer, he donated a large part of his huge professional income to political causes. When the Second World War opened, Sir Stafford had abandoned his lucrative law practice, and in November, 1939, undertook a trip around the world to discover what people were thinking. He had spent eighteen days in India, saw Jinnah, Linlithgow, Tagore, Ambedkar, Jawaharlal Nehru and Gandhi.  

He was of the same age as Nehru and twenty years younger than Gandhi. Cripps and Nehru had known each other for some time, and when Nehru was in England in 1938, Cripps took him to Attlee and they had a long talk on the possible lines of dealing with the problem of Indian self-government and had sketched out the idea of a constituent.

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assembly to be summoned in order that Indians themselves might decide on their future.¹

A lightly-built man with the predilections of an ascetic, Cripps gave the impression to most people who knew him that he was a passionate doctrinaire to whom "ideas were more real than human beings". Dr. Hugh Dalton believed that Cripps had "a very uncertain judgement" and that he was "inclined to be a lone wolf". He wrote on another occasion that his colleague in the party was a problem. "He has no political judgement at all. He over-simplifies everything into 'the capitalists' and 'the workers'. An adolescent Marxian miasmal."²

In the winter of 1939 he had come to India 'as a self-appointed Ambassador to treat with the Congress',³ and had been Jawaharlal’s guest. After his first visit of India, Sir Stafford had drafted a plan for Indian constitutional changes. He had presented the draft to Lord Halifax, the former Irwin, and than British Foreign Secretary, who had filed it in the archives.⁴ Cripps had advised to

¹. Attlee C.R.; As it happened; Heinemann; 1954; p. 181.
². Hugh Dalton; The Fateful years; Memoirs 1931-45; Frederick Muller; 1957.
³. Laski to Mr. and Mrs. Frankfurter, 7 December, 1939, Laski papers, as quoted by S. Gopal; in Jawaharlal Nehru; a biography Vol. I, 1889-1947. Oxford Uni. Press; 1975; p. 278.
White Hall to hasten a rapprochement with India. When it was made clear in the Indian minds that India had no place in sharing the freedom that might result from the war but was only to bear the full burden in standing the blows and the buffets of such a war, only Sir Stafford Cripps on his return from India had a good word to say for the country.¹

Cripps had expressed before views on India's future that were in accord with those of advanced nationalists. He was in fact convinced that the "deadlock could only be broken if the Viceroy started real negotiations on the basis of firm British offer on generous terms".² His pronouncement in the House of Commons on October 26, 1939 was of considerable value in that it commended the constituent Assembly and means of salvation for India's problems and India.

He had pointed out the inconsistency of Britain's relation to India, and had pleaded:

... I believe we have to make up our minds, therefore whether, we are genuinely determined, not in words, but in action, to give self-government to the people of India—and I believe that if we did do, we should be able to welcome that country as a great and powerfully and friend for all the years in the future or whether we are to ally

1. "He seemed to me a genuine friend of India, keenly interested in the solution of her political problems, both immediate and long term". B. Shiva Rao, well known journalist and close to many of the martyrs of India's liberty, writes his impression about Cripps when he met Cripps in India in 1939; India's Freedom Movement: Some notable figures (p. 159) B. Shiva Rao.

ourselves with the reactionary Indian Princes, as we have been doing in past, for a joint exploitation of the Indian people by the British Raj and the Indian Princes.\(^1\)

Suggesting the lines on which a reply should be given to the Congress for the elucidation of Britain's war aims, he had said that "... The Indian people, therefore, can be assured that our immediate objective is self-government for the Indian people". Furthermore, he had recommended that they "abandon all Idea of Federation" and "consent to the election of a new central Legislative Assembly for British India" and "the majority party in that Legislature should form a Government, which the Viceroy should then appoint as his Executive Council.\(^2\)

So it is obvious that Cripps' interest in India was recalled when crisis clouds darkened the horizon of Asia in 1942\(^3\). Meanwhile, his prestige had risen enormously

\(^1\) House of Commons Debate. 5th Series, Vol. 352, C. 1664. for Cripps' Speech see Cs. 1664-1665; See also Cs. 1656-60.
\(^2\) Ibid. Cs. 1665-1666.
\(^3\) B. Shiva Rao: At a press conference in New Delhi, during his first visit of India in 1939, Cripps had made a statement to the effect that he had come to India after discussing with men having intimate knowledge of Indian possible solutions for the deadlock which had been caused by the resignation of the Congress Ministeries from the Provinces in which they held office from the Summer of 1937. Also, before leaving London, he had told the Press conference that he had had discussions with Lord Hailey, Sir Findlater Stewart, and one or two other important officials of the India office. See: India's Freedom Movement: Some notable figures; p. 159.
because he was serving as British Ambassador in Moscow when Hitler invaded Russia. He enjoyed a great reputation as an accomplished diplomat and his role as British Ambassador to Russia was acclaimed as most successful, although knowledgeable persons disagreed with this opinion. Shortly after his so-called success in Russia, he had been appointed to the small inner War Cabinet and was often mentioned as Churchill's successor. Churchill admired the intellectual abilities of Cripps, but disliked his lack of sense of humour and his "often hardly-concealed attitude of mental superiority". Once when Cripps had left a meeting of Ministers, Churchill had remarked: "There, but for the grace of God, goes God".

Cripps was well known in Indian legal circles for his eminent position in the profession. So early as in 1932, he was consulted by the Nizam's Government regarding the interpretation of the Treaty Rights of the Nizam in the port of Masulipattam. According to Sittarammaya:

It was believed in some of the highest Congress quarters that he was feeling a certain compunction of conscience because he had been connected with

1. Dr. Hugh Dalton writes: "Cripps did not succeed in Russia as Ambassador: He asked for recall and returned in January 1942". He entered the Government in the following month. Dalton further says: "He brought back with him a queer myth, for which, of course, he had no responsibility, that he was the man who had brought Russia into the war on our side". See Hugh Dalton; Op. cit. p.320.

a Government which was responsible for a black chapter in the History of British connection with India, and was, therefore, anxious to make suitable amends for it at the earliest opportunity. But it was equally well known that Cripps was somewhat of a faddist and even crank.1

During his first visit to India, Cripps had formed his opinion about the communal problem of India. "His talks with Mr. Jinnah and Mr. Liaquat Alikhan had led him towards the idea that some separation of Hindu and Muslim dominions might be necessary".2 Besides he had been impressed with the problems of the untouchables and of the subjects of the Indian States, which appeared to place obstacles in the way of political advance.

2. GENERAL POLITICAL ATMOSPHERE IN INDIA AT THE TIME OF ARRIVAL OF CRIPPS MISSION IN INDIA:

Since starting of the Second World War, response of the British Government to India's national aspirations was absolutely cold. This negative stand taken by the British Government had created a state of frustration and anti-British feeling in Indian minds. The statement of British Prime Minister about the applicability of Atlantic charter to India had made Indian minds suspicious about the intentions

of British Government regarding the Indian problem. Continuous set back of the British at the war front and rapidly approaching war near the door of India had made Indian minds doubtful about the victory of Allied forces.

Moreover there was a great deal of race feeling in India on account of the treatment meted out to Indian evacuees from Malaya and Burma. These evacuees had gone to all parts of India, and with them had spread accounts of neglect and even ill-treatment. Such race feeling had not existed in India since the days of Amritsar in 1919. When the Japanese were using the race argument prominently in their broadcasts, the existence of this feeling in India was dangerous for British beyond measure. Though from the very beginning of the War, sympathy of the Indian leaders was with the Allies, the partly imperialistic and irrational policy of the British Government towards India had hurt their feelings. Idealist leader like Nehru was disturbed by this total negative approach of the British government.

