CHAPTER X

ARMISTICE AND ARMIES

The overall impact of the war, in its full severity and weight, was felt by the Punjabis when it was about to come to a close. Before the hostilities had ceased on 11 November 1918, the atmosphere in the Punjab was surcharged with great excitement. Many factors had contributed to the existence of that excitement but the war, its exigencies and consequences were at the bottom of each one of them.

What had brought about the excitement to that feverish pitch at the close of the war was the Montagu-Chelmsford Report born out of the scheme envisaged in the August Declaration of 1917. The Government of India and the Secretary of State had purposely published it in July 1918 and managed such a wide publicity to its proposals that the whole of political India had started feeling agitated over it. Different sections of Indians reacted differently to these proposals. The variety of their reactions added to the confusion. Educated politicians of extremist views expressed their complete dissatisfaction with the proposals in the report.

1. G.O.I.-Home-Public (Reforms) — September 1918-Proc. No. 64, & K.W.; Ibid.; Proc. No. 66, Viceroy to Secretary of State for India, tele p., dated 7 August 1918: "Both in England and in India every effort is being made to discredit extremist tactics and further the views of moderates.... every opportunity is seized of for confuting the extremists, encouraging the moderates and explaining to the latter the magnitude of their opportunity."

2. India in the Year 1917-18, pp. 52-53.
They compared the report to the proverbial mouse produced by mountain in labour. Extremists condemned the report as "fundamentally disappointing and unsatisfactory", and as "unworthy to be offered by England or to be accepted by India". Moderates were thrilled by the hope that since the extremists were deadly against the proposals, they had a chance of getting power by accepting the proposals. They had, therefore, begun to attack the extremists vociferously. Conservatives and loyalists were angry, for the Government had gone too far to acquiesce in the demands of extremists. Europeans and Anglo-Indians in India raised a venomous tirade against "the Indian politician" and the reform proposals alike. They knew well that any kind of reform in the then existing set-up meant erosion of many of their privileges. They, therefore, began demanding sufficient protection and safeguards. Muslim edicts were restive and for two reasons. Firstly the Reform proposals had not given them extra communal weightage they had hoped for and secondly they anticipated the disruption of Turkey.

3. GOI-Home-Pol-Deposit-September 1913-Pro. No. 20.
5. India in the Years, 1917-18, p. 52.
8. The Pioneer, 19 March 1919; India in the Years, 1917-18, pp. 55-56.
which they did not like. The Hindu politicians were excited over the prospect of the Muslims coming closer to them after being estranged from the British Government. The Sikhs, after making great contribution to the war efforts of the British Government in India, felt bitter. They believed that what had been conceded to them in the Reform proposals was not commensurate with the services rendered by them.

The closing months of the war proved singularly favourable for the radicals not only to criticise the proposals but also to attack the alien government of India for other reasons. The inflation of prices, the expansion of currency, the subordination of private needs to the requirements of the military forces of the Empire, the wages bearing no relations to the abnormal rise in prices combined with an extremely bad harvest and one of the worst epidemics of Indian history to make the situation awful.

9. GOI- Home-Pol-Deposit-November 1919-Pro. No. 78, p.12. A number of Muslim leaders, including Aga Khan had addressed a memorial to the British Government in this respect. They argued strongly against the dis-member- ment of Turkey and obviously expected from the British Government such a solution as might obtain peace to the Turks without dishonour. See for details the papers, 16 January 1919, p.7.

10. India in the Years 1917-18, p.56.

In the Punjab, there occurred some special mishaps to add to the people's burden. The crops got dried by a spell of dry weather and there was a very serious shortage of fodder. The difficulty of procuring waggons hampered the movement of bhuna. The profiteering spirit, rife among the trading classes, and gambling in the form of setha at the important trading centres like Amritsar and Ferozepur, made the prices soar higher and higher all along the line. The necessities became as dear, if not dearer, as the luxuries.

The people's misery was reaching unbearable limits. This was reflected in notices of serious warnings to the government posted on the walls of the Railway Workshop at Lahore to the effect that there would be looting, if prices did not fall. It was further reflected in the government currency notes falling in esteem and value. Only 1.0% of the total deposits were paid into the treasuries in cash coins.

In the Punjab the gloom resulting from the economic situation was further aggravated by influenza. It had taken a grievous toll of human lives and the cotton lay unpicked on the ground due to non-availability of labour. The people...

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12. GOI-HOME-POL-Deposit-November 1913-Pro. No. 23.
14. GOI-HOME-POL-POL-Deposit-November 1913-Pro. No. 23.
were down with fever and the crops and cattle were completely neglected. The shortage of dry and green fodder for animals was greater than ever before. The attempt of government to deal with the situation by organizing the delivery of supplies and institute enquiries and verifications of stocks of grain-traders had proved of no avail. It was actually found that the majority of holders possessed only small stocks for they did not possess any facilities for warehousing. The cloth worn by the poor had become so dear as to be beyond their reach. Influenza had added to the rise in prices of cloth by creating a large demand of shrouds for the victims of influenza (32 lakh in the month of October alone). Similarly numerous creations caused rise in the price of wood.

