

CHAPTER XV

Struggle for Swaraj

AS we have seen in the previous chapter, a new political situation was maturing during the war years, 1914-18. Nationalism had gathered its forces and the nationalists were expecting major political gains after the war; and they were willing to fight back if their expectations were thwarted. The economic situation in the post-war years had taken a turn for the worse. There was first a rise in prices and then a depression in economic activity. Indian industries, which had prospered during the war because foreign imports of manufactured goods had ceased, now faced losses and closure. The Indian industrialists wanted protection of their industries through imposition of high customs duties and grant of government aid; they realised that a strong nationalist movement and an independent Indian Government alone could secure these. The workers, facing unemployment and high prices and living in great poverty, also turned actively towards the nationalist movement. Indian soldiers, returned from their triumphs in Africa, Asia and Europe, imparted some of their confidence and their knowledge of the wide world to the rural areas. The peasantry, groaning under deepening poverty and high taxation, was waiting for a lead. The urban, educated Indians faced increasing unemployment. Thus all sections of Indian society were suffering economic hardships.

The international situation was also favourable to the resurgence of nationalism. The First World War gave a tremendous impetus to nationalism all over Asia and Africa. In order to win popular support for their war effort, the Allied nations—Britain, the United States, France, Italy, and Japan—promised a new era of democracy and national self-determination to all the peoples of the world. But after their victory, they showed little willingness to end the colonial system. On the contrary, at the Paris Peace Conference, and in the different **peace** settlements, all the war-time promises were forgotten and, in fact, betrayed. The ex-colonies of the defeated powers, Germany and Turkey, in Africa, West Asia, and East Asia were divided among the victorious powers. The people of Asia and Africa were suddenly plunged from high **hopes** into deep despair. Militant, disillusioned nationalism began to **arise**.

Another major consequence of the World War was the erosion of the White man's prestige. The European powers had from the beginning of their imperialism utilised the notion of racial and cultural superiority to maintain their supremacy. But during the war, both sides carried on intense propaganda against each other, exposing the opponent's brutal and uncivilised colonial record. Naturally, the people of the colonies tended to believe both sides and to lose their awe of the White man's superiority.

A major impetus to the national movements was given by the impact of the Russian Revolution. On 7 November 1917, the Bolshevik (Communist) Party, led by V.I. Lenin, overthrew the Czarist regime in Russia and declared the formation of the first socialist state, the Soviet Union, in the history of the world. The new Soviet regime electrified the colonial world by unilaterally renouncing its imperialist rights in China and other parts of Asia, by granting the right of self-determination to the former Czarist colonies in Asia, and by giving an equal status to the Asian nationalities within its border which had been oppressed as inferior and conquered people by the previous regime. The Russian Revolution brought home to the colonial people the important lesson that immense strength and energy resided in the common people. It was the common people who had not only overthrown the mighty Czarist government, the most despotic and one of the most militarily powerful regimes of the day, but also defended the consequent military intervention against the revolution by Britain, France, the United States, and Japan. If the Russian Czar could be toppled, then no regime was invincible. If the unarmed peasants and workers could carry out a revolution against their domestic tyrants, then the people of the subject nations need not despair; they too could fight for their independence provided they were equally well united, organised, and determined to fight for freedom.

Thus the Russian Revolution gave people self-confidence and indicated to the leaders of the national movement that they should rely on the strength of the common people. Bipin Chandra Pal, for example, wrote in 1919;

Today after the downfall of German militarism, after the destruction of the autocracy of the Czar, there has grown up all over the world a new power, the power of the people determined to rescue their legitimate rights—the right to live freely and happily without being exploited and victimised by the wealthier and the so-called higher classes.

The nationalist movement in India was also affected by the fact that the rest of the Afro-Asian world was also convulsed by nationalist agitations after the war. Nationalism surged forward not only* in India but also in Turkey, the Arab Countries of Northern Africa and West Asia, Iran, Afghanistan, Burma, Malaya, Indonesia, Indo-China, the Philippines, China and Korea.

The Government, aware of the rising tide of nationalist and anti-government sentiments, once again decided to follow the policy of the 'carrot and the stick,' in other words, of concessions and repression.

The Montagu-Obelmsford Reforms

In 1918, Edwin Montagu, the Secretary of State, and Lord Chelmsford, the Viceroy, produced their scheme of constitutional reforms which led to the enactment of the Government of India Act of 1919. The Provincial Legislative Councils were enlarged and the majority of their members were to be elected. The provincial governments were given more powers under the system of Dyarchy. Under this system some subjects, such as finance and law and order, were called 'reserved' subjects and remained under the direct control of the Governor; others such as education, public health, and local self-government, were called 'transferred' subjects and were to be controlled by ministers responsible to the legislatures. This also meant that while some of the spending departments were transferred, the Governor retained complete control over the finances. The Governor could, moreover, overrule the ministers on any grounds that he considered special. At the centre, there were to be two houses of legislature, the lower house, the Legislative Assembly, was to have 41 nominated members in a total strength of 144. The upper house, the Council of State, was to have 26 nominated and 34 elected members. The legislature had virtually no control over the Governor- General and his Executive Council. On the other hand, the Central Government had unrestricted control over the provincial governments. Moreover the right to vote was severely restricted. In 1920, the total number of voters was 909,874 for the lower house and 17,364 for the upper house.

