CHAPTER IV

GANDHI AND THE CRIPPS MISSION

The dark clouds of war engulfed the world on September 1, 1939. On September 3, the Viceroy declared India as an ally of the British in war without consulting the Indian leadership. This came as a rude shock to the Nationalist opinion in India as a majority of the provinces were then governed by popular ministries. The Congress, in its repeated declarations, had expressed itself against India being dragged into the war. The Congress Working Committee declared on September 14, 1939:

"The issue of war and peace for India must be decided by the Indian people and no outside authority can impose its decision upon them and that Indian people would not allow their resources to be used for imperialist ends."

The Congress sought from the British Government a declaration of its war aims regarding democracy and imperialism and their applicability to India. On being disappointed by the statement issued by the Governor-General on October 17, 1939, the Congress directed all its ministries to resign. It also asked its members in Central Legislature

to refrain from attending the next session. This led the Congress to follow the policy of non-cooperation. But it did not take the extreme step of embarrassing the Government as is evident from Gandhi's statement:

"I am of the opinion that we should wait till the heat of the battle in the heart of the Allied countries subsides and the future is clearer than it is. We do not seek our independence out of Britain's ruin. That is not the way of non-violence."^4

Nehru also observed:

"Congress which had been on the verge of civil disobedience could not think in terms of any such movement while the very existence of free England hung in the balance."^5

As a sequel to this, the Congress reviewed its earlier resolutions and decided to extend conditional support to the Government in the war efforts. The Congress Working Committee, in its meeting held at Delhi from July 3 to July 7, 1940, resolved:

"... the acknowledgement by Great Britain of the Complete Independence of India was the only solution of the problems facing both India and Britain and that as an immediate step in giving effect to it a provisional national Government should be constituted at the Centre ... If these measures were adopted, it would enable the Congress to throw in its full weight in the effort for the effective organisation of the defence of the country."^6

---

The British Government interpreted this as a 'price' demanded for extending help in the war efforts. Government Intelligence reported that the price rose higher and higher culminating in the demand for complete independence. Linlithgow felt that the Congress help was no more indispensable as the Congress ministries were not in power and he could lean upon the Muslim support as Jinnah in his talks with him had expressed his desire to cooperate in the war efforts. Consequently, the Viceroy did not pay heed to the friendly hand proffered by the Congress and instead announced its August Declaration which in place of constituting a National Government provided for the expansion of Viceroy's Executive Council by including some more representative Indians. The offer further provided for setting up a representative Indian body after the war to frame the new constitution of India. To appease the Muslim League, the Declaration added that the Government would not agree to the formation of "any system of Government whose authority is directly denied by large and powerful elements in India's national life." Jinnah interpreted it as an acceptance of the demand of 'Pakistan'.

Expressing dissatisfaction over the pronouncement

8. Linlithgow Collection, Microfilm No. 16, Telegram No. 262, from Viceroy to Secretary of State, June 28, 1940, p. 183, N.A.I., New Delhi.
made by the Viceroy, Gandhi wrote:

"I have very carefully read your pronounce-
ment and slept over it. It has made me sad. Its implications frighten me. I cannot help feeling that a profound mistake has been made."10

The Congress Working Committee recorded:

"The rejection of the Congress proposals is a proof of the British Government's determi-
nation to continue to hold India by the sword ... "11

Azad, summing up the Congress reaction, said,

"Now that Britain has rejected all the offers made by the Congress, we have only one thing left to do and that is to non-cooperate in every way with the war effort."12

The Congress approached Gandhi to lead it in the difficult situation. But he did not think it proper to launch a mass civil disobedience movement immediately as he felt that the atmosphere conducive to Satyagraha did not prevail.13 However, sensing the impatience of the fire-
brands in the Congress and British misunderstanding about the non-embarrassing policy of the Congress, Gandhi was forced to take some action. He had no desire to embarrass the British, especially at a time, when it was a question of life and death for them14 but he could not sit silently as his inactivity and sympathy with the British was becoming an object of ridicule.

14. The Tribune, October 31, 1941.
He was in search of a method whereby the Congress could record its dissatisfaction with the British without causing any serious damage to the war efforts. Consequently, he preferred individual civil disobedience to mass civil disobedience. An individual, selective and representative Satyagraha was offered by delivering an anti-war speech as a symbolic gesture of resentment.\textsuperscript{15}

The movement did not produce the desired results because of its very nature. It failed to generate enthusiasm among the people as only a few persons were allowed by Gandhi to offer Satyagraha. An Intelligence Report commented:

"In some areas it was limping along, in others it was moribund and still in others, it seemed to be dead."\textsuperscript{16}

The Government did not take it lightly and passed Emergency Power Ordinance to meet the challenge by arresting the Satyagrahis. By the middle of 1941, however, it realised the symbolic character of the movement. The prisoners were proving an economic burden on the Government and a subject of anti-government propaganda. The Government, therefore, decided to release the Satyagrahis gradually with the hope that this friendly gesture on their part would win them the cooperation of the Indian leadership in their war efforts.

\textsuperscript{15} A.I.C.C. File No. 55/1940, N.M.M.L., New Delhi.