The common man in the Punjab had been made to believe during the war that normal conditions would start prevailing immediately with the close of the war, that prices would go down as swiftly as they had risen on the outbreak of the war, and that prosperity would reappear suddenly, but when he found that the termination of the war was not bringing about any of these benefits, he was only too ready to accept the view that the government was the source of all their troubles. That belief helped a good deal the growth of extremism in politics.

17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid., p. 15; Cloth had become so scarce that a number of Brahman graves were desecrated in Lahore in order to secure the cloth from newly buried corpses.
20. India in 1914, p. 23.
The widespread resentment against the government which existed all over India was particularly so in the Punjab. That was because the province had in proportion to its population and resources borne a greater part in shouldering the burden of the war than any other part of India and it was but natural that the consequent reaction should have been more marked here than anywhere else.

The Punjab was in one other respect was more unfortunate than the rest of the provinces in India at this critical juncture and that added to the anger of the people. The province had continued to have even after the close of the war an extremely unsympathetic and arrogant bureaucrat as its Lieutenant-Governor. He had been at the head of the province for more than five years, and during the war had developed a strong aversion for the politically-conscious section of the Punjabis.

Of all provincial heads of the time, Sir Michael O'Dwyer was the most reactionary and for whom any talk of political concession was like a red rag to a bull. He had nothing but contempt for the Indian who took interest in politics. This contempt was particularly great towards the politically sensitive educated urbanites. He would air his views unabashedly and


22. Mundy, Alfred, Present Situation with Special Reference to Punjab Disorders, p. 591: Adjectives used for educated class by O'Dwyer were - 'wild', 'evil', 'dangerous', 'insidious', 'disloyal', 'revolutionaries', 'mischief-makers', 'given to the use of inflammatory language' etc., etc.
raise his mailed fist again and again. He had consistently
shown this attitude on the eve of the war, during the war and
after the war.

A few weeks after he had assumed charge of the province
in May 1913, he had very contemptuously told his audience, in
reply to an address of welcome, that all talks of reforms on
their part were "abstract speculations" and embarrassed him.

Soon after he addressed a "homily" to the vernacular press
and followed that by many stern actions under the Press act. He
demanded security from many papers and in many cases forfeited
security already deposited. When a proposal for the establish-
ment of an Executive Council to the Government of the Punjab
was brought before the Legislative Council on 10 April 1914, he
got excited and replied with all the authority that "the proposal
had come upon him rather as a surprise" and added "For forms of
Government let fools contest".

Then the war broke out, he was instructed by the Govern-
ment of India that every action of his during the war should be
sober and cautious so that people might not get an impression
that the Government was in trouble, but that had no effect

24. Ibid., Vol. I, p.3. quoted from O'Dwyer's speech.
26. Ibid., 13 April 1914, p. 105.
27. GOI- one-Pol.-August 1914-Pro. No. 1, p.11: D.9, from
R. Craddock, Member of the Governor-General's Executive
Council to M. O'Dwyer, Nos. 505-505, dated Circa 9
August 1914.
on him. O'Dwyer cried "wolf! wolf!" right from the start of the war and insisted again and again on the Government of India that for maintaining law and order in the province, he should be equipped with even more dictatorial powers than he already possessed. He persisted in his urgent requests with such regularity and force that the Government of India had to issue the Ingress into India Ordinance within one month of the outbreak of the war and rush through Defence of India Act in March 1915. Both the laws gave him as the Lieutenant-Governor of the Punjab sweeping powers and his administration made free use of the emergency legislation for the purpose of throttling political aspirations of the Punjabis. The ever increasing exigencies of the war helped O'Dwyer achieve his purpose.

While getting the most out of the province for meeting the war needs, he refused to allow the people of the province ventilate their grievances.

This became particularly evident after the change of the Viceroyal City in April 1916. By then O'Dwyer had begun to pose himself as the uncrowned king of the Punjab. Even Chelmsford was forced to confess in private that Punjab was almost the kingdom of O'Dwyer. His advice was sought and accepted not only in matters concerning Punjab administration but also in military matters.

28. Chelmsford Papers, Roll 13, No. 75, Chelmsford to O'Dwyer, 10 February 1917.
29. Ibid., Roll 2, No. 93, Chelmsford to Chamberlain, 15 September 1916.
The added importance flamed the innate vanity of Michael O'Dwyer. It had risen to such a height by the middle of 1917 that he had begun to presume that he could dictate or defy even the Government of India. On 13 September 1917, he publicly vilified the educated classes of India for their demanding political reforms on the floor of Viceroy's Legislative Council without caring for the reaction of the Government of India. In the same speech he extolled his own efficiency in the Punjab and summoned to all other provincial Governments. He insisted again and again that they should take clues from his actions in the Punjab.