Indian nationalists had, however, advanced far beyond such halting concessions. They were no longer willing to let an alien government decide their fitness for self-government, nor would they be satisfied with the shadow of political power. The Indian National Congress met in a special session at Bombay in August 1918 under the presidentship of Hasan Imam to consider the reform proposals. It condemned them as "disappointing and unsatisfactory" and demanded effective self-government instead. Some of the veteran Congress leaders led by Surendranath Banerjea were in favour of accepting the government proposals and left the Congress at this time. They refused to attend the Bombay session, where they would have formed an insignificant minority, and founded the Indian Liberal Federation. They came to be known as Liberals and played a minor role in Indian politics hereafter.

The Rowlatt Act

While trying to appease Indians, the Government of India was ready with repression. Throughout the war, repression of nationalists had continued. The terrorists and revolutionaries had been hunted down, hanged, and imprisoned. Many other nationalists such as Abul Kalam Azad had also been kept behind the bars. The Government now decided to arm itself with more far-reaching powers, which went against the accepted principles of rule of law, to be able to suppress those nationalists who would refuse to be satisfied with the official reforms. In March 1919 It passed the Rowlatt Act even though every single Indian member of the Central Legislative Council opposed it. Three of them, Mohanlal Banerjee, Motilal Nehru, and Madan Mohan Malaviya and Mazhar-ul-Haq resigned their membership of the Council. This Act authorised the Government to imprison any person without trial and conviction in a court of law. The Act would thus also enable the Government to suspend the right of Habeas Corpus which had been the foundation of civil liberties in Britain.

MAHATMA GANDHI ASSUMES LEADERSHIP

The Rowlatt Act came like a sudden blow. To the people of India, promised extension of democracy during the war, the government step appeared to be a cruel joke. It was like a hungry man being offered stones. Instead of democratic progress had come further restriction of civil liberties. People felt humiliated and were filled with anger. Unrest spread in the country and a powerful agitation against the Act arose. During this agitation, a new leader, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, took command of the nationalist movement. The third, and the decisive, phase of Indian nationalism now began.

Gandhiji and His Ideas

M.K. Gandhi was born



Gandhiji

on 2 October 1869 at Porbandar in Gujarat. After getting his legal education in Britain, he went to South Africa to practise law. Imbued with a high sense of justice, he was revolted by the injustice, discrimination, and degradation to which Indians had to submit in the South African colonies. Indian labourers who had gone to South Africa, and the merchants who followed were denied the right to vote. They had to register and pay a poll-tax. They could not reside except in prescribed locations which were insanitary and congested. In some of the South African colonies, the Asians, as also the Africans, could not stay out of doors after 9 p.m.; nor could they use public footpaths. Gandhi soon became the leader of the struggle against these conditions and during 1893-94 was engaged in a heroic though unequal struggle against the racist authorities of South Africa. It was during this long struggle lasting nearly two decades that he evolved the technique of satyagraha based on truth and non-violence. The ideal satyagrahi was to be truthful and perfectly peaceful, but at the same time he would refuse to submit to what he considered wrong. He would accept suffering willingly in the course of struggle against the wrong-doer. This struggle was to be part of his love of truth. But even while resisting evil, he would love the evil-doer. Hatred would be alien to the nature of a true satyagrahi. He would, moreover, be utterly fearless. He would never bow down before evil whatever the consequence. In Gandhi's eyes, non-violence was not a weapon of the weak and the cowardly. Only the strong and the brave could practise it. Even violence was preferable to cowardice. In a famous article in his weekly journal, *Young India*, he wrote in 1920 that "Non-violence is the law of our species, as violence is the law of the brute", but that "where there is only a choice between cowardice and violence, I would advise violence ____ I would rather have India resort to arms in order to defend her honour, than that she should, in a cowardly manner, become or remain a helpless witness to her own dishonour." He once summed up his entire philosophy of life as follows:

The only virtue I want to claim is truth and non-violence. I lay no claim to super human powers: I want none.

Another important aspect of Gandhi's outlook was that he would not separate thought and practice, belief and action. His truth and non-violence were meant for daily living and not merely for high sounding speeches and writings.

Gandhi returned to India in 1915 at the age of 46. He was keen to serve his country and his people. He first decided to study Indian conditions before deciding the field of his work. In 1916 he founded the Sabarmati Ashram at Ahmedabad where his friends and followers were to learn and practise the ideals of truth and non-violence. Champaran Satyagraha (1917)

Gandhi's first great experiment in Satyagraha came in 1917 in Champaran, a district in Bihar. The peasantry on the indigo plantations in the district was excessively oppressed by the European planters. They were compelled to grow indigo on at least 3/20th of their land and to sell it at prices fixed by the planters. Similar conditions had prevailed earlier in Bengal, but as a result of a major uprising during 1859-61 the peasants there had won their freedom from the indigo planters.

Having heard of Gandhi's campaigns in South Africa, several peasants of Champaran invited him to come and help them. Accompanied by Babu Rajendra Prasad, Mazhar-ul-Huq, JB. Kripalam, and Mahadev Desai, Gandhi reached Champaran in 1917 and began to conduct a detailed inquiry into the condition of the peasantry. The infuriated district officials ordered him to leave Champaran, but he defied the order and was willing to face trial and imprisonment. This forced the Government to cancel its earlier order and to appoint a committee of inquiry on which Gandhi served as a member. Ultimately, the disabilities from which the peasantry was suffering were reduced and Gandhi had won his first battle of civil disobedience in India. He had also had a glimpse into the naked poverty in which the peasants of India lived.

