Chapter V

GERMANY AND THE INDIAN REVOLUTIONARIES

The significance of Germany for the purposes of the Indian revolutionary propaganda was that it constituted the focal point around which international diplomacy was developing in the course of the first decade of the present century. The Indian revolutionaries viewed the position of Germany as conducive to the promotion of their ideological interest, and though yet belonging to a subject country, they considered themselves free to exploit the situation by an attempt to enter into diplomatic relations with a country such as Germany which was at the time emerging as by far the strongest force among the axis powers.

There was nothing new in their alliance with Germany. England or any other country would have resorted to the same policy in times of need. Theirs was just a form of secret alliance quite familiar to European nations, where national ambitions and imperialistic designs reigned supreme, precipitating crisis in world affairs. The kind of alliance planned by them was guided by considerations of expediency. None of the parties involved showed any respect or regard for the recognised code of the chancery.

The Indian revolutionaries had closely watched the rivalries which were gradually developing amongst great powers prior to the world war. It was anticipated that the clash of interest might lead to serious conflicts between England and
Germany and that they were clear in their mind about the countries which could help them in such a situation. They recognized Germany as a country hostile to England. Her statesmen were naturally interested in any and every activity that tended to weaken Britain, especially the Indian nationalist movement, which aimed at full freedom. It was hoped that in the event of England getting involved in the war, her power would be weakened by an uprising in India. Thus on both sides there was lively diplomatic speculations, based primarily on their mutual interest which lay in the destruction of a common enemy. None of the parties in the alliance cared to assess the real state of affairs in India.

From the very beginning Indian revolutionary groups followed in the footsteps of other nations for securing the active assistance of an outside power in times of crisis. For many years like the Irish revolutionaries they had believed, that England's difficulty would be India's opportunity. Even the Government of India on the eve of the war suspected that war was likely to be taken advantage of by the Indian revolutionaries and they were sure to join the enemies of the Empire. In the event of war with Germany specially, they might think they could reckon on German sympathy.*

1. Memoranda on the Internal Situation in India on the Eve of the War, Chamberlain Papers.

Besides the Indian revolutionaries, the Irish nationalists also had a similar belief and on the outbreak of the war approached the German Government for arms and ammunition for (contd. on next page)
As early as 1909 Madame Cama had considered Berlin as the safest place from where the revolutionaries could carry on their propaganda without hindrance. She had also advocated the cultivation of friendly relations with Germany which was likely to be of great advantage to the cause of Indian independence. Her lecturing tour of Germany also brought some awareness of the Indian question in that country. During 1909 Chattopadhyaya went to Germany and started the publication of a paper Tavur from Berlin, with the aim of conducting anti-British propaganda and to enlist the support and sympathy of the Germans for the emancipation of India.

During these years, the Indian revolutionaries on the Continent had an inkling that within a comparatively short time Germany and England would be at war. That would be the time, in their opinion, when India should throw off the British yoke and the revolutionaries should be ready when the time arrived. Their belief was that with England fighting for life in the West, India would not encounter very serious resistance in the East. In the same year many German delegates offered help and sympathy at the Egyptian Nationalist Congress to the Indian revolutionaries.

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creating a revolution in their country and to overthrow the British Government. For details about Irish nationalists and Germany during the war see Dennis Gwyn, The Life and Death of Roger Casement (London, n.d.).


After the formation of the Ghadr Party in the United States, its organ Ghadr started publishing news about the coming war. The British investigations conducted later on revealed that the visit of the great German writer Bernhardi to San Francisco in 1913 resulted in articles in Ghadr in which Har Dayal showed that he had awareness of the coming war with Germany. If the Indian revolutionaries were keen to align with Germany, the German Government was equally eager to cultivate their friendship. By 1907, when the Indian revolutionary movement was at its apex, the Government of India suspected that it was getting help and encouragement from foreign powers and especially from Germany. However, they were not sure about the extent of help, as the "machinery for finding out the truth in such matters was inadequate." In the same year the Director of Criminal Intelligence reported about German agents who were distributing seditious pamphlets amongst the tribal chiefs on the north-west frontier.

4. San Francisco Call, 2 October 1915. Foreign Office, 115/1908/1914. In the very first issue of the Ghadr dated 1 November 1913, under the heading "Germany and Ireland will unite; Germany will make war on England," it was mentioned "when the war breaks out between Germany and England fortune will smile on those nations that are now being ruined through English oppression. Indians should be on the look out for this opportunity, lest this auspicious hour should come and pass without a rising in India." Quoted in J.C. Ker, Op. cit., p. 126.