This speech of O'Dwyer raised a storm of indignation both in and outside the Council and Chelmsford had to strive hard to save the situation arising out of it. Upset at the short-sightedness and insolent behaviour of O'Dwyer who had dared to encroach on his domain, the Governor-General pulled up O'Dwyer. The next day, he wrote to O'Dwyer:

"I think you perhaps scarcely realise the effect produced by your speech yesterday and the position of embarrassment in which you have thereby placed the Government of India.... Throughout India a political truce was in effect proclaimed and press and politicians gave proof of their desire to...

31. The Round Table, Vol. VIII, December 1917 to September 1918, p. 508.
observe it. In the Imperial Council evidence
was forthcoming that a reasonable spirit would
prevail, when harques referens, you dropped your
speech as a bombshell into their midst..., any
attempt to recreate the peaceful atmosphere, which
you have been destroyed, can now only be made under
peculiarly difficult conditions, and I must remind
you that it is not your "apple-cart" which has been
upset but mine. If you had made such a speech in
your council, at least it would have been made in
your domain. In this case your speech has been made
in my council, and its whole tone and temper runs
counter to the spirit of what I said on september,
32
5th."

O'Dwyer was grievously hurt on receiving this letter, more so
because the Government of India had at the same time ordered
the unconditional release from internment of Mrs. Besant and
her two supporters of the Home Rule movement. He wrote a long
confidential letter to Chelmsford in protest against the two
actions of the Viceroy. He pointed out in a very strong language
that the unconditional release of Mrs. Besant and the attitude
of Government of India towards his remarks in the debate of the
13 September rendered the position of his Government "difficult
and delicate". He did not stop there but went on to scold

32. Chelmsford Papers, Roll 10, No. 111, Chelmsford to O'Dwyer,
dated 14 September 1917.

33. Ibid., Roll 10, No. 162, O'Dwyer to Chelmsford, dated
20/21 September 1917.
the Government of India for adopting a lenient attitude towards the extremists in Indian politics:

"For some months... there has been indications that the policy of the Government of India is changing and there is a growing desire to conciliate the extremists by direct negotiations with their leaders, rather than to back up local governments in their efforts to rally the moderates. My speech was intended as a reminder to those provinces where the Home Rule and Passive Resistance cry was in the air to realise the gravity of times, do their duty and bear an adequate share of the Imperial burden. Punjab's praise was to rally more forces to arms."

In the same letter he further said:

"I do venture to urge that the influence and authority of all local Governments will be seriously shaken by the two announcements of yesterday, and in particular by Government of India's action in Mrs. Besant's case. Extremists are giving out that they are able to influence the Government of India from Home, that it is they, and not the Local Governments, that are employed by the Government of India to negotiate with Mrs. Besant and Mahmood Ali & Co. Their suggestion is that they are the power behind the throne."

34. Chelmsford Papers, Roll 19, No. 167, 2nd Year to Chelmsford, dated 20/21 September 1917.

35. Ibid.
In the end he combined with the pose of an injured man that the position as prevailing then had been brought about by the Government of India and it was not only discouraging the loyal supporters who considered themselves ignored, but was also a serious menace to local governments for want of support from the Government of India. To emphasise his resentment against the Government of India, he wrote that he be relieved of his post if that served the government's interests.

It was not in the interest of the Government of India to lose a man like O'Dwyer who was otherwise efficient at that critical juncture of the war. Therefore, Chelmsford adopted a conciliatory line and tried to pacify him. On 23 September 1917, he wrote to O'Dwyer:

"I cannot help thinking that you are building a very strong indictment against us on what is really a slender case.... Resent will be less harmful on the whole out than in. We are fortified in the course we took by assurances from leading politicians that she would not, if released, indulge in violent or unconstitutional methods of agitation, that they would use their influence to prevent her doing so, and that they would disavow her if she persisted.... She since has telegraphed to me that she is ready to cooperate in creating calm atmosphere."

36. Chelmsford Papers, Roll 19, No. 102, O'Dwyer to Chelmsford, dated 20/11 September 1917.

37. Ibid., Roll 19, No. 101, Chelmsford to O'Dwyer, dated 23 September 1917.
Chelmsford explained to O'Dwyer that the need of the hour was not to underrate the power of extremists in Indian politics but to deal with them with utmost tact and caution. He wrote:

"I should point out that the power of the extremist leaders to create difficulties and disturbances is considerable, and that it is surely our business to obviate them, if possible, particularly in view of the war."