\textsuperscript{16} Home Poll. 18/10/1941, Fortnightly Report U.P., N.A.I., New Delhi. also File No. 4/8/1941, N.A.I., New Delhi.
By December, 1942, almost all the Satyagraha prisoners were released.17

The war situation in the meantime took a turn for the worse. The Indian question became not only a matter of interest to India and Great Britain but also the concern of all the Allied Powers which were already conscious of India's strategic position for offensive as well as defensive purposes. Consequently, the heads of the various Allied Powers impressed on England to take steps to conciliate public opinion in India in order to secure its enthusiastic cooperation in the war efforts.18

As a sequel to the mounting international pressure, the British War Cabinet decided to send an official mission to India. On March 11, 1942, Churchill, the Prime Minister, announced that the War Cabinet had decided to send Cripps to India with a set of proposals. He was assigned the difficult task of carrying on negotiations with the Indian leadership of different shades and opinions for the acceptance of the proposals. Amery, the Secretary of State, avoided taking the offer himself as he wanted a 'left winger' to carry the proposals which reflected a conservative policy.19

Ibid., pp. 232-233.
choice, therefore, fell on Cripps who was well known for his astute diplomatic and bargaining skill. Besides, he was in close touch with Nehru and the Congress and had supported the Indian claim for independence during his visit to India in 1939. The news of assignment of Cripps for the Mission 'dispelled somewhat the gloom that enveloped the Congress circles and roused great expectations'.

Cripps arrived in India on March 23, 1942. Immediately after reaching here, he started making efforts for creating a favourable atmosphere for the acceptance of the proposals by the Indian leaders. The press statement, that he gave on his arrival in India, aimed at creating confidence among the Indian leaders about the earnestness of his mission. He said,

"I have come to India to discuss with the leaders of Indian opinion conclusions which the War Cabinet have unitedly reached in regard to India. I am here to ascertain whether these conditions will, as we hope, be generally acceptable to Indian opinion ... I have come here because I am, as I always have been, a great friend and admirer of India, and because I want to play my part as a member of War Cabinet in arriving at a final settlement of the political difficulties which have long vexed our relationships."

The scheme which he brought for the settlement of the Indian constitutional tangle embodied:

"The object of His Majesty's Government is the creation of a new Indian Union which

---


shall constitute a Dominion associated with the United Kingdom and other Dominions by a common allegiance to the Crown but equal to them in every respect and in no way subordinate in any aspect of its domestic or external affairs."

The terms of the declaration were as follows:

a) Immediately upon the cessation of hostilities, steps shall be taken to set up in India, in the manner described hereafter, an elected body charged with the task of framing a new constitution for India.

b) Provision shall be made, as set out below, for the participation of the Indian States in the constitution-making body.

c) His Majesty's Government undertake to accept and implement forthwith the Constitution so framed subject only to:

i) the right of any Province of British India or princely States that is not prepared to accept the new constitution to retain its present constitutional position, provision being made for its subsequent accession if it decides so. With such non-acceding provinces, should they so desire, His Majesty's Government will be prepared to agree upon a new Constitution giving them the same full status as Indian Union, and arrived at by a procedure analogous to that here laid down.

ii) the signing of a Treaty which shall be negotiated between His Majesty's Government and the constitution making body. This Treaty will cover all necessary matters arising out of the complete transfer of responsibility from British to Indian hands; it will make provision, in accordance with the undertaking given by His Majesty's Government, for the protection of racial and religious minorities; but will not impose any restriction on the power of the Indian Union to decide in the future its relationship to the other Member States of the British Commonwealth. Whether or not an Indian state elects to adhere to the Constitution, it will be necessary to negotiate a revision of its Treaty arrangements, so far as this may be required in the new situation.
d) The constitution making body shall be composed of as follows, unless the leaders of Indian opinion in the principal communities agree upon some other form before the end of hostilities.

Immediately upon the result being known of the provincial elections which will be necessary at the end of hostilities, the entire membership of the Lower Houses of the Provincial Legislatures shall, as a single electoral college, proceed to the election of the constitution making body by the system of proportional representation. This new body shall be in number about one-tenth of the number of the electoral college.

Indian States shall be invited to appoint representatives in the same proportion to their total population as in the case of the representatives of British India as a whole, and with the same powers as British Indian members.

e) During the critical period, which now faces India and until the new constitution can be framed His Majesty's Government must inevitably bear the responsibility for and retain control and direction of the defence of India as part of their world war effort but the task of organising to the full the military, moral and material resources of India must be the responsibility of the Government of India with the cooperation of the peoples of India. His Majesty's Government desire and invite the immediate and effective participation of the leaders of the principal sections of the Indian people in the counsels of their country, of the Commonwealth and of the United Nations.

In his interview with Jinnah, Cripps explained that in case a majority of less than 60 per cent of members of provincial Assembly voted in favour of accession or non-accession, the minority legislators would have the right to demand a plebiscite of the adult population on the accession issue. In this event, a simple majority in the plebiscite would decide the future of the province. The rulers of the

22. Ibid., pp. 565-566.
States would have the option to join or not to join the Indian Union. For non-acceding States, Crown, as the paramount power would continue to honour its earlier treaties with princes.