Ahmedabad Mill Strike

In 1918, Mahatma Gandhi intervened in a dispute between the workers and millowners of Ahmedabad. He undertook a fast unto death to force a compromise. The millowners relented on the fourth day and agreed to give the workers 35 per cent increase in wages. He also supported the peasants of Khairia in Gujarat in their struggle against the collection of land revenue when their crops had failed. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel left his lucrative practice at the Bar at this time to help Gandhi.

These experiences brought Gandhi in close contact with the masses whose interests he actively espoused all his life. In fact he was the first Indian nationalist leader who identified his life and his manner of living with the life of the common people. In time he became the symbol of poor India, nationalist India, and rebellious India. Three other causes were very dear to Gandhi's heart. The first was Hindu-Muslim unity; the second, the fight against untouchability, and the third, the raising of the social status of women in the country. He once summed up his aims as follows:

I shall work for an India in which the poorest shall feel that it is their country, in whose making they have an effective voice, an India in which there shall be no high class and low class of people, an India in which all communities shall live in perfect harmony. ..There can be no room in such an India for the curse of untouchability..
..Women will enjoy the same rights as men.. ..This is the India of **my dreams**.

Though a devout Hindu, Gandhi's cultural and religious outlook was universalist and not narrow. "Indian culture", he wrote, "is neither Hindu, Islamic, nor any other, wholly. It is a fusion of all." He wanted Indians to have deep roots in their own culture but at the same time to acquire the best that other world cultures had to offer. He said:

I want the culture of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any. I refuse to live in other peoples' houses as an interloper, a beggar or a slave.

Satyagraha against the Rowlatt Act

Along with other nationalists, Gandhi was also aroused by the Rowlatt Act. In February 1919, he founded the Satyagraha Sabha whose members took a pledge to disobey the Act and thus to court arrest and imprisonment. Here was a new method of struggle. The nationalist movement, whether under Moderate or

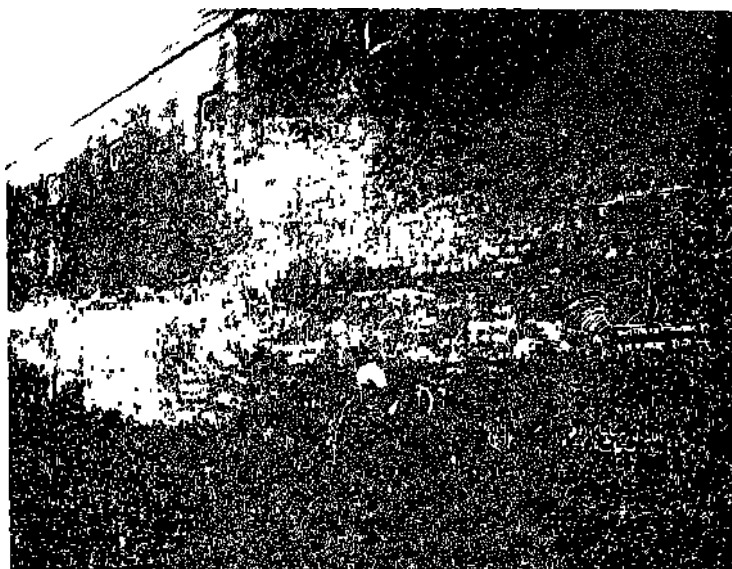
Extremist leadership, had hitherto confined its struggle to agitation. Big meetings and demonstrations, refusal to cooperate with the Government, boycott of foreign cloth and schools, or individual acts of terrorism were the only forms of political work known to the nationalists. Satyagraha immediately raised the movement to a new > higher level. Nationalists could now *act* in place of giving only *verbal* expression to their dissatisfaction and anger. The National Congress was now to become an organisation for political action.

It was, moreover, to rely increasingly on the political support of the poor. Gandhi asked the nationalist workers to go to the villages. That is where India lives, he said. He increasingly turned the face of nationalism towards the common man and the symbol of this transformation was to be khadi, or hand-spun and handwoven cloth, which soon became the uniform of the nationalists. He spun daily to emphasise the dignity of labour and the value of self-reliance, India's salvation would come, he said, when the masses were wakened from their sleep and became active in politics. And the people responded magnificently to Gandhi's call.

March and April 1919 witnessed a remarkable political awakening in India. There were *hartals*, strikes, and demonstrations. The slogans of Hindu-Muslim unity filled the air. The entire country was electrified. The Indian people were no longer willing to submit to the degradation of foreign rule.

Jallianwalla Bagh Massacre

The Government was determined to suppress the mass agitation. It repeatedly lathi-charged and fired upon unarmed demonstrators at Bombay, Ahmedabad, Calcutta, Delhi and other cities. Gandhiji gave a call for a mighty *hartal* on 6 April 1919. The people responded with unprecedented enthusiasm. The Government decided to meet the popular protest with repression, particularly in the Punjab. At this time was perpetrated one of the worst political crimes in modern history. An unarmed but large crowd had gathered on 13 April 1919 at Amritsar



Jallianwalla Bagh (Courtesy: Nehru Memorial Museum and Library)