As in the first round of the war the British Government was beaten and defeated by Hitler and his Allies, even some important Indian leaders had become doubtful about the victory of Britain and other allied forces.1

1. "By the end of October, 1941, when I met Sardar Patel, he had begun to feel that England would have to make a negotiated peace with Hitler", writes Kanji Dwarkadas. See Kanji Dwarkadas; Ten Years to Freedom; Popular Prakashan, Bombay p. 64.
Inspite of all this, announcement of Cripps Mission to India, had once again raised hopes in Indian hearts. For never before had a member of the British Cabinet visited India with the specific goal of a political settlement, on which depended India's future political ties with Great Britain.

Immediate reactions of Indian political leaders to Churchill's statement were favourable. Nehru denied to make any comment, saying that time for comment would be later. Maulana Azad recalled that Cripps had seen him when he visited India in 1940, and said he would welcome him as a friend when he visits India again. Rajagopalachari expressed pleasure that British Government had at last realised gravity of situation and selected a good Ambassador. Without knowing what Sir Stafford has got to present, he could say nothing more than what he had been saying from many platforms during last two months. Sapru said: "On the whole I welcome Cripps' forthcoming visit and would not like to say

1. The Hindustan Times, New Delhi; 12 March, 1942
2. Ibid.
3. The Hindu, Madras, 12 March, 1942
a word which might prejudice his great mission in which I hope he will achieve as much success as he has in Russia. In view of increasing danger to India delay is regrettable, but it is as well that a man of Sir Stafford's status of independence of mind and democratic antecedents should visit India and see things with his own eyes.\(^1\) Jayakar said: "From what I have known of Sir Stafford in London, I am not without hope that he will do full justice to tremendous task he has undertaken."\(^2\) Whereas Jinnah said: "I cannot possibly give any opinion anticipating decision of Moslem League Working Committee, meeting for which is being called as soon as possible to consider situation and announcement".\(^3\) The Hindu Mahasabha leader Savarkar announced: "Hindu Mahasabha cannot attach much importance to endless discussions and conferences even if conducted by member of British War Cabinet like Cripps unless and until we have definite proclamation bringing into operation immediately status of co-partnership equal with Great Britain in Indo-British Commonwealth and representation of Hindu majority and Moslem minority which is perfectly democratic and in proportion to population. I welcome Cripps, but regret that scheme itself should have been still 'a cat in the bag'.\(^4\)

\(^1\) The Bombay Chronicle, Bombay, 12 March, 1942.
\(^2\) Ibid.
\(^3\) Free Press Journal, Bombay, 12 March, 1942.
\(^4\) The Bombay Chronical, Bombay, 12 March, 1942.
These were the reactions of different political leaders of India, representing different political organizations and interests. However, one thing is certain that all well-coined Cripps and hoped highly for his mission.

Cripps' proposals were yet not known, but Cripps was known to India as a straight forward, independent, radical-minded, well-wisher friend of India and of congressmen. Hence, the mission had very favourable reception in India, when Sir Stafford Cripps arrived in Delhi on March 23 and brought with him the draft scheme of the Government for setting the Indian political problem.

3. CRIFFS OFFER:

The object announced in the draft proposal was:

The creation of a new Indian Union which shall constitute a Dominion, associated with the United Kingdom and the other Dominions by a common allegiance to the Crown, but equal to them in every respect, in no way subordinate in any aspect of its domestic or external affairs. 1

The scheme had two parts. The first part prescribed the procedure for formulating the Dominion Constitution. The first step was the holding of fresh elections for all the Provincial Legislatures. According to the second step the members of the lower houses of the new provincial legislatures together with the representatives of the States were

to function as the electoral college whose business was to elect the constitution making body. It was laid down that the strength of this body would be about one-tenth of the total number of the electoral college, and its members would be elected according to the system of proportional representation.

The third step would be that the constitution-making body would prepare the constitution for the Indian Union. But if at the final stage a province expressed its unwillingness through a vote of its legislature to accept the constitution "it was free to refuse accession to the Indian Union". It would then proceed to formulate its own constitution which would have the same status, process and functions as the Union of India.

It was conceded that His Majesty's Government would accept the constitution or constitutions thus framed, and that the Dominion would have the right to secede from the Empire. It was also laid down that a treaty would be made between His Majesty's Government and the constitution making body by which the constitution would provide safeguards for the protection of minorities.

1. Regarding the right of a province not to accede to the Union, both Linlithgow and Wavell strongly argued against its inclusion in the draft declaration, but the War Cabinet was obdurate in its belief that the provincial option was the only solution of the communal question.
The second part of the scheme was concerned with the immediate and interim arrangements during the period of the war. It contemplated no change in the Constitution of 1935, nor in the responsibility of His Majesty's Government for the Government of India, and the control and direction of the Defence of India. But it recognised that the task of organising the military, moral and material resources of India was the responsibility of the Government of India with the co-operation of the people of India. It, therefore, invited the Indian leaders to the counsels of the country, the Commonwealth and the United Nations, for active and constructive help.

Draft declaration of Cripps offer was an advance on the August offer in four respects:

- It conceded to the projected Indian Union the liberty to secede from the British Commonwealth.

- The framing of the new constitution was solely the responsibility of India.

- It proposed a definite plan for the constitution-making body, a Constituent Assembly indirectly elected through Provincial Legislature as opposed to the Congress plan of one directly elected on adult franchise.

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1. For complete draft declaration of Cripps offer See Appendix II.
It also went further to the August offer as regards the character of the interim government.

The essence of Cripps' offer was that Britain would recognize India's independence after the war if demanded by a constituent assembly. The only change that could be made during the war was that the Viceroy's Executive Council would be entirely Indian and consist of leaders of the political parties. In order to solve the communal problem the scheme gave to the Provinces option to join the Union. While Congress demand was of changes in the Government system immediately, Cripps' proposal laid emphasis only on the future.

Dr. Pattabhi rightly observes that Cripps' offer "embodied different items palatable to different tastes". It conceded two essential demands of the Congress for participation in the war, firstly, a declaration of Indian independence, secondly, a Constituent Assembly to frame the Constitution. At the same time, to the States and the Provinces it gave the right of non-accession to the proposed Indian Union and the arrangement was intended to appease the League and the Princely order.

In fact, the weaknesses of the British offer were, obvious and in certain respects it was not only disappointing

but positively dangerous. It appeared to bless a triple or fourfold vivisection of the country, a prospect too horrible to contemplate.

The Constituent Assembly proposed was unrepresentative in character in which there was no room for democratic representation of the people of the States. There was no definite time-limit to the transfer of authority. In short, the offer was made under the exigencies of the war and if the British Government was not desirous of implementing it immediately there was no need of it. It did not reflect the sincerity of the British to transfer power. The principle of Cabinet responsibility at the centre too was not accepted for the transitional period.

4. **FIRST PHASE OF THE CRIPPS NEGOTIATIONS**

Cripps created an excellent atmosphere for the reception of his offer, which was in fact very near to 'cut and dry plan'. Propaganda background was already created before, when Prime Minister Churchill himself had announced the Cripps Mission for India. Wide publicity was given to this announcement Curiosity about the offer was raised by keeping its terms as top secret. Cripps took full advantage of this background and without revealing actual proposals, on the day of his arrival at Delhi i.e. on March 23, said in his statement: "We believe that a generally acceptable line of practical action can be laid down now, and that thus
the main obstacle to India's full co-operation in her own
defence will have been removed. We feel confident that
with the political atmosphere thus clarified, the leading
political organisations will be enabled to put forward
their maximum effort in preserving their country from the
brutalities of aggression.