Chelmsford then discussed matters personally with O'Dwyer to make him reconciled and that was how his vanity was satisfied. The controversy ended in official circle but the event created great apprehension in the rank and file of Indian politicians who were already agitated over his attitude towards political reforms.

O'Dwyer had been of the view, throughout his stay in India, that whatever concessions were to be given should go to the loyalists, princes, notables and the conservative sections of the Indian society and nothing be done to satisfy the aspirations of "educated politicians". In his opinion it was the only logical way of maintaining the British Empire in India. His plea was to rally the loyal forces by throwing out dices to them and crushing the opponents of British rule in India with an iron hand.

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33. Chelmsford Papers, Roll 18, No. 131, Chelmsford to O'Dwyer, dated 23 September 1917.
The Punjab Administration, led by O'Moyer, had manifested hostility toward politically-conscious class in more than one way. It had banned the entry of national leaders like Tilak and B.C. Pal in the Punjab and had used the restrictive provisions of the Press Act and Defence of India Act with a severity unknown in the rest of India. It believed that by acting in the manner it did it would prevent national consciousness making a stronghold in the province.

The five long years of O'Moyer's rule of the Punjab, had exhausted the Punjabi patience. They first showed it in a big way, at the Punjab Provincial Conference held at Amritsar in July 1913. That was presided over by Buni Chand, a barrister of Lahore. Lala Jankya Lal was the Chairman of the Reception Committee. Dr. Kitchlew, Pandit Rambhaj Dutt and Kotu Mal took a prominent part in making the conference a success. The session was marked by the clear desire of the Punjabis to broadcast the suppressed feelings of the province to the outside world.

The speeches delivered in the conference were characterised by a bitterness of language which was probably unprecedented in the Punjab, and certainly had great effect.

43. The Tribune, 30 July 1913, p.1.
44. GOI-Home-Pol-Deposit-September 1913-Pro. No. 40, p.17.
in creating the idea that however powerful an alien government might be it should be openly defied when national issues were at stake. This transformation in their thinking was in the main due to the policies of O'Dwyer during the war. A few passages from the Presidential address would indicate the direction in which the wind then blew in the Punjab. Commenting upon the Montagu-Chelmsford Report, then just published, he said:

"The fetish of an efficient bureaucracy pluming itself on the achievement of good Government, connoting really, in the words of a most brilliant Empire-builder the late Earl Croke — 'the continuance of their own suppleness' is continuously and uniformly worshipped throughout the report, and wherever the question of self-Government is taken up, obstacles are put in the way of an effective transfer of power into the hands of the people and their representatives. False issues are raised and wholly erroneous theories propounded about the inexperience in the art of Government of a people whose ancestors were founders of great empires."

And again:

"Do Lord Chelmsford and Sir Montagu offer to the people of India a site even of unrestricted

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opportunity to carve out their own future and live their lives as they desire? I emphatically say, no.
that they propose to give is just that a subaltern
manager of Court of Ward's in this country does
sometimes propose for his ward on his attaining the
time of majority, namely that he should be placed in
charge of the stables... what they propose is just
the old despotism with the bureaucratic rule more
irresponsible and more certified."

In criticizing the proposals in the Bill for raising the Punjabs
from a Lieutenant Governor's province to that of governor's,
Gulam Isal said:

"Instead of a Lt.-Governor, you might have some
in Michael Dwyer as your Governor. This is too
horrid to think of particularly as a substantial
part of the reforms coming in redemption of the
pledge of August 20."

Towards the end of his speech, while dealing with the existing
political situation in India, Gulam Isal said:

"Today when India wants to consider calmly and
coolly a reform scheme that is going to affect
her destiny vitally, the tables are turned upon
her, and the untried bureaucratic reform is an un-
English method of governing the natives and mulattoes

47. C Bose-Foul-Feb.-February 1900-Pro. No. 391; quoted in the
Memorandum submitted by the Government of India to the
Nizam's Inquiry Committee, part II.


49. C Bose-Foul-Feb.-February 1900-Pro. No. 391; quoted in the
Memorandum submitted by the Government of India to the
Nizam's Inquiry Committee, part II.
the tongues of Constitutional workers. The quackery of hurried violence dissembling as law and order again comes to the front and a brazen faced attempt is made to drag on into servile silence educated men armoured with modern ideas."

The speaker went on to say that spiritual India would interpret those attacks on individual liberty in the terms of naked Prussianism*, and appealed to the Viceroy "to follow Tolstoi and to take immediate order with those of his subordinate pro-consuls, who are abusing the Defence of India Act under the guise of law and order". He appealed to his audience to make it clear to the Viceroy that "our cup of disappointment, discontent and misery, in the Punjab at any rate, is full to overflowing". As regards the report of the Rowlatt Commission (which had been published in the heels of Montagu-Chelmsford report), he said that it was impossible to speak in terms of restraint of "this Prussian document". He concluded his speech by quoting the saying "United we stand, divided we fall".