To carry the Indian leaders with him for the success of his mission, Cripps held discussions with the representatives of various political parties and leaders of different political shades. The detailed discussions, however, were held with the Muslim League and the Congress. But views on the proposals were also sought from the leaders of Hindu Mahasabha, Depressed classes, the Sikhs, rulers of princely States and liberal leaders like T.B. Sapru and M.R. Jayakar.

Cripps met Jinnah on March 25, 1942. In order to win him over, he tried to dispel any notion from his mind regarding former's prejudice against Pakistan. Cripps told him that the view he took two and a half years ago were sincerely taken and represented his judgement of the situation as it then was and that he had "regarded the Pakistan propaganda as pure political pressure" but now, he admitted, there was a change in his views because of two years time and the growth of Pakistan movement. It seems that initially Jinnah's response to the proposals was favourable. He (Jinnah) agreed with the plebiscite formula to determine the question of accession or non-accession though he was slightly doubtful 'whether 40 per cent was the right figure to apply to minority for deciding the question of accession.'

23. Ibid., pp. 480-481.
The only substantial change Jinnah wished to be effected in the draft before publication was of making the second part of Para 'c' (i) clearer regarding the possibility of setting up a second dominion. He told Cripps that he would place the proposals before the Working Committee of the Muslim League and report the outcome to him.24 He met Cripps again on March 28, 1942 to seek certain clarifications. Cripps formed the impression that the League had already accepted the proposals in principle.25

Cripps met some other Muslim leaders also. In his meeting with Sikander, Premier Punjab, the latter informed him that the Working Committee of the Muslim League had accepted the scheme as a whole.26 He expressed his apprehensions about the rejection of the scheme by the Congress over the question of Defence and pleaded with him for making maximum concession on that issue. Fazl-ul-Huq, Premier Bengal, in his interview with Cripps was mainly concerned with Bengal. He told Cripps that he did not want to oppose Jinnah though he had differences with him on certain issues.27

To get the support of a fairly large group in the Congress, Cripps held discussions with Nehru, Rajagopalachari, Bhulabhai Desai, Pattabhi Sitaramayya, Azad and other leaders. Cripps met Nehru a number of times on whom he had pinned his

24. Ibid., p. 481.
25. Ibid., p. 512.
26. Ibid., p. 515.
27. Ibid., p. 531.
hope for getting his proposals accepted by the Congress. Nehru apprised him of the difficulties in the way of the Congress for the acceptance of the proposals. Cripps formed an impression that the Congress reluctance was due to the influence of Gandhi.²⁹

C.Rajagopalachari met Cripps on March 28, 1942 and discussed with him the Dominion Status, right of non-accession and the defence issue. He asked Cripps to redraft the last paragraph of his proposals regarding the defence and make a provision for the appointment of an Indian Defence Minister before the scheme was presented to the Congress Working Committee for approval.³⁰ He expressed his willingness to accept the proposals in his personal capacity but was sceptical about Nehru's approval of the same. Cripps held interviews with Bhulabhai Desai and Pattabhi Sitaramayya also.

By having talks with the Congress leaders individually, Cripps contention was reinforced that the Congress was not a consolidated body. In order to solve the constitutional impasse, he tried to carry a majority of the members with him which virtually amounted to creating a wedge in the Congress ranks and to some extent isolate Gandhi.

In his dialogue with Azad and Nehru³¹ regarding the 'Dominion Status', Cripps told them that it was not a question

²⁹. Ibid., pp. 551-558.
³⁰. Ibid., PP. 511-512.
³¹. Ibid., p. 530.
of substance but only that of an ideology. By using the term he has tried to minimise the chances of objections that might be raised by other dominions and the House of Commons. Regarding States, Cripps told them that it was the only way to include States within the Indian Union. Turning to non-accession clause, he discussed the method of plebiscite of the total male adult population, which seemed to appeal to them. Nehru and Azad proposed that the Congress was prepared to consider the possibility of Pakistan but a scheme to have cession after five or ten years of constitution-making was desirable. Cripps commented that the idea would be more disruptive than the one devised by him. He said that the clause about non-accession in his scheme was provided to accommodate the Muslim League.

The discussions continued over the interim arrangement as the Congress was very particular regarding the position of Executive Council and the issue of Defence. Cripps, in his first meeting with the Congress President on March 29, raised some hope in the Congress circle and it appeared that he tried to accommodate the Congress viewpoint by deliberately not discouraging the impression that the Executive Council would be a National Government functioning like a cabinet and the Viceroy would be a constitutional head. He said that this could be done with the help of conventions. But later on, perhaps at the Viceroy's instance, he changed his version. In his subsequent meeting with the Congress leaders, he started giving different interpretations that

surprised them. When they sought clarifications, his answers were vague and ambiguous. He told Azad that legal position would, however, remain unchanged. Regarding the powers of the Viceroy, he told Congress leaders that it was a matter within the ambit of the Viceroy's sole discretion and could be discussed with him (Viceroy) only. The other major issue for the Congress was of Defence. Azad, expressing the Congress viewpoint, stressed that it was necessary to give to the Indians the control of defence of their country in order to mobilise them for war. Cripps told Azad that Viceroy was prepared to place an Indian member in charge of that portion of defence activities which were laid down in the final form of the draft declaration as the functions of the Government of India, but hesitated to call him Defence Minister. He was, however, prepared for the creation of a ministry of Defence Coordination but wanted Commander-in-Chief to be in charge of that as a member of Government of India. An annexure was also sent to the Congress enumerating the list of subjects to be transferred to the Defence Coordination Department. But the Congress rejected the proposal as in its opinion the subjects listed for transfer were unimportant and would render the position of the Indian Defence Member almost ridiculous.