(in the Punjab) in the Jallianwalla Bagh, to protest against the arrest of their popular leaders, Dr. Saifuddin Kitchlu and Dr. Satyapal. General Dyer, the military commander of Amritsar, decided to terrorise the people of Amritsar into complete submission. Jallianwalla Bagh was a large open space which was enclosed on three sides by buildings and had only one exit. He surrounded the Bagh (garden) with his army unit, closed the exit with his troops, and then ordered his men to shoot into the trapped crowd with rifles and machine-guns. They fired till their ammunition was exhausted. Thousands were killed and wounded. After this massacre, martial law was proclaimed throughout the Punjab and the people were submitted to most uncivilised atrocities. A liberal lawyer, Sivaswamy Aiyer, who had received a knight from the Government, wrote as follows on the Punjab atrocities:

The wholesale slaughter of hundreds of unarmed men of Jallianwalla Bagh without giving the crowd an opportunity to disperse, the indifference of General Dyer to the condition of hundreds of people who were wounded in the firing of machine-guns into crowds who had dispersed and taken to their heels, the flogging of men in public, the order compelling thousands of students to walk 16 miles a day for roll-calls, the arrest and detention of school students and professors, the compelling of school children of 5 to 7 to attend on parade to salute the flag... the flogging of a marriage party, the censorship of mails, the closures of the Badshahi mosque for six weeks, the arrest and detention of people without any substantial reasons, the flogging of six of the best boys in the Islamiah school simply because they happened to be school boys and to be big boys, the construction of an open cage for the confinement of arrested persons, the invention of novel punishments like the crawling order, the skipping order and others unknown to any system of law, civil or military, the handcuffing and roping together of persons and keeping them in open

trucks for fifteen hours, the use of aeroplanes and Lewis guns and the latest paraphernalia of scientific warfare against unarmed citizens, the taking of hostages and the confiscation and destruction of property for the purposes of securing the attendance of absentees, the handcuffing of Hindus and Muhammadans in pairs with the object of demonstrating the consequences of Hindu-Muslim unity, the cutting off of electric and water supplies from Indians' houses, the removal of fans from Indian houses and giving them for use by Europeans, the commandeering of all vehicles owned by Indians and giving them to Europeans for use. ..These are some of the many incidents of the administration of martial law, which created a reign of terror in the Punjab and have shocked the public

A wave of horror ran through the country as the knowledge of the unjab happenings spread. People saw as if in a flash the ugliness and brutality that lay behind the facade of civilisation that imperialism and foreign rule professed. Popular shock was expressed by the great poet and humanist Rabindranath Tagore who renounced his knighthood in

protest and

declared:

The time has come when badges of honour make our shame glaring in their incongruous context of humiliation, and, I, for my part, wish to stand, shorn of all special distinctions, by the side of my countrymen who, for their so-called insignificance, are liable to suffer degradation not fit for human beings.

THE KHILAFAT AND NON-COOPERATION MOVEMENT (1919-22)

A new stream came into the nationalist movement with the Khilafat movement. We have seen earlier that the younger generation of educated Muslims and a section of traditional divines and theologians had been growing more and more radical and nationalist. The ground for common political action by Hindus and Muslims had already been prepared by the Lucknow Pact. The nationalist agitation against the Rowlatt Act had touched all the Indian people alike and brought Hindus and Muslims together in political agitation.

For example, as if to declare before the world the principle of Hindu-Muslim unity in political action, Swami Shradhanand, a staunch Arya Samaj leader, was asked by the Muslims to preach from the pulpit of the Jama Masjid at Delhi while Dr. Kitchlu, a Muslim, was given the keys of the Golden Temple, the Sikh shrine at Amritsar. At Amritsar, such political unity had been brought about by governmental repression. Hindus and Muslims were handcuffed together, made to crawl together, and drink water together, when ordinarily a Hindu would not drink water from the hands of a Muslim. In this atmosphere, the nationalist trend among the Muslims took the form of the Khilafat agitation. The politically-conscious Muslims were critical of the treatment meted out to the Ottoman (or Turkish) Empire by Britain and its allies who had partitioned it and taken away Thrace from Turkey proper. This was in violation of the earlier pledge of the British Premier, Lloyd George, who had declared: "Nor are we fighting to deprive Turkey of the rich and renowned

lands of Asia Minor and Thrace which are predominantly Turkish in race.” The Muslims also felt that the position of the Sultan of Turkey, who was also regarded by many as the Caliph or the religious head of the Muslims, should not be undermined. A Khilafat Committee was soon formed under the leadership of the Ali brothers, Maulana Azad, Hakim Ajmal Khan, and Hasrat Mohani, and a country* wide agitation was organised.

The All-india Khilafat Conference held at Delhi in November 1919 decided to withdraw all cooperation from the Government if their demands were not met. The Muslim League, now under the leadership of nationalists, gave full support to the National Congress and its agitation on political issues. On their part, the Congress leaders, including Lokamanya Tilak and Mahatma Gandhi, viewed the Khilafat agitation as a golden opportunity for cementing Hindu-Muslim unity and bringing the Muslim masses into the national movement. They realised that different sections of the people—Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Christians, capitalists and workers, peasants and artisans, women and youth, and tribes and peoples of different regions—would come into the national movement through the experience of fighting for their own different demands and seeing that the alien regime stood in opposition to them, Gandhi looked upon the Khilafat agitation as “an opportunity of uniting Hindus and Mohammedans as would not arise in a hundred years.” Early in 1920 he declared that the Khilafat question overshadowed that of the constitutional reforms and the Punjab wrongs and announced that he would lead a movement of non-cooperation if the terms of peace with Turkey did not satisfy the Indian Muslims. In fact, very soon Gandhi became one of the leaders of the Khilafat movement.