That was not the voice, on the eve of the Armistice, of one man but of the whole educated class, then politically astir, as also of a large section of the ignorant masses.

No sooner the hostilities ceased on the European front with the signing of the Armistice than the whole attention of

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the Punjabis got diverted to the pitiable plight to which the British had reduced them. The instantaneous impact of the Armistice was that all the grievances of the people now sought openings in the main stream of national politics. This became particularly evident towards the end of 1918 when Congress and Muslim League sessions were held simultaneously at Delhi, so close to the Punjab.

Generally speaking, the objectives of the Congress and League sessions were the same: to arouse the common man and push him forward for action by apprising him of the reality of the time and acquainting him with the burning topics of the day, especially the questions of political reforms, despotic ways of Punjab bureaucracy and the Rowlatt Legislation then under active consideration of the government. This is evident both from the speeches made in the sessions and resolutions passed there.

The session of the All-India Congress was held under the Presidency of Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya. The most prominent features of this session were:

(a) the adoption of the extremist policy regarding the Reforms Scheme, including a demand for full and immediate Provincial autonomy. Speakers like Mrs. Besant and Sri Nivasa Shastri who advocated a more moderate line received an extremely cold reception.

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(b) the close rapport between Hindus and Muhammadans. There were joint debates between the Council of the League and the Working Committee of the Congress.

The All-India Muslim-League passed a number of resolutions on similar lines to those of the Congress. For example it insisted on India's rights to self-determination, and subjects of special interest to Indian Muhammadans, such as the desirability of maintaining the integrity of the holy places, the Caliphate, the Turkish peace terms and the release of Muslim internees. An unusual feature of the League meeting this time was the participation of a large number of women.

The most striking speech in the League session was delivered by Dr. H.A. Ansari, a physician of Delhi and Chairman of the Reception Committee, on the threatened dismemberment of the Turkish Empire and the abolition of the Caliphate. He severely criticised in the course of his speech the King of the Hedjaz, who was at that time an ally of the British. Ansari described the King of Hedjaz as a truthteller to the unquestioned Caliph of Islam. The speaker quoted numerous texts from the Koran to show how it was not only lawful but incumbent for all true Muhammadans to use force against a rebel of that kind. The attitude of the Government officials towards Muhammadans during the four years of the war was described by Ansari as "varying..."
from bias against them to antipathy, suspicion, mistrust and even dislike". He described the Indian Mahomedans "as having been subjected to a treatment which no self-respecting people would have tolerated."

Dr. Ansari's speech created big excitement and when the newspapers and pamphlets reported it, they were immediately prescribed under the Press Act by the Punjab Government. If the government's intention was to obliterate the effect of Dr. Ansari's speech it failed. Actually far from diminishing the influence of that speech the Government action increased it at a time when the discontent from other causes was already very great.

The Government of India had watched the growing tide of peoples' discontent and the excitement flowing therewith during the war with great apprehension. It had, however, hoped that after the war, with its hands free, it would easily tackle the frayed tempers and the excited feelings of the people.

During the war, the Government had itself created excitement among the people and used that excitement to serve the Imperial interest but that exigency was over after the war. Now the excited state of peoples' mind was regarded as detrimental to the interest

57. GOV-Home-Pol-Deposit-February 1919-Pro. No. 42, para 12.
of the British administration in India. Its problems after the Armistice were to obliterate the political impact of the war upon India, to keep her safe for Britishers, and to drive back the Indians' thinking to the pre-war grooves of servility.

It was necessary to tackle the problems urgently because the drastic powers which the administration had possessed then under war legislations were to expire after six months of the armistice. The Government knew very well that the atmosphere was surcharged with excitement and the post-war reforms for India were still not in sight; the extremist section of Indian politicians were utterly dissatisfied with the proposed reforms which were far below their expectations and their utterances were adding to the excitement. The Government of India, therefore, thought of substituting the war-time legislation with an equally stringent peace-time law to deal with the post-war situation.

It does not mean, however, that the Government of India thought of such a scheme only after the war. The Government was, indeed already well prepared for it before the war had come to an end. The Government had envisaged the post-war situation even when the war was on and had devised ways and means to tackle it. It had appointed a Sedition Committee (popularly known as the Rowlatt Committee after the name of its President—

36. India in 1919, pp. 21-22.
37. Chalmsford Papers, Roll I, No. 37, Chalmsford to His Majesty the King - Emperor, dated 21 May 1919.
Mr. Justice S.A.T. Rowlatt) in December 1917 for that purpose. This Committee sat in camera and submitted its report on 15 April 1918 which was published in a censored form later in July 1918.