Fresh attempts to frame a formula accommodating the respective position of the Indian Government and the Congress over the issue of Defence were made with the help of Colonel Louis Johnson, President Roosevelt's personal envoy, who had come to India and was very keen for the success of the Cripps Mission. A new formula was presented to the Congress which embodied:

a) The Defence Department shall be placed in the charge of a representative Indian member with the exception of functions to be exercised by the Commander-in-Chief as War Member of the Executive Council.

b) A War Department will be constituted which will take over such functions of the Defence Department as are not retained by the Defence Member. A list of all the retained functions has been agreed, to which will be added further important responsibilities including the matters now dealt with by the Defence Coordination Department and other vital matters related to the defence of India.

The Congress Working Committee suggested some amendments in the formula in the light of which Cripps revised the draft and discussed the revised formula with the Viceroy who did not agree with the former's approach to the problem. Cripps sent home the revised formula and recommended for its acceptance. But the Viceroy communicated his disapproval for any alteration in the powers of the Commander-in-Chief during the pendency of war. It seems that the Viceroy was also displeased over the way the negotiations had been carried on.

because Cripps handed over the formula to Johnson for onward transmission to Jawaharlal Nehru as he had been making efforts to bring round Nehru to put his weight in preventing the talks from going down the drain over the issue of Defence. By this time, Cripps realised his limitations to proceed further and the talks broke down.

Nehru commented:

"A big change had occurred somewhere in the middle. It was obvious that there was some trouble between Sir Stafford and others."\(^\text{35}\)

It seems that the British bureaucracy and Home Government did not like the promises which Cripps was making to Indian leadership and being his superiors they pulled him up.

When Cripps arrived in India, Gandhi was in his Ashram at Sevagram. He was not very keen to participate in the negotiations,\(^\text{36}\) but was persuaded to do so by Cripps who carried the impression that his Mission would not succeed without Gandhi's support. He showed him the unpublished draft of the proposals during his first meeting with him on March 27, 1942.

Gandhi's reaction to the Cripps' proposals was not very favourable. To him, these appeared cut and dried and hardly had any scope for negotiations. He said that the

---

Congress will have two main objections to the proposals, viz.,
the continuance of autocratic States under the British
Government with the right to call upon the British armed
forces to enforce the arbitrary power of the ruler and
secondly, the document was an open invitation to the Muslims
to create a separate homeland for them.\textsuperscript{37}

According to All-India Congress Committee records,
it did not take Gandhi long to see that they were dangerous
in the long run and empty of all meaning and significance for
the present.\textsuperscript{38} The Cripps offer appeared to him as 'a post-
dated cheque' and he remarked, "It is too late for me to
be interested in this post-dated cheque."\textsuperscript{39} Agatha Harrison
had foreseen it earlier. She said to Cripps before his
departure to India, "I do not believe that they will accept
it. It is too late. They would have accepted it six months
ago."\textsuperscript{40} Gandhi also remarked later in his correspondence
with Horace Alexander, "How nice it would have been if he had
not come with that dismal mission."\textsuperscript{41}

Gandhi felt sore that the British Government had sent
proposals without discussing them with the principal parties.
He said, "Trying to please all, the proposals pleased none."\textsuperscript{42}
He conveyed his mind to Cripps with considerable sorrow because

\textsuperscript{37} Nicholas Mansergh, op.cit., vol. I, p. 499.
\textsuperscript{38} A.I.C.C. File No. 55/1940, N.M.M.L., New Delhi.
\textsuperscript{39} Horace Alexander, Oral History Transcript No. 12,
N.M.M.L., New Delhi.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{41} Gandhi Papers, vol. 64, Letter No. 1434 from Gandhi to
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid.
the proposals were sponsored by one in whom India had some trust. He said to Cripps, "Why did you come at all if this is what you have to offer? I would advise you to take the first plane home." He expressed his viewpoint before the Congress Working Committee but took care to emphasize that he had not the slightest desire to stand in the way of the Working Committee in accepting the proposals or seeking modification of them if they so desired. He summed up his views in the Harijan dated April 19, 1942:

"It is a thousand pities that the British Government should have sent a proposal for dissolving the political deadlock, which, on the face of it, was too ridiculous to find acceptance anywhere. And it was a misfortune that the bearer should have been Sir Stafford Cripps, acclaimed as a radical among radicals and a friend of India. I have no doubt about his good will. He believed that no one could have brought anything better for India. But he should have known that at least the Congress would not look at Dominion Status even though it carried the right of secession the very moment it was taken. He knew, too, that the proposals contemplated the splitting up of India into three parts, each having different ideas of governance. It contemplated Pakistan, and yet not the Pakistan of the Muslim League's conception. And last of all, it gave no real control over defence to responsible ministers. The fact is that Sir Stafford Cripps having become part of the Imperial machinery, unconsciously partook of its quality. Such is its strength ..."