5. Note W. Malleson, 7 May 1907. Foreign Department, Frontier, Confidential B, 1907, No. 17.

6. H.A. Stuart note 13 June 1907. Ibid.
Besides Europe the Indian revolutionaries in New York were also trying to form an alliance with the German socialists. At the same time Morley informed Minto that the German ambassador in the United States was sending alarming reports to his Government of the Indian nationalist movement on the Pacific Coast. There is no doubt that the German statesmen took keen interest in the development of political situation in India, which they could see would increase England's difficulties in case of a war in Europe. Discussing the position of Germany and analysing the alignment of the powers, Bernhardi wrote in 1911 that besides the rivalry of the United States, England had to face another danger that threatened her vitality. "This was," the author said, was "due to the nationalist movement in India and Egypt." He particularly referred to the pronounced revolutionary and nationalist tendencies amongst the Hindus and the growth of the Pan-Islamic agitation among Indian Mohammedans, a combination between which might, in his opinion, shake Britain's high position in the world. In March 1914 the Berlin Tageblatt referred to the secret revolutionary societies in India which were spreading their activities with outside help. But before

7. Weekly report D.C.I., 1 August 1908, Home Political B, September 1908, Nos. 49-58.
8. Morley to Minto, 23 April 1908, Morley Papers.
the war, the German Foreign Office gave no substantial help to the Indian revolutionaries. Perhaps, Germany was under the impression that India would need very little extraneous prompting and assistance to rise against the British if the latter were in difficulty owing to a big Continental war. It was because of this that "not much attention was paid by the German Government to instigation in India before the war". Similarly the Indian revolutionaries who were trying to enlist the sympathy of Germany, never asked for any concrete assistance before the war. But the alliance did mature on the outbreak of the war. Whether the Indian revolutionaries and German statesmen were right or wrong in their estimate of the revolutionary elements in India, it may not be possible to say but both were confident that England and Germany were fast heading towards a conflict and the Indian revolutionaries might utilise this opportunity to overthrow the British power and thereby deal a fatal blow to England's high position in the Orient.

Har Doyal left the United States in March 1914 with the intention of approaching the German Government for support during the coming war for the purpose of forging a successful revolution in India. Har Doyal went to Switzerland, where he joined the Pro-India Society started by Champakaram Pillai in Zurich in 1912. The reports of the British intelligence show that Har Doyal

10. Interview with Charles Cleveland, Director, Criminal Intelligence, as reported by Dewit Mackenzie, Op.Cit., p. 118.
was busy organising an Indo-Egyptian revolutionary congress to be held at Zurich in August 1914, with the object of bringing all the Indian revolutionaries at one place and to decide about the future programme of work. The Pro-India Society also brought out a journal called Pro-India in which it was propagated that the Indian revolutionaries in Europe should join hands with Germany since "the fate of the world was in Germany's hands" and she would "set the Indians free".

Naturally after the outbreak of the war, there was a great deal of activity amongst the Indian revolutionaries. Some of them went to Constantinople to enlist the cooperation of the Turks. Prasatha Barth Butt alias Dawood Ali Khan sent information from Constantinople to Madame Gama and Pillai that the Turks were very sympathetic towards the Indian revolutionary movement. In his view Turkey would prove a safe asylum for Indian political

11. Weekly Report D.C.I. 23 June 1914. Home Political B, July 1914, Nos. 124-28. The Pro-India Society also known as International Pro-Indian Committee, had Champakaram Pillai as President, Dr. Edward Briass as Vice-President, while Walter Strickland, Krishnavarma and Karl Kleibtreu were assessors. Ker, op.cit., p. 264. The committee was formed with the intention of influencing the German speaking world and to come closer to Germany. Har Dayal also lent his full support to the society and especially sent his thanks from Gatard to the non-Hindu colleagues whose donation had really made possible the existence of the journal. In the same letter Har Dayal expressed his wish to have a "banquet" revolutionaire at Zurich, Har Dayal to C.R. Pillai 31 May 1914. Home Political 3/V/1914.

refugees and recommended that an anti-British centre might be established there. Accordingly Har Dayal considered it worthwhile to pay a visit to Constantinople to find out whether Turkey could be utilised during the war in the cause of India's freedom.