I want to play my part as a member of the War Cabinet
in reaching a final settlement of the political difficulties
which have long vexed our relationship. Once these
questions are resolved, and I hope they may be quickly and
satisfactorily resolved, the Indian peoples will be enabled
to associate themselves fully and freely, not only with
Great Britain and the other Dominions, but with our great
Allies, Russia, China and the United States of America, so
that together we can assert our determination to preserve
the liberty of the peoples of the world.¹

On March 24, Cripps told the Viceroy's Executive
Council in the meeting: "His Majesty's Government must
keep control of Defence. But apart from that participation
of others would be welcome to any extent that His
Excellency desired."²

1. Mansergh and Lumby (Eds.); TOP; Document Number: 369;
2. Ibid; Document Number: 377; Notes on Executive
   Council Meeting, at 6 p.m. on Tuesday, 24 March 1942,
   p. 477.
From the observations and private conversations of Cripps the Congress leaders came to the conclusion that the British Government was not averse to the transformation of the Executive Council into a national government composed of Indian members - with the exception of the Defence Member, in which the Viceroy would have the same position as the King Vis-a-vis the British Cabinet.

Azad records the discussion which he had with Cripps in his first meeting on March 25:

The net result of the proposal was that in place of the majority of British members in the existing Executive Council, there would be an Executive Council composed of Indians alone... I asked Sir Stafford what would be the position of the Viceroy in the Council. Sir Stafford replied that the Viceroy would function as a constitutional head like the King in the U.K. In order to remove any room for doubt, I asked him to confirm that this would mean that the Viceroy, as a constitutional head, would be bound by the advice of the Council. Sir Stafford said that this was the intention; I said again that the basic question was as to who would exercise power, the proposed council or the Viceroy. Sir Stafford repeated that power would vest with the Council as it vests with the British Cabinet. 1

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

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of the constitution. You can turn the Executive Council into a Cabinet. In this press conference he declared: "The intention of the document as far as possible, subject to the reservation of defence, is to put power into the hands of Indian leaders. At the same time, he made it clear that "the scheme goes through as a whole or is rejected as a whole".

During his stay in India, Cripps interviewed almost more than 70 people representing different organisations and interests, but real "negotiations were held almost exclusively with the Congress, represented by Azad and Nehru, while the Moslem League stood by and awaited developments.

It is apparent that having conceded Pakistan in principle, Cripps directed his energies towards winning over the Congress. The Congress Working Committee debated on the proposals for two days, but the discussions were

1. Mansergh and Lumby (Eds.); TOP; Document Number 440. Proceedings of a Press Conference held by Sir S. Cripps on 29 March 1942 p. 547. Linlithgow was annoyed with this statement. 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". Hodson H.S.; The Great Divide; p. 98.

2. Menon V.P.; Transfer of Power; p. 126. Cripps at one time angrily told three Princes who went to see him on the 2nd or 3rd April 1942 that they must settle their affairs with Congress and Gandhi "for we are packing off". Sitaramayya; The History of the Indian National Congress Vol. II, p. 324.
inconclusive. Then it was necessary to seek further clarification and more detailed information on several points from Sir Stafford. The basic question was the powers of the Executive Council. Sir Stafford had proposed that the council would remain but would be constituted with Indian members selected by the political parties. He had verbally assured the Congress president that the Viceroy's position would be that of a constitutional head. The Working Committee desired that this point should be brought out clearly in the terms of the agreement itself. Accordingly, the Congress President, again called on Cripps, on 1 April 1942.

Maulana Abulkalam Azad, the then Congress President writes about this meeting:

This meeting with Sir Stafford was decisive. I found that the position had undergone a radical change since I had last met him. His answers were now quite different in temper from his replies during the first interview. When I asked him about the status of the Executive Council, he said that it was his hope that the Council would, even during the war, work like a Cabinet, I enquired if this meant that the Council would decide all issues by majority and its decisions would be final. Cripps gave an ambiguous reply. He would not categorically state that the Viceroy would have the final say but the purport of what he said was that the Council would not have full and unfettered freedom of decision. He tried to explain this by saying that the position now enjoyed by the Viceroy could not be changed without a change in the law. However, he stressed again and again that whatever might be the position in law, in actual practice the Viceroy would behave as a constitutional head. 1

The Congress President reminded Sir Stafford that he had been much more categorical during the first interview. Cripps argued with the President and tried to convince him that his basic position had not changed and what he (Cripps) intended to convey then was identical with what he was saying now. In reply the President reminded Sir Stafford that he had then said categorically that the Executive Council would function exactly like a Cabinet. Today, however, he was saying that the legal position would remain unchanged, and he was only trying to reassure the President by saying that it was his hope that the Council would function like a Cabinet. This was not the impression which the President had carried away from the first interview. Also, Cripps had said during the first interview with the President that the Secretary of State for India would act like the Commonwealth Secretary but he was now saying that any change in the status of the India office or the Secretary of State for India would require a new parliamentary enactment. Cripps clarified this time that in practice the India office would function on a fresh basis but there were practical difficulties in enacting a law which would change the status of the Secretary of State to that of a Commonwealth Secretary. 1

Even at this stage once again it became clear for Congress that the British Government was not prepared to transfer power to India, but was ready to get active support of India in the War on a voluntary basis. As a result, the Working Committee had prepared a draft resolution on the proposals brought by Cripps, which was sent to him on 2 April. Cripps wanted it not to be published in the Press. Due to the loose phrases of Cripps about national Government and his oral assurances, the Congress agreed not to publish it but to proceed instead with the negotiations on the interim proposals.

5. **SECOND PHASE**:

The Congress having decided to keep the problem of the future in abeyance, and having received assurances on the formation of the national Government, felt that the only important matter which remained for adjustment related to the office of the Defence Member.

During the war the portfolio of Defence transcended all others in importance both from the administrative and psychological points of view. The Congress leaders naturally desired that India should make its maximum contribution in winning the war and defeating the aggressor. This, according to them, required that the people should feel that the

1. Ibid., p. 59. Also see Menon V. F.; Transfer of Power p. 126. Also see Mansergh and Lumby; Ed; TOP; Vol. I; Document Number : 507; Sir S. Cripps to Mr. Churchill (Via Viceroy and India Office) Telegram, 2 April 1942, pp. 616-618.
war was the people's war. Only with an Indian in charge of the defence of the country could this feeling be evoked.¹ He can tell to the country that India's youth must be prepared to make sacrifices, even to lay down their lives in the war. The Japanese were making attractive offers of independence to India, which a great many people doubtless believed. What would be the strength of an appeal by Indian leaders to India's people not to attach any importance to such promises - unless they could say, "We have already achieved almost complete freedom".

The question of the Defence membership thus assumed extra-ordinary importance. In the opinion of the nationalist leaders the establishment of national Government would be a guarantee for the fulfilment of the long term plan after the war. In case the national Government was not agreed to immediately, the promise about the future could not be relied upon. Therefore, the Congress leaders were keen about the interim part of the Cripps offer, and even on Defence the Congress Committee did not adopt an uncompromising attitude. Rajaji suggested that formally the Department should be entrusted to an Indian member, but for practical purposes, during the duration of the war.