The Rowlatt Report and circumstances connected with it proved most distasteful to the politically-conscious people of India. They had looked upon the appointment of the Rowlatt Committee soon after the August Declaration and the timing of submission and publication of its report to synchronise with that of the Montagu-Chelmsford Report, as clever moves on the part of the British Government to make a mockery of the much-publicised reforms envisaged in the Declaration of August 1917. Indian nationalists were further embittered on noticing in Rowlatt Report a calculated travesty of India's struggle for freedom. In their eyes the report was "politically and socially biased".

In the Rowlatt Report, facts and figures had been marshalled in such a manner as to project the image of India's freedom movement as a sum-total of dacoities, robberies, arson and murders. It had argued that the politically-conscious middle-class was the source of all trouble. It had contained passages in which the Chitpavanas of Maharashtra, Bhdralokas of Bengal and the warrior Sikhs of the Punjab had been deliberately insulted. The Report was a thesis written to

60. Sedition Committee Report 1912, p. i.
61. Ibid., p. 111.
prove that the Indian nationalists were anarchists of the worst order and as much a danger to society as to law and order in India. It had argued that the existing law was not adequate for dealing with such criminals. Much influenced by the working of the Defence of India Act and the Rules made thereunder, and the salutary effect produced by them, the Report had concluded that the chief requirement of the situation was the strengthen- ing of the Executive permanently by arming it with similar powers as they had temporarily acquired under the Defence of India Act.

It was on the basis of this report that the Government framed two Bills to substitute war regulations and published them in an Extraordinary Gazette of India on 18 January 1919.

The more important of the two Bills, the Emergency Power Bill, was framed to provide for expeditious trial of zealous Indian nationalists by special courts, with no right of appeal. Although in theory this procedure was to be brought into operation at the discretion of the Governor-General, in practice the initiative was always to come from the local governments. It was actually laid down in the Bill that in an area where nationalist activities prevailed, "the local government was to have powers to order persons whom it believed to be actively concerned in such a movement, to furnish security, to reside

65. Ibid., pp. 210-11.
66. The other bill was dropped later because its necessity had ceased for government.
in a particular place, or to abstain from any specified act". The local governments were also given powers to arrest persons believed to be connected with such active patriots and to confine them in such places and under such conditions as the authorities deemed fit. The Bill also provided for continued detention of those active nationalists who were already behind the bars.

A storm of indignation followed the publication of the Bills. The Indians looked upon them as an unlawful device to crush the nationalist spirit then increasing among the Indian youth. They looked at its timing and the wording as an insult and a challenge to their self-respect. It was in their eyes a clear attempt of the bureaucracy to crush the Indians with a heavy hand. If the Bill was to become an Act, as intended, they felt confident that they would be treated like robbers and dacoits, in fact worse. Even dacoits and robbers could hear the evidences given against them and could appeal against the judgement of lower court, but the Indian patriots were to be deprived of that right. The members of the bureaucracy were themselves to be complainants, witnesses and judges and their victims were to have no say in their own defence.

As soon as the Bills were published, the Indian nationalist Press, realizing its duty, protested vehemently against

the repressive and high-handed policy of the government
reflected in the Bills. It warned the bureaucrats that the
measures, if adopted, would produce consequences which would
be remembered as "a blot on the fair name of the Britishers." 70

The nationalist Press, while communicating the people's
mood to their leaders also suggested to them the ways and means
to face the ordeal. Indian leaders were exhorted to prepare

70. D.L.C.E., Vol. VI, pp. 236-37: Extracts from various
newspapers are quoted. Few of them, for example, are
as under:

* The Young Patriot from Nagpur (20 January 1919) in its
columns told the Government:

"If in spite of the country's protest the measures are
passed into law, it would be the greatest political
blunder which the bureaucracy had ever committed in the
history of British rule."

And again voiced its indignation on 29 January when it
wrote:

"If the Bill is passed into law, a new era will set in
the history of India, an era which will slacken all
civilization ... The new law will make honourable exist-
ence as uncertain as life in a plague-infected area."

* The Tribune from Lahore (22 January 1919) while comment-
ing on the Bills remarked that:

"the authorities are making one of the gravest blunders."

* The Amrita Bazar Patrika, from Calcutta (4 February 1919)
compared the law resulting from the bills to Nadirshahi
orders:

"The parallel furnished by history is that of Nadir Shah
(who), on the pretext of some of his soldiers being
killed in the bazar affray, made over the city of Delhi
to the rapine, lust and blood-thirstiness of his brutal
soldiery."
the masses for passive resistance and to boycott the deliberations of Imperial Legislative Council in protest.