Meanwhile the Government had refused to annul the Rowlatt Act, make amends for the atrocities in the Punjab, or satisfy the nationalist urge for self-government. In June 1920, an ail-party conference met at Allahabad and approved a programme of boycott of schools, colleges, and law courts. The Khilafat Committee launched a non-cooperation movement on 31 August 1920. Gandhi was the first to join it and he returned the Kaiser-i-Hind Medal awarded to him earlier for services during the War.

The Congress met in special session in September 1920 at Calcutta. Only a few weeks earlier it had suffered a grievous loss—Lokamanya Tilak had passed away on 1 August at the age of 64, But his place was soon taken by Gandhiji, C.R. Das, and Motilal Nehru. The Congress supported Gandhi’s plan for non-cooperation with the Government till the Punjab and Khilafat wrongs were removed and Swaraj established. The people were asked to boycott government educational institutions, law courts, and legislatures and to practise hand-spinning and hand-weaving for producing khadi. This decision to defy in a most peaceful manner the Government and its laws was endorsed at the annual session of the Congress held at Nagpur in December 1920, “The British people will have to beware,” declared Gandhi at Nagpur, “that if they do not



C.R. Du, N.C. Kelkar, Salyamurthi and others at the time of Nagpur Congress in 1920.
(Courtesy: Nehru Memorial Museum and Library)

want to do justice, it will be the bounden duty of every Indian to destroy the Empire.’* The Nagpur session also made changes in the constitution of the Congress. Provincial Congress Committees were reorganised on the basis of linguistic areas. The Congress was now to be led by a Working Committee of 15 members, including the president and the secretaries. This would enable the Congress to function as a continuous political organisation and would provide it with the machinery for implementing its resolutions. Congress membership was thrown open to all men and women of the age of 21 or more on payment of 4 annas as annual subscription. In 1921 the age limit for membership was reduced to 18.

The Congress now changed its character. It became the organiser and leader of the masses in their national struggle for freedom from foreign rule. There was a general feeling of exhilaration. Political freedom might come years later but the people had begun to shake off their slavish mentality. It was as if the very air that India breathed had changed. The joy and the enthusiasm of those days was something special, for the sleeping giant was beginning to awake. Moreover, Hindus and Muslims were marching together shoulder to shoulder. At the same time, some of the older leaders now left the Congress. They did not like the new turn the national movement had taken. They still believed in the traditional methods of agitation and political work which were strictly confined within the four walls of the law. They opposed the organisation of the masses, *hartals*, strikes, satyagraha, breaking of laws, courting of imprisonment, and other forms of militant struggle. Mohammed Ali Jinnah, G.S. Khaparde, Bipin Chandra Pal, and Annie Besant were among the prominent leaders who left the Congress

during this r»rK 1.

The years 1921 and 1922 were to witness an unprecedented movement of the Indian people. Thousands of students left government schools

SiJBLIC MEETING AND BONFIRE or *m&m* OMKS

Wili like plus il the Maid&ti near Efptiinalona Millj « * » Opp.
Elptiuiitone Road Station

On SUNDAY the 9th Inst, at 6-30 P. M.

When the Rewhition of the X>r»«hl Khilala! Conference and nrtolher CnngratulfcLing Ait Brothers
And others wiiE be paitefl>

A lira requested lo attend in Swadeshi Clothes of Khadl. Those who h& a nol yet given away
their foreign Clothes ara requastad lo sand them to their respective Ward Congress Committees
lor inclusion in

G R E A T B O N F I R E .

.....
.....
A Publicity poster published in the *Bombay Chronicle* of 6 October 1921 (Courtesy: Nehru Memorial
Museum and Library)

and colleges and joined national schools and colleges, it was at this time that the Jamia Millia Islamia (National Muslim University) of Aligarh, the Bihar Vidyapith, the Kashi Vidyapith, and the Gujarat Vidyapith came into existence. The Jamia Millia later shifted to Delhi. Acharya Narendra Dev, Dr. Zakir Husain, and Lala Lajpat Rai were among the many distinguished teachers at these national colleges and universities. Hundreds of lawyers, including Chittaranjan Das, popularly known as Deshbandhu, Motilal Nehru, and Rajendra Prasad, gave up their legal practice. The Tilak Swarajya Fund was started to finance the non-cooperation movement and within six months over a crore of rupees were subscribed. Women showed great enthusiasm and often offered their jewellery. Huge bonfires of foreign cloth were organised all over the land. Khadi soon became a symbol of freedom. In May 1921, the All-India Khilafat Committee passed a resolution declaring that no Muslim should serve in the British Indian army. In September the Ali brothers were arrested for 'sedition'. Immediately, Gandhiji gave a call for repetition of this resolution at hundreds of meetings. Fifty members of the All India Congress Committee issued a similar declaration that no Indian should serve a government which degraded India socially, economically, and politically. The Congress Working Committee issued a similar statement.

The Congress now decided to raise the movement to a higher level. It permitted the Congress Committee of a province to start civil disobedience or disobedience of British laws, including non-payment of taxes, if in its opinion the people were ready for it.