1. General Wavell had told India two weeks before that the defence of the country rested on three factors: (1) Planes (2) Guns and Tanks, and (3) Civilian morale. Of these Wavell regarded the last as the most important. See B. Shiva Rao; India's Freedom Movement: Some Notable Figures; p. 163.
the responsibility for Defence would continue with His Majesty's Government. Nehru admitted that in practice the strategic and tactical disposition of fighting units must remain under the effective control of the Commander-in-chief subject to the Chiefs of staff and the War Cabinet, but they still urged that there were many other Defence matters which would be handled by an Indian.

Though Cripps had informed Azad in his first interview that the subject of Defence was outside the discussion of the draft declaration, but as the view of the Congress leaders was quite fair and reasonable that without Violating the effective control of the Commander-in-chief subject to the chief of staff and the War Cabinet still there were many other defence matters which should be handled by Indian, he sent two telegrams on March 29 and April 1 to Churchill giving a gloomy picture of the Indian situation, and added: "I give you this picture so that you may judge as to the importance from a Defence point of view of getting the Indian leaders into the job of controlling, encouraging and leading the Indian people. This cannot be

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1. Mansergh and Lumby (Eds.); TOP; Document Number : 519; Sir S. Cripps to Mr. Churchill (Via Viceroy and India Office) Telegram 4th April 1942; Vol. I. p. 637.

2. Ibid.
done under existing circumstances by any Britisher." The suggestion was to appoint an Indian member to deal with some aspects of Defence without impinging upon the sphere of activity and authority of the Commander-in-chief.

Linlithgow, who did not agree with Cripps' view of the Indian situation nor with the need of associating an Indian with Defence for such purposes as mentioned by Cripps, cabled his own views to the Cabinet and asked permission to communicate with the Prime Minister separately from Cripps. The permission was given and the door was opened for undermining the influence of the Cabinet's emissary. Thus the Viceroy stepped in, and toned down the co-operation in the military effort to mean merely the designation of an Indian to some office connected with the defence responsibilities of the Government of India without in any way impinging upon the functions and duties of the Commander-in-chief.

So it happened that the request of Cripps - "If some adjustment can be arrived at will you give me full authority subject to agreement of Commander-in-chief and Viceroy?" was instantly turned down by the Cabinet.

1. Ibid; Document Number : 484; Telegram from Sir S. Cripps to Mr. Churchill, April 1, 1942; p. 601. Table showing a classification in which all those functions could be retained by the War Department under the Commander-in-chief and functions which can be transferred to the Defence member prepared by Sitaramayya is given in Appendix : III.

2. Ibid; Document Number : 484; p. 602.
Churchill informed Cripps: "I cannot give you any authority to compromise on Defence without submitting issue both to Cabinet and Minister above the line call ministers except the Minister of Pensions". 1

Cripps, disappointed by Churchill's reply concluded that his mission had failed. Inspite of his failure so far, Cripps decided to make a fresh attempt. He suggested that Azad and Jawaharlal should meet the commander-in-chief, Wavell 2. The Congress had already reached a decision rejecting the proposals not merely because of the objectionable nature of the long-term arrangements but for the failure to transfer responsibility for defence, to which the Working Committee attached the greatest importance; but Azad agreed that he and Jawaharlal would meet Wavell and the Congress refrained from publishing its resolution.

On this basis, the talks continued. The War Cabinet was not in favour of associating a Congressman with defence responsibilities, but a more precise interpretation of the association of an Indian with defence could be considered if the Congress desired it and the Viceroy could select

1. Ibid; Document Number: 492; Mr. Churchill to Sir S. Cripps (Via India Office and Viceroy) Telegram, 2 April 1942, p. 607.

2. Ibid; Document Number: 480; Sir S. Cripps to Maulana Azad; 1 April 1942, p. 598.
'some suitable Indian' presumably loyalist. Cripps, eager for an agreement and now realizing that if he could satisfy Jawaharlal, Azad and Rajagopalachari on defence, the opposition of Gandhi would not prevail, sought to interpret the Declaration to meet the requirements of the Congress. On April 4, he suggested to the Cabinet three formulae for the transfer of Defence functions to an Indian member. Linlithgow communicated his preference for one of them different from the one recommended by Cripps, and advised the Cabinet not to yield on the question of the national government.

Cripps himself preferred to transfer the defence ministry to an Indian, subject to a written convention that nothing would be done contrary to British policy; but knowing the opposition this would arouse in Delhi and London, he suggested the transfer to an Indian of such functions of the defence ministry as the Commander-in-chief considered could be handed over safely and practically. A further safeguard was that 'under the new arrangement whereby the Executive Council will approximate to a Cabinet' all important matters would be decided by the Council as a whole and not by any individual member.

1. Ibid; Document Numbers: 500 and 502; Minute of War Cabinet discussion and Churchill's draft telegram to Cripps 2 April 1942, pp. 612-14.

2. Ibid; Document Number: 519; Sir S. Cripps to Mr. Churchill; Telegram; 4 April 1942; pp. 636-39.
It is clear from this document that Cripps was thinking in terms of cabinet government in India as generally understood.

But the Viceroy had made sure that Wavell would stand firm. Wavell claimed to be working out details on the lines of Cripp's proposal. There is nothing in the published British documents to show what took place at Wavell's interview with Jawaharlal and Azad, and the Congress leaders also refrained from talking about it. But in fact it was a disaster; as the following account of the meeting clearly shows it:

When tea was cleared away, Wavell asked the Indian leaders to open proceedings, and Pandit Nehru spoke for some time. Briefly he wanted the Defence Member of Council to be an Indian in place of the Commander-on-chief, who would become an executive adviser. He was asking for hundred per cent on Defence. When he had finished I imagined that some discussions, and, perhaps, bargaining would take place; Wavell perhaps offering something, Nehru conceding something until some sort of compromise might be reached to form the basis of further discussions at a higher level. How far Wavell would go I did not know. To my intense astonishment Wavell said; 'If that is your case there is nothing more to be said'. There was dead silence. After a pause Wavell stood up and the Indian leaders rose to take their leave.

On April 6, the Cabinet rejected both the recommendations of Cripps and accepted Linlithgow's suggestions. They told Cripps that there could be no surrender of authority.

of the Viceroy conferred by the Act of 1935. This was the first major check suffered by Cripps in his negotiations. It did not improve relations between the head of the Mission and the head of the Government of India.

On April 7, the formula which the Cabinet approved was, however, rejected by the Congress Working Committee, which was in session during the stay of Cripps in Delhi. The Cripps mission was by now beyond redemption, and the Congress had nothing to do with its failure. Cripps was obliged to agree with Linlithgow and Wavell that nothing more would be done but transfer some non-essential functions of the Commander-in-chief to an Indian member. But in his letter to the Congress enumerating the nondescript defence matters which would be transferred to an Indian he used the phrase 'National Government'. At this stage a new factor became more active in these negotiations. It was the attempt of Col. Louis Johnson, the special representative of the President of America. He was asked by Cripps on his personal capacity to help him in disentangling the knotty Defence problem.

6. **AMERICAN INTEREST IN CRIPPS NEGOTIATIONS**

Colonel Louis Johnson, President Roosevelt's personal representative, came to India with the personal rank of

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1. Ibid; Document Number: 534; War Cabinet, Committee on India. I (42) 11th Meeting; 6 April 1942; p. 659.
Minister. He had served as U.S. Assistant Secretary for war 1937-40 and later became Secretary for Defence in President Truman's Cabinet from 1949-50.