The Cripps proposals failed to evoke a favourable response not only from the Muslim League and the Congress

---

44. A.I.C.C. File No. 55/1940, N.M.M.L., New Delhi.
45. Harijan, op.cit., vol. IX, p. 120, April 19, 1942.
but also from Hindu Mahasabha, All-Party Committee of Sikhs and the Depressed classes. None of the parties was completely satisfied. Since the proposals were to be accepted or rejected in toto and were not subject to any modification, all the parties rejected them due to one reason or the other.

The Muslim League Working Committee expressed its gratitude for the implied recognition of the principle of Pakistan but regretted that the scheme was not acceptable because Pakistan was not conceded unequivocally and the right of Muslim self-determination was denied. Moreover, it complained that the proposals were not open to any modification so far the fundamentals were concerned and keeping in view the rigidity of the proposals, Muslim League finally turned them down on April 11, 1942.

The Congress Working Committee had already rejected the proposals on April 10, 1942. The rejection of the scheme by the Congress was mainly based on their dissatisfaction with the provision of non-accession, position of Executive Council, the issue of Defence and its disregard to the claims of the people of princely States.

Some of the British bureaucrats, however, held Gandhi responsible for the failure of the Cripps Mission. Amery, on October 18, 1943, observed that Gandhi brought about the rejection of Sir Stafford Cripps offer because of his pacifism.

Azad's observation lends support to this view. He commented:

"Gandhi's judgement of the merits of the proposal was coloured by his inherent and unchangeable aversion to anything which might involve India in war. Proposals, however favourable to India, if they meant that India would have to participate in war went against his grain."\(^{49}\)

Gandhi's pacifism could make one draw this conclusion but Azad's observation did not reveal the whole truth. It was not only his apprehension of India's voluntary participation or involvement in war that prevented him from accepting the proposals but also his fears of the process of disintegration of the country that might follow if the proposals were accepted, generated in him greater aversion for them. He felt that the non-accession clause in the proposals would amount to the acceptance of the principle of partition of the country on religious ground which to him was 'patent untruth' and his 'whole soul rebelled against the idea that Hinduism and Islam represented two antagonistic cultures and doctrines'.\(^{50}\)

Cripps in a press interview on June 16, 1942 said,

"The assurance that the Congress Working Committee had accepted the proposals came through the press and other sources. Then further consultations took place in which, I understand, Mr. Gandhi was consulted and after some further delay, the Congress finally turned down the proposals."\(^{51}\)


It was even current among the British high officials that Gandhi telephoned from Sevagram to Delhi and instructed the Congress to reject the Cripps Offer. 52

Though Gandhi held the magic power of bending the Congress according to his own desire yet his belief in non-violence gave freedom of choice to Congress members even when he disliked a particular act of the Congress. 53 Besides, he was conscious of the fact that many Congress leaders did not subscribe fully to his faith in non-violence and would be ready to throw overboard any regard for non-violence if they were assured of real transfer of power on the condition of India's willing participation in war. Consequently, he did not like to force his opinion on the members of the Working Committee. The following press statement of Azad issued on April 11, 1942 bears testimony to it:

"It would be entirely untrue to suggest that the Working Committee's decision has in any way been influenced by Gandhi's views as he (Gandhi) made it clear to the Working Committee members that they were perfectly free to come to their own decisions on the merits of the proposals." 54

Azad further noted that Gandhi was not even ready to stay on in Delhi during the deliberations of the Working Committee over the Cripps proposals but was made to do so only on the insistence of the former. However, he left Delhi even

before the Working Committee arrived at any decision. He also told Cripps that if the British Government accepted the demand for Indian freedom, he was sure to carry the majority of the Congress members and the masses with him. Horace Alexander, however, held the view that though Gandhi did not ask the Working Committee to reject the proposals yet the latter knew very well that Gandhi was averse to the Cripps proposals and as such his views influenced the Working Committee's decision to turn down the proposals.

Jawaharlal Nehru did not give any credence to the British Government's view that the talks failed because of Gandhi's intervention. He said,

"No question of violence or non-violence arose in our talks or in our consideration of the subject. We rejected the proposals purely on political grounds." This was corroborated by Rajagopalachari also who refuted Cripps' view that the rejection of the proposals by the Congress Working Committee was largely due to Gandhi's adherence to non-violence. He said,

"... 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 its own policy and Mahatmaji did not interfere. Gandhi's Secretary, Mahadev Desai, also denied the news of Gandhi's intervention. He told Horace Alexander that after they left Delhi on April 2, they had no further communication of any kind with the Working Committee until after the decision. Apart from the press reports, they knew nothing about the proceedings.  