The Government again took recourse to repression. The Congress and Khilafat volunteers, who had begun to drill together and thus unite Hindu and Muslim political workers at lower levels, were declared illegal. By the end of 1921 all important nationalist leaders, except Gandhi, were behind the bars along with 3,000 others. In November 1921 huge demonstrations greeted the Prince of Wales, heir to the British throne, during his tour of India. He had been asked by the Government to come to India to encourage loyalty among the people and the princes. In Bombay, the Government tried to suppress the demonstration, killing 53 persons and wounding about 400 more. The annual session of the Congress, meeting at Ahmedabad in December 1921, passed a resolution affirming "the fixed determination of the Congress to continue the programme of non-violent non-cooperation with greater vigour than hitherto

— till the Punjab and Khilafat wrongs were redressed and Swarajya is established." The resolution urged all Indians, and in particular students, "quietly and without any demonstration to offer themselves for arrest by belonging to the volunteer organisations." All such Satyagrahis were to take a pledge to "remain non-violent in word and deed", to promote unity among Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Parsis, Christians, and Jews, and to practise swadeshi and wear only khadi. A Hindu volunteer was also to undertake to fight actively against untouchability. The resolution also called upon the people to organise,

whenever possible, individual or mass civil disobedience along non-violent lines.

The people now waited impatiently for the call for further struggle. The movement had, moreover, spread deep among the masses. Thousands of peasants in U.P. and Bengal had responded to the call of non-coo pera-



Procession of Non-Coo petition volunteers parading in Calcutta (Courtesy: Nehru Memorial Museum and Library)

In the Punjab the Sikhs were leading a movement, known as the Akali movement, to remove corrupt *mahants* from the Gurudwaras, their places of worship. In Malabar (Northern Kerala), the *Moplahs*, or Muslim peasants, created a powerful anti-*zamindar* movement. The Viceroy wrote to the Secretary of State in February 1919 that "The lower classes in the towns have been seriously affected by the non-cooperation movement....In certain areas the peasantry have been affected, particularly in parts of Assam valley, United Provinces, Bihar and Orissa, and Bengal." On 1 February 1922, Mahatma Gandhi announced that he would start mass civil disobedience, including non-payment of taxes, unless within seven days the political prisoners were released and the press freed from government control.

This mood of struggle was soon transformed, into retreat. On 5 February, a Congress procession of 3,000 peasants at Chauri Chaura, a village in the Gorakhpur District of U.P., was fired upon by the police. The angry crowd attacked and burnt the police station causing the death of 22 policemen. Gandhiji took a very serious view of this incident. It convinced him that the nationalist workers had not yet properly understood nor learnt the practice of non-violence without which, he was convinced, civil disobedience could not be a success. Apart from the fact that he would have nothing to do with violence, he also perhaps believed that the British would be able to crush easily a violent movement, for people had not yet built up enough strength and stamina to resist government repression. He therefore decided to suspend the nationalist campaign. The Congress Working Committee met at Bardoli in Gujarat on 12 February and passed a resolution stopping all activities which would lead to breaking of laws. It urged Congressmen to devote their time to the constructive programme—popularisation of the charkha, national schools and

temperance

The Bardoli resolution stunned the country and had a mixed reception among the nationalists. While some had implicit faith in Gandhiji, others resented this decision to retreat. Subhash Bose, one of the popular and younger leaders of the Congress, has written in his autobiography, *The Indian Struggle*:

To sound the order of retreat just when public enthusiasm was reaching the boiling-point was nothing short of a national calamity. The principal lieutenants of the Mahatma, Deshbandhu Das, Pandit Motilal Nehru and Lala Lajpat Rai, who were all in prison, shared the peculiar resentment I was with the Deshbandhu at the time and I could see that he was beside himself with anger and sorrow at the way Mahatma Gandhi was repeatedly bungling.

Many other young leaders such as Jawaharlal Nehru had a similar reaction. But both the people and the leaders had faith in Gandhi and did not want to oppose him in public. They accepted his decision without open opposition. The first non-cooperation and civil disobedience movement virtually came to an end.

The last act of the drama was played when the Government decided to take full advantage of the situation and to strike hard. It arrested Mahatma Gandhi on 10 March 1922 and charged him with spreading disaffection against the Government. Gandhi was sentenced to six years' imprisonment after a trial which was made historic by the statement that Gandhi made before the court. Pleading guilty to the prosecution's charge, he invited the court to award him "the highest penalty that can be inflicted upon me for what in law is a deliberate crime, and what appears to me to be the highest duty of a citizen." He traced at length his own political evolution from a supporter of British rule to its sharpest critic and said:

I came reluctantly to the conclusion that the British connection had made India more helpless than she ever was before, politically and economically. A disarmed India has no power of resistance against any aggression ... She has become so poor that she has little power of resisting famines. ... Little do the owners know how the semi-starved masses of India are slowly sinking to lifelessness. Little do they know that their miserable comfort represents the brokerage they get for the work they do for the foreign exploiter, that the profits and the brokerage are sucked from the masses. Little do they realise that the Government established by law in British India is carried on for the exploitation of the masses.

No sophistry, no jugglery in figures, can explain away the evidence that the skeletons in many villages present to the naked eye. In my opinion, administration of the law is thus prostituted, consciously or unconsciously, for the benefit of the exploiter. The greater misfortune is that Englishmen and their Indian associates in the administration of the country do not know that they are engaged in the crime I have attempted to describe. I am satisfied that many Englishmen and Indian officials honestly believe that they are administering one of the best systems devised in the world, and that India is making steady, though slow progress. They do not know that a subtle but effective system of terrorism and an organized display of force on the one hand, and the deprivation of all powers of retaliation or self defence on the other, have emasculated the people and induced in them the habit of simulation.