When he arrived India on April 3, as he alighted from his plane, his first words were alleged to have been, "what about Cripps?" Johnson may not have made this remark, but it is evident that he lost little time in gathering informations, and the day after his arrival cabled to the American Secretary of State: "I have had two long sessions with Stafford Cripps today. He is advising the Prime Minister that the final decision must be based on one of three possible courses. (a) No further changes or concessions; (b) modify draft declaration by granting India Defence Minister if protected by agreement in writing that the Minister could take no action contrary to Empire war policy as exercised by the Commander-in-chief who would remain; (c) convert the present Defence Ministry into War Ministry which would be left under the Commander-in-chief and then create a new office of Minister of co-ordinator of Defence placing in it relatively innocuous

1. Sitaramayya (Vol. II p. 317) records Johnson's statement about Cripps, which may be apocryphal, but shows the popular belief, which was not without some basis. On March 14, 1942 Summer Wells cabled to the U.S. Commissioner at New Delhi, that the Department of State was extremely interested in the Cripps Mission and wanted to be informed about it. Foreign Relations, 1942, I, p. 619. The U.S. Office in New Delhi was exceptionally well informed and on April 2 and 3 cabled to the Secretary of State that the Congress had decided to submit a memorandum to Cripps, detailing their objections to his scheme and that it would be published after consultation with Cripps. Ibid. pp. 624-625.
matters such as defence, public relations and appointing an Indian thereto.

"Cripps violently opposes (a) profess (b) but believes that War Cabinet, Commander-in-chief and Viceroy will all oppose both (b) and (c). Unless the President feels that he can intercede with Churchill it would seem that Cripp's efforts are doomed to failure. Cripps so believes too. Such failure will adversely affect war effort. I respectfully urge therefore that the President without disclosing he is advised of Cripp's cable, consider further effort with Churchill..."¹

It is apparent from this letter also that the real point at issue was the power of the Defense Minister. Churchill was not ready to give any authority to Cripps to compromise on Defence, and as mentioned earlier, British Cabinet had rejected recommendations of Cripps, on the issue. The only person who could have brought his pressure on Churchill was President Roosevelt, but he declined to intervene, though he asked Johnson to telegraph all development.² This telegram though it did not state

¹ The Personal Representative of the President in India (Johnson) to the Secretary of State, New Delhi, for the President and Acting Secretary. April 2, 1942, 8 P.M. (Received, April 4, 7:44 p.m.) Foreign Relations, 1942, I, pp. 626-27.

² The Acting Secretary of State to the Officer in charge at New Delhi; April 5, 1942, Foreign Relations 1942, I., pp. 627-28.
anything implied the approval of Johnson's activities.

7. **THIRD PHASE Cripps-Johnson Formula: Success is in sight**: 

As we have already seen that on 2nd April Congress had first time rejected Cripps offer but on request of Cripps had not published it. Also Nationalist leaders were motivated for further negotiations with Cripps by his oral interpretation of the new formation of Viceroy's Council as Cabinet. He had used loose phrases for the character of 'National Government'.

Once again Congress had rejected the original proposal on April 7, on the issue of Defence proposals. At this stage Johnson became more active and produced a new formula which Cripps approved with some minor modifications.¹

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¹ Same day Johnson cabled to the President:

"... At request of Cripps and of Nehru, both absolutely on their own initiative, I have been acting as go-between since last Sunday. Sir Stafford indicated this morning as did Nehru yesterday that the fact that they have not already failed has been due to the efforts of your personal representative (i.e. Johnson) after long session with Nehru last night, the fourth of the day, and a conference with Sir Stafford from which I have just returned, I am for the first time hopeful that negotiations will not be a complete provided the military situation does not overwhelm us.

"Sir Stafford is presenting the final proposals at 10 a.m. today. They are based substantially on proposal (c) in my 145 of April 4, 8 p.m. I have commitments of Nehru and President of Congress not to throw them out completely until after half a day has been reserved for discussion between Nehru and myself" Ibid., pp. 628-2.
According to this formula an Indian would be appointed in charge of Defence, but he would delegate powers to the Commander-in-chief as the War Member of the Executive Council who would control the war operations and the armed forces and would be responsible to the General Head Quarters, the Defence Member would be in charge of all other matters in the Defence Department as well as the Defence Co-ordination Department and in the event of any new function falling to be discharged or any dispute arising as to the allocation of functions it would be decided by His Majesty’s Government.¹

Johnson, with Cripps’ approval saw Wavell with new formula, and was able to convince Wavell and the letter’s approval and co-operation were complete. He (Wavell) phoned Viceroy for appointment and went with me (Johnson) to see him. On Wavell’s recommendation, Viceroy approved and sent for Cripps. Cripps met with three of us and of course heartily approved.²

Thereupon on the evening of April 7, the new formula had been shown to Nehru, who had suggested some minor changes but the Viceroy had not seen it in the final form and he protested that he was ignored. He refused to accept

¹. Mansergh and Lumby (Eds.); TOP; Document Number: 553; Note by the Marquess of Linlithgow; Vol. 1 pp. 594-599.

². Johnson to Secretary of State, April 9, 1942, 6 p.m. Foreign Relations. 1942. I p. 630.
any responsibility for it. 1 Churchill then warned Cripps not to commit the Government in any way. 2

The War Cabinet communicated their views on the formula to Cripps on April 9. "It is essential to bring the whole matter back to Cabinet's plan which you went out to urge, with only such modifications as are agreed to be put forward." 3 It further questioned him regarding the significance of the phrase National Government.

It was obvious from this telegram that War Cabinet did not approve of the proposals made by Cripps without previous agreement. The Viceroy too told him that he was not prepared to abstain from exercising his constitutional authority regarding the Executive Council.

Here one can see irresistible operation of the negative power exercised by Linlithgow, when the success of the Mission was in sight. The effect is best described in the words of Harry Hopkins, Special Assistant to President Roosevelt, who had arrived in London on April 8 on a special mission and recorded as follows on April 9.

"... Prime Minister read me a despatch which he had just

1. Mansergh and Lumby; (Eds.); TOP; Document Number: Note by the Viceroy, 8 April 1942; Vol. I; pp. 594-96.
2. Ibid; Document Number: 563; Mr. Churchill to Sir S. Cripps, Telegram, 9 April 1942. p. 703.
3. Ibid; Document Number: 567; War Cabinet to Sir S. Cripps (Via India Office and Viceroy), 9 April 1942. Telegram; Vol. I. pp. 707-08.
received from the Governor General of India indicating that Cripps had presented a new proposal to Nehru without consultation with the Governor General but presumably with the assistance of Louis Johnson... The Governor General's despatch indicated that he and Cripps could have got Nehru's agreement to the original proposal had not Cripps and Johnson worked out this new arrangement. It was apparently clear that the Governor General was irritated with the whole business and laid great stress on the fact that Johnson acts and talks as though he was sent to India as Roosevelt's personal representative to mediate in the Indian crisis. It is apparent that this new proposal, which is known as Cripps-Johnson proposal, might well be turned down by the British Cabinet which is meeting at 12 today, in which case Roosevelt would be in the embarrassing position of having ostensibly made a proposal which the British Government rejected. I told the Prime Minister that Johnson's original mission to India had nothing whatever to do with British proposals and that I was very sure that he was not acting as the representative of the President in mediating the Indian business. That I believed Cripps was using Johnson for his own ends, Cripps being very anxious to bring Roosevelt's name in the picture. That it was to Cripps' interest to get Roosevelt identified with his proposals. I told Mr. Churchill of the President's instructions to me, namely, that he would not be drawn into the Indian business except at the personal
request of the Prime Minister and then only if he had an assurance both from India and Britain that any plan that he worked out would be acceptable, and that he, Roosevelt, was unwilling to be put into a situation before the world in which he undertook to moderate between the conflicting forces and then have these forces turn down his proposals.