This patriotic campaign, set in motion by the nationalist press, was invigorated still more when it met the tirade of hatred and condemnation let loose by the Anglo-Indian Press against Indian nationalism during the same period. As spokesman of the bureaucracy in India, Anglo-Indian Press questioned the integrity of Indian nationalists by quoting chapter and verse from the Rowlatt Report. They cast aspersions upon tested leaders of the Indian nationalist movement in order to belittle or damage their image in public, and openly proclaimed that in view of the findings of the Rowlatt

71. D.L.G.S., Vol. VI, pp. 236-37: The Leader from Lahore (23 January 1919) suggested that Indian leaders should prepare themselves for passive resistance and it should be set on foot in every part of the country. The Commonweal from Madras (31 January 1919) advised that non-official members should leave the Imperial Council Chamber en bloc in protest if the Bills were passed into law. The Desbhaktan another paper from Madras exhorted the people:

"When the law comes into force, true patriots should silently walk to the prison and call out: officers, open the door. We will enter the prison now because we have to do it one day or the other."

and felt sure that

"If the whole of India acts in this manner, the law will be defeated."

Kopari
The renowned Maratha paper (4 February 1919) advised as follows:

"People should agitate on such a large scale as to attract the notice of the big statesmen at the Peace Conference.... Time may come even for the adoption of passive resistance.... People should note the fact beforehand."

72. India in 1919, pp. 22-23.
Committee, Indians were not fit for any political concessions. The Anglo-Indian Press strongly justified the arming of the Executive with the powers as were provided in the Rowlatt Bills. This tirade of the Anglo-Indian press touched the Indian people to the quick.

They felt still more angry when the Association of the Anglo-Indians and the Europeans started collaborating with the recently formed Moderate Party and began scoffing at the extremists. This sudden change in the attitude of Europeans in India towards Indians and their aspirations immediately after the war appeared most amazing and irksome to every self-respecting Indian.

In order to exhibit their anger and dismay the Punjabis began to rally around their leaders in a rapidly increasing number. Protest meetings began to be held day after day.

The government, however, refused to bow before the rising tide of public anger and without caring for the vehement resentment and protests, it introduced the Emergency Powers Bill in the Imperial Legislative Council on 6 February 1919. Heated debate followed and bitter speeches were made by the elected members against the bill. The advocates of the bill changed their tactics. To hoodwink Indian opinion, one


74. The moderates had left the Congress fold and had formed a separate new party after the publication of the Montagu-Chelmsford Report in July 1918, under the tacit patronage of the Government.

75. India in 1919, p. 23.

member after another from the government benches solemnly pledged that the law would only be used for checking political violence, and not the other activities of the political parties, but that could not pacify the nationalist opinion.

Indians had had enough of the British pledges and words. They were not ready to be fooled any more. Non-official members of the Council, representing the Indian opinion, made impassioned speeches against the Bill, exposing the hollowness of the promises by official members.

If the bill was opposed inside the Council Chamber by the elected Indian members, the Indian Press and platform agitated against it outside the chamber. The Bill was depicted by them:

"as proof of the determination to deprive India of her legitimate due, flagrant denial of the promises which had been made to her by responsible statesmen during the course of the war; as an iron fetter upon her future progress, the imposition of which would be intolerable for any patriot to contemplate."

To them, as to the most of the Indians, it looked ironical that repressive legislation of this character was being hurriedly passed while the much awaited Reforms were nowhere in sight. The people were alarmed at the Executive clothing itself "with considerable powers uncontrolled by the Judiciary."

As already indicated, this Bill, together with one which was left out later, was introduced by the government with the purpose of equipping itself with more repressive powers in peace time in order to counter a likely agitation on the part of Indians for radical reforms. That being its intention, the government was not perturbed by the opposition. The Government had, in fact, already envisaged this opposition, and had won over the Moderates, who were secretly strengthening its hands. That is clearly seen in Chelmsford’s letter to His Majesty the King-Emperor in which there is a significant sentence to that effect. It runs as follows:

"I must say that the opposition, while unanimous on the surface was by no means unanimous in reality, for many of the non-official Indian Members expressed privately their conviction that the legislation was necessary, but they felt unable to resist the pressure put upon them to oppose these Bills."

Fortified by the secret understanding with the Moderates, the Government ignored the Extremists. In the words of Chelmsford:

"We felt... that we must face this opposition and consequently passed the Bill by means of official majority."

When the more important of the two Rowlatt Bills was thus passed into law on 18 March 1919 it was for the purpose of

30. Chelmsford Papers, Roll 1, No. 27, Chelmsford to King-Emperor, dated 21 May 1919.
31. Ibid.
challenging the Indian politician of extremist views. "At the
government wanted to pacify, appease, or to soothe public
nerves, it would have certainly given heed to people's voice
and employed more than one conciliatory measure, as was done
during the war, in the wake of the Home Rule movement in 1917.
At no stage of the passage of the Bill, the government yielded
to any substantial amendment suggested in the Council. What-
ever concessions were made by the government to appease the
Indian opinion in the course of the debates were, "all within
the four corners of the Rowlatt Committee's recommendations and
in no sense militated against them".