Replying to Cripps' press statement, Gandhi told the representative of the United Press of London in an interview:

"Sir Stafford knows that I was disinclined to proceed to New Delhi. Having gone there, I intended to return the same day that I reached there. But Maulana Sahib would not let me go. I wish that I could have induced the Working Committee to take up its stand on pure non-violence. But it did not and could not. With it, rightly, politics were all important and it could not, not having the conviction, allow its deliberations to be affected by the issue of non-violence. The deliberations, therefore, of the Working Committee at New Delhi, were carried on without any interference or guidance on my part. Therefore, the negotiations had nothing to do at any stage with the question of non-violence."  

It appears that as a result of all these denials, Cripps modified his stand by October, 1942. He said, "I do not believe that Gandhi who was not present when the decision was taken was personally responsible for the rejection of the Government's proposal."  

59. Horace Alexander, India Since Cripps, op.cit., p. 20.  
An analysis of the Cripps proposals reveals a number of lacunae which stood in the way of its acceptance in toto by the major political parties and religious and racial minorities. Some of the more prominent flaws include the provision of Dominion Status instead of complete independence and that, too, after the cessation of hostilities; freedom to provinces and States for not acceding to the Indian Union thereby resulting in the creation of numerous States; non-acceptance of the demand to make the Executive Council a de facto cabinet and refusal to transfer the control of Defence to an Indian Member.

The proposals promised a Dominion Status owing allegiance to the Crown and assured equality with other Dominions but the offer fell short of the complete independence which had been the definite goal of the Congress since 1929. Besides, the promise of the creation of Indian Union was to be implemented in a distant future after the cessation of hostilities.

The clause 'c' (i) of the Cripps proposals included a provision by which the British Indian provinces and States could exercise their discretion for acceding to the Indian Union. It seems that this clause was mainly inserted to appease the Muslims, who found in it the indirect recognition of the principle of separate homeland. This is apparent

from Cripps' note of his interview with Jinnah in which he has mentioned, "The first part of the document surprised him as in the distance it went to meet the Pakistan case." From the Congress point of view, the disruptive motive of the scheme is further reflected in the provision which guaranteed the support and protection of the British not only to princely States but also to racial and religious minorities. The scheme, if accepted, would have resulted in the balkanization of India as the rulers of the States were given an option to join the Indian Union. The non-acceding States could either remain independent or form their own federation. Crown was to retain the paramount powers for them and continue to honour its earlier treaties with the Princes. Nehru recorded:

"... whole background would be of separation and the real problem of the country, economic or political, would take secondary place." The danger of this clause in the Cripps proposals was also realised by the Congress Working Committee which in its resolution of April 2, 1942 observed:

"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 province and which may well lead to further difficulties in the way of the Indian States merging themselves in the Indian Union." 65

64. Jawaharlal Nehru, The Discovery of India, op.cit., p. 454.
The British Government was fully conscious of this fact as is evident from the Secretary of State's letter to the Viceroy dated March 24, 1942. He hinted at the possibility of creation of several independent units such as Muslim zones in North-West and North-East, Hindu British India and some hilly tribal regions administered directly by the Government of India. He advised the Viceroy to see that "Delhi alongwith a considerable area around it was not passed into the hands of any one of the dominions that might temporarily emerge out of the first experiment in constitution framing."\textsuperscript{66}

The provision for the Indianization of the Executive Council did exist in the Cripps proposals but its freedom was not unfettered. It was not made clear in the initial stage whether the Executive Council was to be something akin to cabinet in England and Governor-General to act as a constitutional hand.\textsuperscript{67} Indian Nationalists were not prepared to assume responsibility without having a truly National Government. They were ready to ignore all questions regarding future if they could be assured of the National Government functioning as a Cabinet Government with full powers which would be different from a mere continuation of the Viceroy's Executive Council.

\textsuperscript{66} Nicholas Mansergh, op.cit., vol. I, p. 469.
Reginald Coupland, an eminent historian, who made an intensive study of the Indian problem at that time, also believed that the decisive factor was the clash between the Congress and the British view over the question of the character of proposed National Government. Cripps, the liberal leader, agreed to give real government to Indians as demanded by them but finally the British conservative view prevailed and Cripps had to change his tone.68

The non-acceptance of the demand to make the Executive Council a de facto cabinet proved a major hurdle in the way of a settlement. The whole controversy centred around the point that the Congress asked for a National Government whose advice would be binding on the Viceroy, and the British Government offered them the membership of the Executive Council with the overriding powers to Governor-General and Home Government. The Indian leaders were only offered participation in the machinery of British imperialism without having substantial powers.

The clause relating to Defence proved another major hurdle in the way of the acceptance of the Cripps proposal. Indians were prepared to accept the overall control of Commander-in-Chief on technical and operational matters but they wanted the appointment of an Indian Defence Minister with substantial powers to boost up Indian morale. This

68. Purshotamdas Thakurdas Papers, File No. 239, pt. 4, 1940-1950 containing clipping of Bombay Chronicle, October 31, 1942.
was really the great need of the hour as Indians were required to protect their country from the impending danger, which could not be done without the realisation of freedom at that particular moment.