On the outbreak of the war, the Indian revolutionaries whether they were in the United States or in Europe hoped for active collaboration with Germany in their programme of overthrowing the British Government in India. With this aim in view they approached the German Consulates in their respective places.

In the beginning of September 1914, Pillai called at the German Consulate-General at Zurich and gave him an outline of the programme of the Indian revolutionaries. The latter promised to communicate this to his Government and also to obtain permission to publish anti-British literature in Germany.

But the actual negotiations with the German Foreign Office for getting active help were conducted by Virendranath Chattopadhyaya and Dr Abhinash Chandra Bhattacharya. They placed before the German Foreign Office concrete proposals in which they asked for a national loan, to be repaid on the achievement of Indian independence. They also sought arms and German assistance for Indian

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12A. Ibid.

revolutionaries working in different countries. Further they asked the German Foreign Office to make arrangement for the despatch of Indians to India to give training to them in the manufacture and application of explosives, to provide assistance for the publication of statements, circulars and leaflets to be issued by them from time to time and to broadcast them if possible. Concrete efforts were to be made to send arms, ammunition and other necessaries with German help. The whole work was to be guided by an Indo-German Committee to be formed. Abhinash Bhattacharya through his contacts arranged a meeting between Chattopadhyaya and Baron Von Berthein of the German Foreign Office. Chattopadhyaya then had a meeting with Baron Oppenheim. As a result of these meetings, a telegram was sent to Har Dayal at Constantinople on 21 September 1914 to come immediately to Berlin for the settlement of the terms with the German Foreign Office.

By the end of September, a preliminary understanding was reached between the two parties and an Indian Committee was set up. Har Dayal had not come by this time and another telegram was sent requesting him to start immediately for Berlin. The four

leading members of the Committee at the time of its formation were Champakaraman Pillai, Virendranath Chattopadhyaya, Dr. Mareshwar Govindra Prabhakar and Dr. Abdul Hafiz. Har Dayal joined the party by the beginning of January 1915. Other Indian revolutionaries who subsequently became active members of this organisation were Tarak Nath Das, Mohammed Barkatullah, Chandra Kanta Chakravarty, Harambalal Gupta, Bhupendranath Datta and Tirumal Acharya.

It has already been mentioned that on the outbreak of the war the Ghadr Party started preparations for despatching their workers to India with the aim of creating a revolution in the country. Barkatullah informed Har Dayal about this move and also explained that in order to expedite the work of bringing about a successful revolution in India, it was essential to get German help. Barkatullah requested Har Dayal to borrow necessary funds from his German friends and hoped that his presence in Berlin at that time would enable him to solve the financial problem without loss of time. Barkatullah further referred to the enthusiasm shown by the Indians both in the United States and in Canada to support their country's cause with money as well as life. But there is hardly any evidence to show that the German

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17. Ker, op. cit., p. 265. The Committee formed in Berlin was known as Indian Independence Committee, also called the Indian National Party, but were popularly known as Berlin Indian National Committee. (Hereafter referred to as Berlin Committee).

Foreign Office took any serious notice of this letter from Barkatullah or made any effort to assist the returning Ghadrites in forging a revolution in India.

When the Berlin Committee was formed its function was to advise the German Foreign Office and to devise methods of damaging the prestige of England. In the initial stages it served as a sort of oriental translation bureau that translated German news and other literature into oriental languages for distribution among the Indian prisoners of war in the Middle East and for dissemination by means of aircraft among the Indian troops on the front. The Committee produced large quantities of revolutionary literature and established propaganda centres at different places in Europe and the Middle East. Literary propaganda was also considered necessary to counteract the

19. Before the formation of the Indian National Party, the German Government constituted a committee on 3 September 1914 known as the German Union of Friendly India, with Herr Albericht as President, Baron Oppenheim and Sukhthasaker, Vice-Presidents and Dhiren Sarkar as Secretary. R.C. Majumdar, op.cit., pp. 213-14. A.C. Bhattacharya, however, holds that the Committee formed on 7th September 1914 was known as 'The German Society of the Friends of India', with Herr Albericht Ballen, the General manager of the Hamburg-America Steamer Line as its President, Herr Baron Von Oppenheim and Dr Sukhthasaker as Vice-Presidents and Dhiren Sarkar as Secretary. Dr Muller was appointed liaison officer. A.C. Bhattacharya, op.cit.