Churchill at once wrote in long hand a cable to the Viceroy stating that he was sure Johnson was not acting as personal representative of the President in negotiations between the Indian Congress and Cripps.

It is clear that Churchill did not wish at this time to bring the United States into what he calls a constitutional question, and he is unhappy at the turn the press has taken, namely, that public opinion in America and Roosevelt in particular can handle this matter over the head of the British Government. 1

Linlithgow's statement that he and Cripps could have induced Nehru to accept the original proposal, was indeed very far from the truth. Congress had already rejected original Cripps offer twice on 2nd and 7th

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1. Sherwood R.B.; Roosevelt and Hopkins, p. 524. Harry Hopkins's official designation was Special Assistant to the President, but that does not convey his important position. The same evening Hopkins cable to the President a summary of what he recorded in his diary. But in the meantime he had met Eden and had also assured him that Johnson had no authority to mediate. Foreign Relations, 1942, I, pp. 629-30.
April respectively, and had not yet accepted the modified proposal presented to them by Cripps.

In fact, the success of the Mission was in sight. Compromise was very near. Both the parties were about to reach the settlement. New formula had consent of Nehru except some minor changes. In fact, the Working Committee asked for illustrative lists of the functions of the Defence Minister and the Commander-in-chief and, to avoid delay, authorized Azad and Jawaharlal to discuss these matters with Cripps.\(^1\) There was now general expectation of a settlement\(^2\) Jawaharlal himself said later that he at this time estimated the chances of success at 75 per cent.\(^3\) The Congress might had accepted Johnson formula but the Viceroy was absolute non-co-operative and Hopkins' assertion that Johnson was acting without authority destroyed any chance of success.

Thus it was clear that the hopes Cripps had raised of establishing immediately a national government could not be fulfilled. Nor was the new formula about Defence-Cripps-Johnson formula, although altered in form

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2. The Hindustan Times, 9 April, 1942.
3. Press Conference 12 April, National Herald, 13 April 1942.
substantially, different from the original formula which the Congress had already rejected.

He was obliged to retract his steps and in the interview with the Congress leaders on the evening of April 9 he tried to convince them that the original Draft scheme conceded practically the entire demand of the Congress. He urged upon them to accept the scheme, for otherwise, the question of constitutional advance would be postponed till after the termination of the war.

On April 10, while he waited for the final answer of the Congress Working Committee he made the last effort to secure the assent of the War Cabinet to the Defence proposal. He telegraphed to Churchill the list of functions of the War Member and repeated the assurances that the legal and constitutional position was not changed. But he called the reconstructed Executive Council a national government. 1

On the same day (April 10), the Viceroy who had opposed the transformation of the Executive Council into national government, telegraphed to the Secretary of State to find out the opinion of His Majesty's Government on the point in dispute, viz., "Either the Governor-General

1. Mansergh and Lumby (Eds.); TOP; Document Number: 574; Sir S. Cripps to Mr. Churchill (Via Viceroy and India Office) Telegram, 10 April, 1942, Vol. I pp. 713-14.
must continue to have the right to differ from his colleagues (under Section 41 of the Ninth Schedule) or he must promise that in no circumstances, will he refuse to act upon their advice. 1

In other telegram of the same date (April 10) Linlithgow complained that the Cripps-Johnson formula on Defence Department was communicated to the Congress without prior reference to him and the Commander-in-chief. His chief criticism was that the formula had taken the settlement of disputes about the functions of the Defence Member and the War Member out of the jurisdiction of the Viceroy and placed it in the hands of His Majesty's Government.

The India Committee of the War Cabinet met to consider the telegrams of Cripps and Linlithgow under the chairmanship of Churchill. It appeared to the Committee that the Congress leaders had been informed by the Lord Privy Seal (Cripps) on the formation of a national government that while there was to be no change in the constitution, he (Lord Privy Seal) assumed that the Governor General would meet the point by means of a convention.

The War Cabinet decided the point in favour of the Viceroy and rejected Cripps' opinion. The decision was

1. Ibid; Document Number: 578; The Marquess of Linlithgow to Mr. Amery, Telegram, 10 April 1942; Vol. I p. 718.
immediately cabled to the Viceroy and Cripps; that "there can be no question of any convention limiting in any way your (the Viceroy's) powers under existing constitution... and no departure from this can be contemplated during the war".1

Cripps was nettled by the attitude of the War Cabinet and immediately (April 10) sent an explanatory message and conveyed his annoyance by offering to resign in the words: "I am sorry that my colleagues appear to distrust me over this matter, and I am quite prepared to hand the matter over if they would rather some one else carried on the negotiations".2

Churchill replied that there was no question of want of confidence, but the Cabinet definitely rejected the suggestion of a convention to restrict the powers of the Viceroy. The refusal of the Cabinet to support Cripps made him feel humiliated and he came to the conclusion that his further stay in India would not serve any useful purpose. He suddenly made up his mind to return.

Although his decision to wind up the mission was obviously a reaction against the orders of the Cabinet, he

1. Ibid; Document Number: 581; War Cabinet to the Marquess of Linlithgow (Via India Office); Telegram, 10 April 1942; p. 720.

2. Ibid; Document Number: 577; Sir S. Cripps to War Cabinet (Via Viceroy and India Office); Telegram, 10 April 1942; p. 717.
wanted to exculpate himself from the charge that the mission had failed because of any act of omission or commission on his part or on the part of the Government of which he was an important limb.

8. **THE REJECTION:**

The Congress delivered its rejection of Cripps proposals at 7.00 O'clock Friday (April 10) night.\(^1\)

The Congress Working Committee had discussed the matter threadbare and had adopted a long resolution in which it gave its reasons for rejecting the offer.

The resolution explained that in view of gravity of the present situation the Committee in spite of its strong objections to the provisions of the scheme for the future, concentrated its attention on the part dealing with the present, specially on the status and character of the Executive Council, and in particular of the Member for Defence.

On the question relating to the Executive Council, the Committee had been assured by the phraseology used by Cripps that "the new Government would function with full powers as a Cabinet with the Viceroy acting as a constitutional head". But according to the latest discussions

\(^1\) For the full text of Congress President's Correspondence with Sir S. Cripps during 10 and 11 April 1942. See Appendix IV.
with him, it was found that Cripps had gone back on the assurance and the picture of the new government was not very different from the old. "It would just be the Viceroy and his Executive Council with the Viceroy having all his old powers."¹

The Congress had not demanded that the change should be brought about by modifying the law and the constitution but by convention and assurance. It had also agreed that in regard to the conduct of the war and connected activities the Commander-in-chief would have freedom and that he would also act as War Ministe. But there was not even a vague or general commitment on the part of Cripps about the conventions that should govern the new government and the Viceroy. In the circumstances the Congress Working Committee had no option but to reject this part of the proposal.

So far as the change of law was concerned it did not believe that a constitutional amendment could not be made during the war, for a far greater and more fundamental change was contemplated during the war when the union of France and England was proposed on the eve of the fall of France.

¹ The Congress Working Committee resolution rejecting the Cripps offer. This resolution was communicated to Sir Stafford Cripps on April 2, but was released to the press only on April 10, 1942 after the talks had failed
The new formula for Defence given to the Committee was based on the separation of the War Department from the Defence Department but the allocation of subjects to the two Departments showed that there was no difference between the original formula and the new. The Committee had been unable to accept the old list and could not be expected to approve the same list because it was attached to the new formula.