Various attempts made by Cripps to conciliate the Indian opinion over the issue of Defence did not yield any positive result on account of Viceroy's stiff attitude, who complained to the Secretary of State that he was not being consulted. According to Ram Manohar Lohia, Cripps' enthusiasm to arrive at a settlement was dampened on account of Johnson's interference in the Indian affairs. He observed:

"Open American intervention in Imperial affairs would touch an English man on the raw. Aside from being nationally susceptive, he was personally sensitive. After Johnson's intervention, the Mission had lost half of its charm for Cripps. Even if he succeeded, he could not have gathered all the plums."  

Besides these factors which were largely responsible for the failure of Cripps Mission, the inherited flaws in the proposals made it almost impossible to remove the deadlock and achieve anything substantial. The two major factors which contributed to a large extent to the failure of the Mission included the strict limits of the draft declaration in which Cripps was to negotiate and the unhelpful attitude of the British conservative diehards.

Cripps was bound by the draft declaration and did not have much latitude of power to make necessary modifications. Churchill's telegram to Linlithgow dated March 10, 1942, confirms this fact:

"You will await Lord Privy Seal's arrival and go into the whole matter with him. He is of course bound by the draft declaration which is our utmost limit."

He continued:

"... there were not to be negotiations but that you were to try to gain acceptance with possibly minor variations or elaborations."\(^7^1\)

Subsequently, he reaffirmed this in his speech in the House of Commons on December 12, 1946:

"His Majesty's Government had not been willing to support Sir Stafford Cripps to the extent to which he himself was prepared to go."\(^7^2\)

Amery, the Secretary of State, also stressed the same point in his letter to Churchill:

"... there should be no idea that he is going out on a purely roving commission. I think there are serious objections to referring to his instructions as if they were an absolutely cut and dried plan (even though from our point of view they are something fairly nearing that)

He knew that the contents of the draft would not satisfy the Congress and he wrote about it to the Viceroy on March 10, 1942:

"As for Congress, their adverse reaction may be all the greater when they discover that they

\(^{71}\) Nicholas Mansergh, op.cit., vol. I, p. 395.

\(^{72}\) V.P. Menon, op.cit., p. 135.

are not going to get a Sapru type of government and that the nest contains the Pakistan cuckoo's egg ... 

British officers in India, too, carried the impression that Cripps would not succeed. Gwyer, Chief Justice of India, told Craik, political adviser to Crown representative:

"It is amusing, almost comic, that Cripps should solve the Indian problem. The scheme is final if Cripps succeeds in persuading his friends of Congress to accept, it is sure to be rejected by Jinnah, the princes and the Depressed classes." 

The unhelpful attitude of the British Conservatives was equally responsible for the breakdown of the talks. Viceroy, Lord Linlithgow, was against any major change in the British Government's policy at that time (during war) and conveyed his views to the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister. Besides, he was against any compromise scheme that effected the Muslim interest. He communicated to Amery:

"If His Majesty's Government's scheme is detrimental to Muslim interest, we will never accept it. I warn Government against attempt to suppress League or create disruption therein ... We are prepared to face all consequences if any scheme detrimental to interests of Muslims is forced upon us. We shall resist it to utmost; if we have to die in attempt we shall die fighting." 

On his threat of resignation, the Prime Minister had told him that he was forced to take some steps at that particular moment because of various rumours and American propaganda.

74. Ibid., p. 396.
75. Jayakar Papers, File No. 727, Letter No. 16 from B.L.Mitter, Advocate General, to Jayakar (He conveyed to Jayakar what he overheard at a party), N.A.I., New Delhi.
77. Ibid., p. 395.
Viceroy was also of the opinion that Cripps, who was coming with a genuine public spirit to solve the problem, would go off very quickly. He said, "... personally I think, he'll fail with His Majesty's Government's policy."\textsuperscript{78}

Immediately after Cripps' arrival in India, he reminded him of his own control of his Executive Council.\textsuperscript{79} He warned him that he would forgive him almost anything except stealing his Excellency's cheese to bait his own trap.\textsuperscript{80} It was this attitude of the Viceroy that contributed a great deal to the breakdown of the talks. The unhelpful attitude of Churchill, the Prime Minister, further sealed the fate of the Mission.\textsuperscript{81}

The secret documents now released give ample evidence of the fact that Cripps, the Liberal leader, did not get full support of his Conservative partners, viz., the Viceroy, the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister. Santhanam opined that Cripps did not come to India as somebody's tool. He came with a genuine desire to solve the Indian constitutional tangle. He might have thought of putting pressure over Churchill as it was a Coalition Government. But he could not get support from any side.\textsuperscript{82}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{78} H.V.Hodson, \textit{The Great Divide} (London: Hutchinson and Co., 1969), pp. 95-96.
\item \textsuperscript{80} H.V.Hodson, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 98.
\item \textsuperscript{82} K.Santhanam, Oral History Transcript No. 19, N.M.M.L., New Delhi.
\end{itemize}
It is evident that the British Government was divided over the issue of yielding anything substantial to the Indians to meet their aspirations. Attlee and Cripps, the Labour partners, were ready for some sort of compromise over the issue while the Conservatives, headed by Churchill and Amery, were not keen to take any effective action in this direction. In fact, they were more concerned about public opinion in Britain and America rather than giving substantial powers to Indians during the war. Churchill wrote to Cripps:

"You must not feel unduly discouraged or disappointed by the result. The effect throughout Britain and United States has been wholly beneficial." 83

Amery's telegram also revealed this:

"What a relief now that it is over ... Our whole conception was to put an end to all doubts about our complete sincerity as to the future and to hope that in the light of that Indians would cooperate within the present constitutional scheme." 84

The failure of Cripps Mission invited widespread criticism by various leaders and press. Gandhi wrote in Harijan dated May 24, 1942 that so far as the public know, the negotiations did not break over the want of agreement between the two organisations, but over differences with Sir Stafford as to what powers the British Government wanted to part with during the war. 85 He said that the main objections

84. Ibid., p. 756.
to Cripps' proposals was that it involved dismemberment of India, Indian States were being set up as an all extensive disintegrating factor.  

Jawaharlal Nehru said that the whole affair was a propaganda gesture, a cruel hoax to nationalist opinion. He continued:

"The real question was the transfer of power to the National Government. It was the old issue of an Indian nationalism, and on that issue, war or no war, the British governing class in England and in India was determined to hold on to what it had. Behind them stood the imposing figure of Mr. Winston Churchill."  

Rajendra Prasad commented that although the tongue was that of Sir Stafford, the language was still that of Amery. No group in India was prepared to accept the offer of August, 1940 in April, 1942 dressed in a different way.

B.S. Moonje said that before Sir Cripps' arrival in India, Jinnah was insistent on previous acceptance of the principle of Pakistan, but Sir Cripps conceded in his proposals the claim of the Muslim League. Mr. Jinnah was encouraged to assume a new position that rapprochement is impossible without a previous acceptance of the principle of Pakistan. Mudaliar said that by sending Cripps Mission, Churchill's Government wanted to convince the Labour Party

86. The Tribune, July 17, 1944.  
88. The Tribune, April 16, 1942.  
through Cripps that India was so divided in opinion that no democratic constitution could be worked out by the Indians.\textsuperscript{90} Majumdar held the view that it was Winston Churchill himself who stopped the negotiations between the Congress and Cripps as he believed that Gandhi with his idea of pacifism and non-violence would hinder all the war efforts. Churchill was not prepared to take any risk with Gandhi.\textsuperscript{91}

Louis Fischer, the American journalist, told the world that the Mission had failed not because of Hindu-Muslim disunity but because Sir Stafford could not or was not allowed to make good his assurance about the National Government.\textsuperscript{92} Laski ascribed the cause of the failure of the Mission to rigidity of instructions which prevented the elasticity of maneuver which a negotiator of Cripps stature required. He further said that Cripps was acting in collaboration with colleagues some of whom at least were afraid of the consequences of his success.\textsuperscript{93}

The Indian language press attributed the failure of the Mission to 'Britain's insincerity' and described the Cripps drama as Britain's unsuccessful attempt to befool the world.\textsuperscript{94} The Statesman commented 'So long as India Office

\textsuperscript{90} Jayakar Papers, File No. 727, Sr. No. 16, N.A.I., New Delhi.
\textsuperscript{92} Home Poll. File No. 37/16/1942, Ram Manohar Lohia, Mystery of Sir Stafford Cripps, op.cit., p. 9, N.A.I., New Delhi.
\textsuperscript{93} Dawn, September 24, 1944.
\textsuperscript{94} Home Poll. 18/5/1942, Fortnightly Report for the 1st half of May, 1942.
and the Government of India draft proposals, no emissary can succeed'. Cripps was not strong enough to do his drafting and he also succumbed to the influence of New Delhi.\textsuperscript{95}

Though the Cripps Mission met its doom yet it influenced the course of events that shaped the history of the Indian subcontinent. The proposals provided a basis for a constitutional advance. Though nothing substantial was offered immediately yet the assurance of granting a Dominion Status after the cessation of hostilities virtually recognised the principle of independence which Gandhi and other leaders had been striving for. Moreover, Indians were promised the right of framing their own constitution.

The Muslim claim for a separate homeland as made in the Lahore Resolution of 1940 was given an indirect recognition by the British through Cripps formula. It gave a great incentive to the Muslims and made them more enthusiastic to achieve their goal as the idea of Pakistan which till then remained in the realm of fancy, acquired the shape of a viable proposition. The aspiration of the Muslims touched new heights when they found that the Congress Working Committee while rejecting the Cripps offer had also recognised the principle of self-determination. Hodson rightly assessed the inherited dangers in the provision and remarked, "This was a hole in the dyke which Mr. Jinnah was determined to widen."\textsuperscript{96}

\textsuperscript{95} The Tribune, April 13, 1942 (The Editorial commented on the news item appeared in the Statesman).
\textsuperscript{96} H.V. Hodson, op.cit., p. 105.
The machinery devised by Cripps to ascertain the wishes of the people regarding the accession to the Indian Union by holding a plebiscite of the adult population formed the very basis of the various proposals which were put forward by C. Rajagopalachari and Gandhi in the subsequent years to arrive at a settlement with the Muslims.