APPENDIX VI

(Lajpat Rai's attempts to help Komagata Maru Victims from his last Autobiographical Fragment).

Source: The People (Lahore), January 25, 1931.

On reaching England in May I started taking interest in the matter and besides seeing the Under-Secretary of State for India saw other persons in connexion therewith (Komagata Maru ship), seeking their intervention. I interviewed the important editors and also wrote to the press pointing out the dangers of the policy and the impropriety of the Dominion Government's stand. Mr. Charles Roberts was then Under Secretary at the India Office. He was very sympathetic but it was obvious that the India Office had neither the will nor the power to make an issue of it with the Dominion. The English press was as usual united as well as decided in the matter. The Tory press was opposed and the "Times" in the course of a leading article pointed out the eternal truth of Kipling's verdict that "East is East and West is West, And never the twain shall meet." The liberal papers did publish my letters and otherwise took a sympathetic view of the situation pointing out the likely evil consequences of a conflict between the East and the West but they did not definitely commit themselves to any specific course of action. During the three months before the breaking out of the war the English press was full of this subject and articles appeared in all the leading organs of public opinion. On the 23rd of June Mr. Charles Roberts, the Under Secretary of State for India, wrote to me to say that the Canadian statesman Mr. Henri Bourassa was anxious to meet me. Two days later I received a letter from Mr. Bourassa which ran as follows:

"As you may have been informed by Mr. Charles Roberts, Under Secretary of State for India, I take a deep interest in Indian matters, even apart from the acute difficulty existing at present between our respective countries (I am from Canada). I have read with much interest and sympathy the two letters of yours which appeared in "New Leader" (?) of the 11th and 12th instant and I would be delighted to have conversation with you on the growth of nationalism in India."

"Would you do me the pleasure of coming here on Monday next, 29th instant, at one O'clock? We would then go and have lunch together at some quiet place and compare facts and sentiments as between nationalism in India and nationalism in Canada...."
I met Mr. Bourassa by appointment and had a long talk with him in London. (After that we met once in the U.S.A.) He threw the whole responsibility of the anti-Asian policy of the Dominion on the British and was interested more in the general development of democracy in the world than in the particular question of an open door policy for Indians in Canada. It was a great pleasure to meet him but he could provide me no relief in the matter in which I was immediately interested. All our efforts in England failed to bring any relief to the Komagata Maru victims of British Imperialism.

The following cable received by me on the 21st of July shows the end of the Komagata Maru enterprise:

"Unsuccessful attack by four hundred armed Police on Komagata passengers yesterday how many Hindustanis dead and wounded unknown regular armed force thousand ordered to butcher unarmed men on board."

As soon as I received the cablegram I forwarded it to Mr. Charles Roberts the Under Secretary for India with a request to him to take suitable action. On the 28th July I received the following reply which practically closed the incident for the time being:

Dear Sir,

I have your letter enclosing a cablegram about the affair of the "Komagata Maru". I am glad to see it, though I think it represents the apprehensions of those on shore rather than a statement of what actually occurred. As you doubtless know, the matter ended without bloodshed, and, so far as we know, no passengers were killed or seriously hurt, and the Canadian Government at all events supplied provisions.

If you have any further information about this grave affair, beyond what is contained in the cablegram, I should be very glad to see it. I return the cablegram.
In the meantime, the other Indians started a movement to get a general declaration signed by all prominent Indians then present in London. Sir M. Bhawanagre and Pandit Bhagwan Din Dube were the two principal sponsors of this movement. The defeated delegates of the I.N. Congress took their appeal to Sir W. Wedderburn who was then at Meredith and brought down a draft of a statement prepared by him for them. The first news of this statement I got was from the columns of the "Times" wherein the text of statement was published with a note that all the delegates including myself had signed it. It seems that some one put in my signature in the belief that I would, as a matter of course, accept a draft made by Sir W. Wedderburn. My signature on the statement was considered essential. On the 7th August I received the following wire from Pandit Bhagwan Din Dube:

"Letter to Lord Crewe assuring our loyalty signed by elderly Indians including delegates, if you wish sign come immediately 3 Middle Temple Lane".

I did not go to the rooms of Pandit Dube to sign the statement but a day or two later I did sign it at the National Liberal Club. Mine was perhaps the last signature. So I was definitely committed to a policy of loyal co-operation in the war in the interests of the Empire. The news from India was even more disconcerting. Almost all the nationalist leaders joined in declarations of loyalty and devotion to the Empire. In the Viceroy's Legislative Council a resolution was unanimously passed that all the expenses of the Indian contingent then and during the war would be borne by the Indian Exchequer. The British public, Parliament and Press were naturally full of India and Indian loyalty.