20. War Office memorandum on German Literary propaganda as regards India and the Orient. Home Political Deposit, December 1916, no. 30. The Berlin Committee devoted much attention to propaganda against the British Government and by the middle of 1916 the Government of India prepared a list of nearly 82 leaflets and pamphlets published by them. Ibid.
statements which were being issued by the British and were in
circulation in Germany and other countries. The other aim of the
propaganda was to enlist the sympathies of the educated classes
in Germany for the Indian people by projecting before them the
correct picture about India.

During the first few months of its existence the Berlin
Committee was engaged mainly in the task of flooding the world
with pamphlets on India and was setting up agencies in almost all
the neutral countries for the distribution of its literature.
The Committee was also busy with the question of deciding "who
among the Indians in Germany should be interned and who should
be enrolled as members to work against Britain in Germany and
elsewhere". It was only towards the end of December 1914 that
the Berlin Committee submitted their scheme for working in active
collaboration with the Ghadr Party in America "in order to carry
into effect all the plans in connection with the prospective
revolution in India".

Dhirendranath Sarkar along with N.S. Marathe was sent to
the United States by the Berlin Committee with instructions to
send young men to India and to inform the Indians there that German
help was coming. They also carried a letter from the German

   Home Political B, June 1915, Nos. 549-52.
23. German Foreign Office Records, Roll No. 397.
Foreign Secretary for the German Ambassador in the United States was asked to pay them dollars equivalent to 25,000 marks.

The Berlin Committee knew that the work in the United States was not proceeding properly on account of financial and other difficulties. A telegram received from German representative in Washington at this time contained a request that the Ghadr Party wanted an agent from Berlin who could organise the and could help in the importation of arms to India. Perhaps, it was on the basis of this telegram that the Berlin Committee asked permission of the German Foreign Office to send a man with good judgment, business capacity and full information about the whole movement as well as a perfect knowledge of the American situation who was to be entrusted with the selection of the people and the coordination of the work in America. The German Foreign Office was requested to sanction 100,000 marks of which 50,000 each were to be placed at the disposal of the German Consuls in New York and San Francisco for the purchase of arms. Immediately after the acceptance of the proposal Alfred Zimmermann, the German Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, sent a telegram to Von Bernstorff, the German ambassador in the United States, saying

A confidential agent of the Berlin Committee Heramba Lal Gupta is shortly leaving for America in order to organise the importation of arms and the conveyance of Indians, now residents in the United States to India. He is provided with definite instructions. You could please place at his disposal the sum which he requires for this purpose in America, at Shanghai and Batavia viz. 1,50,000 Marks. 27

In a supplementary message Von Bernstoff was directed to speed up in conjunction with H.L. Gupta the training of the Indian revolutionaries in the use of explosives.

The Berlin Committee, however, missed the opportunity offered by the first three months of the war of helping the thousands of Indians who returned from America. It was announced as early as October 1914 at a meeting in California that assurance of German help had been received, but in the actual execution of the February Revolution in India, the signs of German assistance according to the reports of the British intelligence were few and far between. The returning emigrants, according to the same report, approached German Consulates at various ports and received advice and possibly also money and arms, but it is impossible to believe that the attempt made by the Indian revolutionaries for a revolution in the Punjab in February 1915 was in any way supported by Germany. The movement was in fact planned and carried out before the German Secret Service or the Berlin Committee had time to get into touch

with the leaders and assume control.

The Berlin Indian Committee was attached to the German General Staff with its headquarters at 28 Weilandstrasse, Charlottenburg and was under the immediate charge of Baron Wesendonk of the Foreign ministry and functioned under the general supervision of Alfred Zimmermann. The first president of the party was Dr Mansur Ahmed, but actually its work was carried on under the management of a Committee consisting of seven members viz., Har Dayal, Chattopadhyaya, Barkatullah, Dr Abdul Hafiz, N. Datta, Champakaraman Pillai and Dr M.G. Prabhakar. After 

29. Weekly report D.C.I. 17 August 1915. Home Political B, August 1915, Nos. 552-56. Lajpat Rai who was in the United States at that time mentions that the Indians who left the United States in 1914 to organise a rebellion in India were neither financed nor inspired by the Germans. See Lajpat Rai, op. cit., p. 42.