In conclusion, Gandhi expressed his belief that "non-cooperation with evil is as much a duty as is cooperation with good." The judge noted that he was passing on Gandhi the same sentence as was passed on Lokamanya Tilak in 1908.

Very soon the Khilafat question also lost relevance. The people of Turkey rose

up under the leadership of Mustafa Kamal Pasha and, in November 1922, deprived the Sultan of his political power. Kamal Pasha took many measures to modernise Turkey and to make it a secular state. He abolished the Caliphate (or the institution of the Caliph) and separated the state from religion by eliminating Islam from the Constitution. He nationalised education, granted women extensive rights, introduced legal codes based on European models, and took steps to develop agriculture and to introduce modern industries. All these steps broke the back of the Khilafat agitation.

The Khilafat agitation had made an important contribution to the non-cooperation movement. It had brought urban Muslims into the nationalist movement and had been, thus, responsible in part for the feeling of nationalist enthusiasm and exhilaration that prevailed in the country in those days. Some historians have criticised it for having mixed politics with religion. As a result, they say, religious consciousness spread to politics, and in the long run, the forces of communalism were strengthened. This is true to some extent. There was, of course, nothing wrong in the nationalist movement taking up a demand that affected Muslims only. It was inevitable that different sections of society would come to understand the need for freedom through their particular demands and experiences. The nationalist leadership, however, failed to some extent in raising the religious political consciousness of the Muslims to the higher plane of secular political consciousness. At the same time it should also be kept in view that the Khilafat agitation represented much wider feelings of the Muslims than their concern for the Caliph. It was in reality an aspect of the general spread of anti-imperialist feelings among the Muslims. These feelings found concrete expression on the

Khilafat question. After all there was no protest in India when Kamal Pasha abolished the Caliphate in 1924.

It may be noted at this stage that even though the non-cooperation and civil disobedience movement had ended in failure, national movement had been strengthened in more than *one* way. Nationalist sentiments and the national movement had now reached the remotest corners of the land. The educated Indians had learnt to rely on their own people. The Indian people had lost their sense of fear—the brute strength of British power in India no longer frightened them. They had gained tremendous self-confidence and self-esteem, which no defeats and retreats could shake. This was expressed by Gandhiji when he declared that “the fight that was commenced in 1920 is a fight to the finish, whether it lasts one month or one year or many months or many years.”

V, («+r * ✓ ^'• \ "■* 't' • -i t -* • ■ .. V J■'
1, ' *
/'



Gandhiji with the Ali Brothers at the Beigam session of the Congress, 1924 (Courtesy: Photo Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Govt. of India)

THE SWARAJISTS

Disintegration and disorganisation set in after the withdrawal of the civil disobedience movement. Enthusiasm evaporated and disillusionment and discouragement prevailed in the ranks of the Congress party. Moreover, serious difference arose among the leaders.

A fresh lead was now given by C.R. Das and Motilal Nehru who advocated a new line of political activity under the changed conditions. They said that nationalists should end the boycott of the Legislative Councils, enter them, obstruct their working according to official plans, expose their weaknesses, and thus use them to arouse public enthusiasm. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Dr. Ansari, Babu Rajendra Prasad, and others, known as “no-changers”, opposed Council-entry. They warned that legislative politics would weaken nationalist fervour and create rivalries among the leaders. They therefore continued to emphasise the constructive programme of spinning, temperance, Hindu-Muslim unity, and

removal of untouchability.

In December 1922, Das and Motilal Nehru formed the Congress- Khilafat Swaraj Party with Das as president and Motilal Nehru as one of the secretaries. The new party was to function as a group within the Congress. It accepted the Congress programme except in one respect— it would take part in Council elections.

The Swarajists and the "no-changers" now engaged in fierce political controversy. Even Gandhiji, who had been released on 5 February 1924 on grounds of health, failed in his efforts to unite them. But on his advice the two groups agreed to remain in the Congress though they would work in their separate ways.

Even though the Swarajists had had little time for preparations they did very well in the election of November 1923. They won 42 seats out of the 101 elected seats in the Central Legislative Assembly. With the cooperation of other Indian groups they repeatedly outvoted the Government in the Central Assembly and in several of the Provincial Councils. In March 1925, they succeeded in electing Vithalbhai J. Patel, a leading nationalist leader, as the president (Speaker) of the Central Legislative Assembly. But they failed to change the policies of the authoritarian Government of India and found it necessary to walk out of the Central Assembly in March 1926. What was worse, their work failed to bring the masses or the middle classes into active politics. At the same time the "no-changers" were also not successful in this respect. In fact, both groups failed to check the spreading political rot. But as there was no basic difference between the two wings and because they kept on the best of terms and recognised each other's anti-imperialist character, they could readily unite later when the time was ripe for a new national struggle. Meanwhile the nationalist movement and the Swarajists suffered another grievous blow in the death of Mahatma Das in June 1925.

As the non-cooperation movement petered out and the people felt frustrated, communalism reared its ugly head. The communal elements took advantage of the situation to propagate their views and after 1923 the country was repeatedly plunged into communal riots. The Muslim League and the Hindu Mahasabha, which was founded in December 1917, once again became active. The result was that the growing feeling that all people were Indians first received a set-back. Even the Swarajist Party, whose main leaders, Motilal Nehru and Das, were staunch nationalists, was split by communalism. A group known as "responsivists", including Madan Mohan Malaviya, Lala Lajpat Rai, and N.C. Keekar, offered cooperation to the Government so that the so-called Hindu interests might be safeguarded. They accused Motilal Nehru of letting down Hindus, of being anti-Hindu, of favouring cow-slaughter, and of eating beef. The Muslim communalists were no less active in fighting for the loaves and fishes or office. Gandhiji, who had repeatedly asserted that "Hindu-Muslim unity must be our creed for all time and under all circumstances" tried to intervene and improve the situation. In September 1924, he went on a 21 days' fast at Delhi in Maulana Mohammed Ali's house to do penance for the inhumanity revealed in the

communal riots. But his efforts were of little avail.