WHY CONGRESS REJECTED THE OFFER? :-

Since it was the non-acceptability of the proposals to the Congress and its leaders led to the failure of the Mission, the Congress point of view as worst as those of other parties need to be looked and analysed in detail. For the critical assessment of the Congress point of view let us examine the stand taken by the Congress on the various provisions included in the Draft Declaration.

(1) The Constituent Assembly

The idea of a Constituent Assembly elected by the whole adult population of the country had been first put forward by the Congress as the fairest means of solving India's complicated political and communal problems. The Faizpur resolution of the
in which the representatives of the states were to be selected was objectionable for the Congress. The point of view of the Congress was that, if most of the state did send their representatives, the would be a solid reactionary bloc of about 25 per cent in the Constituent Assembly which would consist of the nominees of the Rulers States, detracting from the merit of the Assembly as an essential democratic body. The arrangement also, practically deprived the States subjects, who from 25 per cent of the population of India, from any share in drafting the future constitution of the country. Therefore in its Resolution of 2nd April, 1942. The Congress Working Committee said: "Even the constitution body is so constituted that the people's right to self-determination is vitiated by the introduction of non-representative elements". Sir Stafford's argument that the British Government could not exercise over the States the same control as they exercised over British India, left the Congrè unconvinced, as the British Government, in their role as the Para power, had never hesitated to take even extreme measures in dealing with the Rulers of States wherever they thought it necessary to do in Imperial interests. Thus the refusal even to recommend to the Rulers to follow a Procedure similar to the one adopted in the

1. Indian National Congress, March, 1940 to September 1946: Resolu passed by the Congress Working Committee: Swaraj Bhawan, Allahab pp. 108-111.
by the Congress.

(ii) **Non-Accession**

In the offer the right given to Provinces not to accede to the Union, and even to form an alternative Union or Unions was also objectionable. The Congress saw in the proposal a blow at one of its most cherished ideals. Therefore the Congress vehemently criticised the provision of non-accession in the words: "The acceptance before-hand of the novel principle of non-accession for a province is also a severe blow to the conception of Indian unity and an apple of discord likely to generate growing trouble in the provinces, and which may well lead to further difficulties in the way of the Indian States merging themselves in the Indian Union."¹ Freedom and Unity had been watchwords of the Congress for a long time and progressive opinion in the country was unwilling to contemplate the possibility of disruption because of the insistence of the League on separation. The demand was scarcely two years old and the British Government were not unaware of the history behind

１. Resolution passed by the Congress Working Committee, March 1940 to September 1946, Allahabad, P.111.
it, even though Sir Stafford came out with his blessings for the scheme of partition, by the indirect method of giving the Province the right not to accede to the Indian Union.

The Congress had been willing to give the Muslims and other minorities all the safe-guards they desired in the new constitution. It was not blind to the antagonisms between the communities which had their background in history, but its hope was the evolution of a common, composite nationality and the wearing down of ancient prejudices by the slow progress of education.

**Interim Arrangements:**

Paragraph(e) of the Draft Declaration dealt with the interim arrangements to be made immediately. Obviously the Congress attached great importance to this part of the Declaration. Speaking in the House of Commons, on April 28, 1942, on his return from India, Sir Stafford Cripps said that this part of the Declaration was in 'vague and general terms.' The question raised by the Congress was: How much power were the British Government prepared to transfer to the new Government which Indian leaders were being called upon to join? There could not be effective participation, unless the was transfer of real power to those whose co-operation was sought. Therefore, putting emphasis on present arrangements, the Congress said:

"Any proposal concerning the future of India must demand attend
and scrutiny, but in today’s grave crisis, it is the present that counts and even proposals for the future are important in so far as they affect the present.”

(iii) Defence

The Congress claimed an effective voice in the Central Government to popular representatives in order to tell the people that the Government of their country was in their own hands and they should rally to the defence of the country which was threatened by Japanese aggression. The leaders could not rouse the enthusiasm of their countrymen merely by appealing to them to give men, money and materials to the Government to carry on their war effort, though Defence was not under their control but under the control of the British Government. With popular control at the Centre, the Congress claimed, the present war effort could be increased a great deal and the people would willingly come forward to make greater sacrifices.

The leader agreed to leave the actual conduct of military operations to the Commander-in-chief, but why could not political control of defence be exercised by a responsible Indian? The

argument that the separation of political and military controls would result in the British Army in India being controlled by the British Government and the Indian Army by the Government of India did not impress any one. Similar problems had been tackled successfully elsewhere. British and even American troops had gone to the Dominions and it was possible for them to conduct their operations to control their defence. British forces had gone even to countries like France and Russia and functioned there effectively without different political controls producing anything in the nature of friction.

The Congress Working Committee's resolution rejecting the Draft Declaration which was handed over to Sir Stafford Cripps on April 2 pointed out: "At any time Defence is a vital subject: during war time it is all-important and covers almost every sphere of life and administration. To take away Defence from the sphere of responsibility at this stage is to reduce that responsibility to a force and a nullity and to make it perfectly clear that India is not going to be free in any way and her Government is not going to function as a free and independent Government during the pendency of the war."¹

¹ Azad A.K.: India Wins freedom: P.54
The Congress during the further negotiations over the defence issue, was willing to admit the practical limitation imposed on the powers of the National Government by the war situation and the special position of the Commander-in-chief, provided there was willingness to recognise its authority over all Departments of Government, including Defence. But everything, naturally, would depend on what functions would be reserved for the Commander-in-chief and what would be discharged by the Defence Member.

If the Congress asked for popular control over Defence, it was because, firstly, there could be no real transfer of power without control of Defence, and, secondly, without such control it was impossible to kindle the enthusiasm of the people for the defence of their country. Thus on general grounds, the Congress would be entitled to ask for complete control over Defence, with the exception to the British armed forces forming part of the Army in India. But because of its anxiety to each a settlement in view of the Japanese threat to the integrity of the country, the Congress was prepared to agree to considerable limitations.

A great deal was sought to be made during the negotiations about India being represented on an equal footing on the War Cabine
which dictates the higher strategy of the war. But its real significance can only be seen when taken in conjunction with the refusal to give real power to the Indian Defence Member. The presence of Indians in the War Cabinet and the Pacific Council may help in deceiving the world about the equality of status conceded to India. A dummy Indian Defence Member would also serve a similar purpose but not one who controlled Defence policy, to however limited an extent.

If the Congress suggestion had been accepted, the position would have been somewhat as follows: The Commander-in-chief would be responsible for the conduct of all military operations while the Indian Defence Member would be responsible for all Government relations between the Army and the Government. While the disposition of the forces and similar questions would be decided solely by the Commander-in-chief, it would be for the Indian Defence Member to, for example, how the funds needed to finance military operations were raised. The Commander-in-chief could certainly express his opinion about the fighting qualities of different classes in the army, but the question of recruitment and abolition of distinctions like martial and non-martial races would be for the Defence Member to decide. The distinction between the political and military aspect
of Defence is one well understood in democratic countries and the position of the Indian Defence member would be something like that of the Secretary of State for War in the British Cabinet. Apart from the theoretical limitations to his power to which the congress was prepared to agree, practical considerations would still further limit his powers. He would have no control over the British sector of the army while, even in the Indian army, the safeguarding of the interests of the large number of British officers would limit his control over it. Much was made of the difficulty of disentangling from the complicated organization of the army in India a General Headquarters during the war the functions of the Defence Member and the Commander-in-chief, both of which were being discharged by the latter. But if the assumption was one of hearty co-operation between the Defence Member and the Commander-in-chief all such questions could have been easily solved, especially if the parties bore in mind the exigencies of war.