By passing the Rowlatt Act by the sheer weight of official
majority the government had surely thrown out a gauntlet
to the nationalists. The latter were forced to see that whatever
they might think of their future, the government would not
allow them any say in the administration of the country and was
all out to humiliate them.

The nationalists had no option but to accept the
challenge. They felt sure now that without waging a determined
struggle against the British right, their political aspirations
so intensely aroused during the war would never be fulfilled.
The problem now before them was to decide as to what shape and
direction they should give to their struggle and who should lead
them in that. The solution to these problems was by no means
easy.

33. Chelmsford Papers, Roll 1, No. 27, Chelmsford to King-
Emperor, dated 21 May, 1919.
The extremist politicians, however, soon found a right leader in Gandhi, known for his high ideals and complete selflessness. He was an ascetic of saintly character. Even his opponents respected him. General Smuts, in South Africa, used to visit him in prison to discuss philosophy with him. Gandhi was held in high esteem by all who came across him. His readiness to take up cudgels on behalf of any individual or class, suffering oppression, social or political, had further endeared him to his countrymen.

In selecting Gandhi as their leader at that juncture it seemed for a while as if the extremists had out-manoeuvred the bureaucrats. It became a baffling problem for the government for some time. Chelmsford himself admitted the difficulty. While referring to Gandhi he admitted that Gandhi was a man who had staunch faith in high moral values of life,

"and this fact renders the task of dealing with him much more difficult than if he were a mere agitating politician."

Gandhi had closely watched the political situation in India since the Armistice, and had now come to believe that time had come to experiment with the method of non-violent civil resistance on a national plane. He had already applied that

35. Chelmsford Papers, Roll 1, No. 27, Chelmsford to King-Emperor, dated 21 May 1916.

36. India in 1919, pp. 29-30.

37. Chelmsford Papers, Roll 1, No. 27, Chelmsford to King-Emperor, dated 21 May 1916.
weapon successfully in South Africa, Champaran (Bihar) and Kaira (Gujarat), and this had developed in him ample faith and confidence in the method. Gandhi felt that if violence was used by Indians to wrest power from the hands of the British, the latter would use the tremendous military power of the Empire to crush them and that would demoralise the Indian masses, and the attainment of India's freedom would be delayed for many generations to come.

After passing many sleepless nights in chalking out a plan, Gandhi decided to lead a mass movement to be named as Satyagraha — resistance of a bad law through soul-force. Before the movement began Chelmsford sent for Gandhi and with a view to wean him away from his path warned him that it was "bound to result in disorder and that the unfortunate people who were the dupes of the leaders of the movement would be the people to suffer from it."

Chelmsford might have thought that his plain speaking would discourage Gandhi from starting the movement, but the impression which Chelmsford's warning produced on Gandhi was different. Gandhi was now even more convinced than before that without giving a manly and befitting reply to Britishers' malafide intention, Indians would have no chance of wresting anything.


from their unwilling hands. Gandhi, therefore, started the Satyagraha movement in March 1919 with extraordinary zeal. His first act was the publication of a letter to the press along with the Satyagraha vow which he had taken a few days before with some of his selected colleagues.

Apparently it looked as if the Satyagraha movement was started to persuade the government to withdraw the Rowlatt Bills, but in reality Gandhi had the greater cause of the country in his mind. The choice of the time by him for starting the Satyagraha on a country-wide scale speaks highly of his statesmanship and far-sightedness. His political skill also lay in converging all the divergent forces, then existing in the country, to a point so that a mighty upsurge would result from it.

Gandhi threw himself heart and soul into the campaign. Despite his precarious health he made a whirlwind tour of Delhi, United Provinces, Bombay and Madras Presidencies in order to see things for himself and to guide the movement.

Gandhi had a perfect grasp of mass-psychology of the Indian people. He knew that they would not be stirred up through secular discourses alone. He, therefore, gave his


93. *Ibid.*, pp. 126-131; He was so weak and feeble that at places his speeches were delivered by others on his behalf.
movement a religious colour. He made appeals to their religious sentiments and asked them to realise their dharma (religious duty) towards their motherland at the time of unprecedented peril.

At the same time while expounding the gospel of satyagraha to the ignorant multitude, Gandhi very carefully made the people understand the true import of non-violence in the growth of healthy politics of a nation. He exhorted them again and again that non-violence was the heart and soul of the movement, and, if people wavered from that principle at any step, it would be a sad day for them. Gandhi was very sincere when he tried to explain that any kind of violence from the side of people would mean playing in the hands of government.

People on their part became ardent followers of Gandhi and accorded him warm reception wherever he went. Although Gandhi could not get an early opportunity of visiting the Punjab, educated people and the masses in this part of the country, specially in the towns, showed unusual enthusiasm in his programme.