It appears from the intercepted telegrams that the Berlin Committee had full knowledge about the activities of the Ghadr party and were sending messages to the United States for organising the movement and to make preparations for the despatch of arms to India. In November 1914 had asked even for the services of Barkatullah, Bhagwan Singh and Tara Singh at Berlin, but it was only towards the end of December, 1914 that concrete steps could be taken to bring the Ghadr party under its control. See Berlin Committee's proposals for work in America dated December, 1914, C.P.O. 328 Telegraph from Berlin to Washington 11 November 1914, Telegram from Washington to Berlin, 20 November 1914. Home Political F.No. 9/V/1932.

few months the office of the President was abolished when Dr Mansur Ahmed left for Italy. From then onward the Committee functioned collectively. In July 1915 the Committee was given the exclusive Indian complexion and its name was changed to Indian Independence Committee.

After the first failure of the Ghadrites in India in February 1915, the Berlin Committee decided to bring the Indian revolutionaries working at different places under a central control. Steps were taken to contact the revolutionaries in India and to inform them about the despatch of arms and ammunition. Along with this, various schemes based on the actual geographical situation in India were formulated. Attempts were now to be made for a revolt in India by land and by sea, the former from the nearest neutral base, the Dutch East Indies and the latter from the neutral neighbours of India — Siam on the east and Persia and Afghanistan on the north-west. The German Consul in Shanghai was to be in charge of the operation in the Far East. Emissaries were sent to the Far East and the Near East for the successful execution of the various schemes. The members of the Committee visited Indian prisoners of war camps and tried to persuade them to fight against the British. The Indian prisoners of war were mainly confined to the Zossen camp about 12 miles from Berlin, which was under the supervision of Dr Mansur and was frequently

31. Ibid.
visited by Har Dayal, Kartar Ram, Tarek Nath Das. The prisoners were exhorted to rise in rebellion and drive the British out of India. Since majority of the prisoners were Muslims, they were urged to go to Turkey and to fight on the side of their co-religionists. Under the spell of the propaganda, many came forward to join the fight against the British and accompanied Har Dayal to Constantinople.

Before putting the above schemes into operation, the Indian revolutionaries signed an agreement with the German Government. According to a British intelligence report, a treaty was "drawn up between the Indian Committee and the German Government about the beginning of 1915. It bore the signatures of Benthmann Hollweg, Von Jagow, Chattopadhyaya, Har Dayal, Mahendra Pratap and Barkatullah". By the terms of this treaty, the German Government promised that in return for the help given by the Indian Committee, they would do their best, both during and after the war to secure independence for India. Berlin Committee stipulated, however, that all money given to them by Germany was to be repaid after independence. Soon after this agreement the Indian National Party issued a manifesto declaring their aim to achieve freedom for India and their determination not to stop till India was free. Besides the above agreement,

53. Statement of Naik Mohammed Khan, a prisoner of war in Germany. Home Political B, No. 5/1/1918.


35. Appendix IV, A Manifesto of the Indian National Party. Many other pamphlets were brought out by the Berlin Committee, but perhaps the most damaging in its indictment of the British rule was Why India is in Revolt by British Rule (London, 1916).
the Berlin Committee subsequently also asked for a written assurance from the German Foreign Office that "if the Indian Princes and native leaders undertook to wage war against the English for the establishment of an Indian National Government, the German Government was "to extend moral and material help to them in the form of arms and ammunition, financial loans and recognition of the provisional government that may be established by them" and "that the Imperial German Government had no other than commercial and cultural interests in furthering the cause of Indian National Independence". It was one thing for the German Government to sign a secret agreement with the Indian revolutionaries, but it was quite difficult to declare publically their intentions towards the question of Indian independence. Har Dayal persuaded the German Foreign Office to realise that the Indian revolutionaries could be very useful in not only shortening the war but also to extend German trade influences from Berlin-Baghdad railway to Bengal. After great deal of negotiations between the Indian revolutionaries and the German Foreign Office on this issue, the latter at last agreed and Zimmermann gave the desired assurance. About a month after Zimmermann even gave his


37. Chandra Chakravarty, New India (Calcutta, 1940), p. 28.

consent to the formation of secret parliamentary commission which was to advise on Indian affairs to the foreign office. The Berlin Committee was anxious that the question of India's freedom should be accepted as a cardinal principle to be achieved by Germany during the war and the members of Reichstag should be made to release the influence of India and if possible should be interested in the question of India's freedom.