The supreme issue, however, was how in face of the threat of Japanese invasion, an appeal could be made to the imagination of the people in order to harness their enthusiasm to the defence of the country? In the declarations of war with Germany, Italy and Japan, the people of India had no voice. With war draw
closer to Indian borders, the need for converting a Government war into a people's war was apparent. Were the British Government appreciative of the need? The Congress point of view was that not only should there be recognition of the ultimate freedom of the country after the war, but the immediate steps taken should be such as to demonstrate to the people, that a great change had taken place. If Defence was a reserved subject, it could not be said by Indian leaders that the war was their war, fought for the defence of their freedom and the integrity of their soil. With control of Defence in their hands, ultimate power would continue to rest in the hands of the British Government, and the Congress felt that it could not shoulder the responsibility of rousing the patriotism and spirit of sacrifice of the people for what would be not the Indian people's war but the British Government's war against Japan.

Why then did Sir Stafford Cripps refuse to budge from his position? In his letter dated April 11 to the Congress President Sir Stafford Cripps said that unity of command was essential in the interests of Allied help to India. The Congress leaders had never suggested that there should not be unity of command. In fact, their frank recognition of the position of the commander-in-chief as he of the Indian armed forces, even though he would continue to be
appointed by the British Government, was itself a recognition of
the principle of unity of command. But unity of command need not
necessarily mean surrender of political control by the Government
of different countries whose forces would be operating under one
active command. By allowing the British Expeditionary Force in
France to act under the supreme commandership of General Gamelin
the British Government did not hand over political control of the
forces to the French Government. In Australia, General Macarthur
had been Supreme Commander of the forces of the United Nations,
but the Australian Government had not ceased to exercise political
control over the Australian army, navy and air force. There were
American forces in Britain over which the U.S. Government had no
abandoned control. The plea that there could be no transfer of
responsibility for Defence because of the need for unity of
command was a spurious one.

Another argument advanced by Sir Stafford Cripps in
justification of the refusal to accede to the Congress position
was that their "duty to our American allies" made such a course
impossible. It was bad enough for the British Government to
refuse to transfer responsibility because of their paramount
duty to defend India, but it was worse to drag in America, to
make her assume a portion of the blame for their own reactionary attitude. Why should the need for American help, or even the presence of American forces in India, stand in the way of the representatives of the Indian people assuming responsibility for the defence of their country? In the absence of any definite confirmation from American official sources, the allegation that the United States had objected or was likely to object to Defense becoming the responsibility of an Indian Defence Member must be attributed to British anxiety to prop up an untenable position.

(iv) National Government

Though Defence was the issue over which there were prolong negotiations, the actual breach occurred not over the question of Defence but over the wider question of the powers and functions of the National Government.

When Sir Stafford Cripps invited Indian political leaders to join the Executive Council, it was assumed that the British Government would be willing to make the necessary minimum changes in the constitution of the council, if not by statute, at least by convention, in order to enable the Council to function as a responsible cabinet. The Congress demand for a National Government
made at Poona in July, 1940, and the history of the previous controversy about Council expansion should have made this much plain to any one authorized to negotiate with Indian leaders on behalf of the British Government. The emphatic terms in which the Draft Declaration reserved the Defence of India as a responsibility of the British Government tended to confirm the illusion that all other subjects were being transferred to the representatives of the Indian people.

The general impression created was that, though the present constitution would not be changed, the leaders of the different political parties were being asked to join the Viceroy's Executive Council which would, by convention, be allowed to function as a responsible cabinet.

In whatever way the National Government was formed, the Congress leaders were clear in their minds as to the powers it must possess. It should not be an Executive Council carrying out the orders of the British Government. It must be treated as a responsible Cabinet whose advice would ordinarily be binding on the Vicer

What was wanted by the Congress was the sincere desire to transfe

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1. The Congress Working Committee's Resolution passed on July 7, 1940 at Delhi and confirmed by A. C. on July 28, 1940 at Poona: Indian National Congress Bulletins, March 1940 to September, 1946 pp. 9-10, 74-75.
power by means of agreed conventions, and not necessary by any statutory changes in the constitution.

The Congress had never asked for power itself as a patriotic gesture, but for power for the people as a whole. As the only large political organization in which all sections of the Indian people were represented, it had always spoken in the name of the country as a whole, and not in the interests of this section or that section.

However, in the later stage of the negotiations Sir Stafford Cripps could not speak of a National Government and began to talk of the Viceroy's Executive Council. The truth is His Majesty's Government were not prepared to transfer real power to the representatives of the Indian people. What they wanted was the moral prestige which they would get both within India and in the outside world by the leader of the main political bodies being associated with the Viceroy in the Government of India under the constitution and the material asset such association would mean to their war effort. What was offered was sub-ordinate association, not equal partnership. No wonder the Congress decided to have nothing to do with such a scheme, and throw the blame for the failure of...
the mission on the Congress, is to do something which facts do not justify.

Thus Congress rejected the Cripps offer. About this rejection Johnson's cable to the President of April 11 is important: 
"...The rejection is a master piece and will appeal to free men everywhere.

"My substitute defence amendment was informally agreed to at Conference between Cripps, Nehru and Congress President on Thursday night (9th) but then after they disagreed on giving any new authority to new Nationalist Government proposed by Cripps. Cripps said my formula meant the same thing as his original amendment which was quite untrue and denied his earlier press remarks that Nationalist Government any more real self Government now."

"Cripps is sincere, knows this matter could be solved. He and Nehru could solve it in 5 minutes if Cripps had any freedom or authority. To my amazement when satisfactory
when satisfactory solution seemed certain, with unimportant concession, Cripps with embarrassment told me that he could not change original draft declaration without Churchill's approval and that Churchill has cabled him that he will give no approval unless Wavell and Viceroy separately send their own code cables unqualifiedly endorsing any change Cripps wants.

"I never lost confidence until then. London wanted a Congress refusal. Why? Cripps's original offer contained little more than the unkept promise of the first World War. Does England prefer to lose India to enemy retaining claim of title at peace table rather than lose it by giving freedom now? I have my own opinion about it..."

"Nehru has been magnificent in his co-operation with me... I trust him... Cripps, though no fault of his own, has failed.

"Halifax's speech added the finishing touch to the suborning of Cripps. It is believe here it was so intended and timed and I am told pleased Wavell and the
Viceroy greatly*.

Same day (on April 11) Sir Stafford announced that His Majesty’s Government’s offer to India was withdrawn. The abrupt withdrawal of the offer and termination of negotiations are questionable and one can doubt the sincerity of the British Government.

1. Johnson to the President and Secretary of State, April 11, 1942, 9 a.m. Foreign Relations, I, 1942, pp. 631-32. Referring in his speech at New York Town Hall on the night of the 7th April to the possibility, that India’s spokesmen might reject Cripps’ proposals the British Ambassador in America, Lord Halifax, formerly Lord Irwin and ex-Viceroy of India, said: "If our best efforts failed the British Government would find itself obliged to do its own duty without the assistance or co-operation of the larger organised Indian parties. We have had no cooperation from the Indian National Congress, the largest and the best organised political party in India". "The Congress" he said, "was only a small proportion of whole of India and its exclusive claim to speak for the whole of India was rejected by other bodies of Indians". See Sitaramayya; Op. cit; p. 326. Lord Halifax was well briefed from Cripps before he could make such a speech. See Mansergh and Lumby (Ed.); TOP; Vol. I; Document Number: 524; Sir S. Cripps to Viscount Halifax (Via Viceroy), Telegram; 5th April 1947; p. 641.