The situation in the country appeared to be dark indeed. There was general political apathy; Gandhi was living in retirement, the Swarajists were split, communalism was flourishing. Gandhi wrote in May 1927: "My only hope lies in prayer and answer to prayer." But, behind the scenes, forces of national upsurge had been growing. When in November 1927 the announcement of the formation of the Simon Commission came, India again emerged out of darkness and entered a new era of political struggle.

THE SECOND NON-COOPERATION MOVEMENT

The year 1927 witnessed many portents of national recovery and evidence began to gather that the people were waiting for a lead. Politically this force and energy found reflection in the rise of a new left-wing in the Congress under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhash Chandra Bose. The two soon toured the country preaching the new ideology of socialism. They attacked imperialism, capitalism, and landlordism, and told the people that if freedom had to be won by the people, it would not come as a gift from the British Parliament. They soon came to be idolised by the students and other young people.

Indian youth were becoming active. All over the country youth leagues were being formed and student conferences held. The first All- Bengal Conference of students was held in August 1928 and was presided over by Jawaharlal Nehru. After this many other student associations were started in the country. The first All India Youth Congress met in December. Moreover, the young Indian nationalists began gradually to turn to socialism and to advocate radical solutions for the political.

^ social ills from which the country was suffering. They also put forward and popularised the programme of complete independence.

Socialist and Communist groups came into existence in the 1920's. The example of the Russian Revolution had aroused interest among many



Jawaharhi Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose arriving to attend a Congress meeting (Courtesy: Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi)

young nationalists. Many of them were dissatisfied with Gandhi's political ideas and programmes and turned to socialist ideology for guidance. M.N. Roy became the first Indian to be elected to the leadership of the Communist International. In 1924, the Government arrested Muzaffar Ahmed and S.A. Dange, accused them of spreading Communist ideas, and tried them along with others in the Kanpur Conspiracy case. In 1925, the Communist Party came into existence. Moreover, many workers and peasants parties were founded in different parts of the country. These parties and groups propagated Marxist and Communist ideas.

The peasants and workers were also once again stirring. In Uttar Pradesh, there was large scale agitation among tenants for the revision of tenancy laws. The

tenants wanted lower rents, protection from eviction, and relief from indebtedness. In Gujarat, the peasants protested against official efforts to increase land revenue. The famous Bardoli Satyagraha occurred at this time. In 1928, under the leadership of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel the peasants organised a No Tax Campaign and in the end won their demand. There was a rapid growth of trade unionism under the leadership of the All India Trade Union Congress. Many strikes occurred during 1928. There was a long strike lasting for two months, in the railway workshop at Kharagpur. The South Indian Railway workers went on oil strike. Another strike was organised in the Tata Iron and Steel Works at Jamshedpur. Subhash Chandra Bose played an important role in the settlement of this strike. The most important strike of the period was in Bombay textile mills. Nearly 150,000 workers went on strike for over five months. This strike was led by the Communists. Over five lakh workers took part in strikes during 1928.

Another reflection of the new mood was the growing activity of the revolutionary terrorist movement which too was beginning to take a socialist turn. The failure of the first non-cooperation movement had led to the revival of the terrorist movement. After an All India Conference the Hindustan Republican Association was founded in October 1924 to organise an armed revolution. The Government struck at it by arresting a large number of terrorist youth and trying them in the Kakori conspiracy case (1925). Seventeen were sentenced to long terms of imprisonment, four were transported for life, and four, including Ramprasad Bismil and Ashfaqulla, were hanged. The terrorists soon came under the influence of socialist ideas, and, in 1928, under the leadership of Chandra Shekhar Azad changed the title of their organisation to the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association.

A dramatic manifestation of revolutionary terrorist activity was the assassination of a British police officer by Bhagat Singh, Azad and Rajguru, who had earlier ordered lathi charge on a demonstration led by Lala Lajpat Rai. This had resulted in a fatal injury to the great Punjabi leader, known popularly as Sher-e-Punjab. The assassination was justified by the revolutionary young men as follows:

The murder of a leader respected by millions of people at the unworthy hands of an ordinary police official... was an insult to the nation. It was the bounden duty of young men of India to efface it... We regret to have had to kill a person but he was part and parcel of that inhuman and unjust order which has to be destroyed. In him, an agent of British rule has been done away with. Shedding of human blood grieves us but bloodshed at the altar of revolution is unavoidable. Our objective is to work for a revolution which would end exploitation of man by man.

Similarly, Bhagat Singh and B.K. Dutt threw a bomb in the Central Legislative Assembly on 8 April 1929. They wanted to protest against the passage of the Public Safety Bill, which would have reduced civil



Bhagat Singh (Courtesy: Nehru Memorial Museum and Library)

liberties. The bomb did not harm anyone for it had been deliberately made harmless. The aim was not to kill but, as a terrorist leaflet put it, "to make the deaf hear". Bhagat Singh and B. K. Dutt could have easily escaped after throwing the bomb but they deliberately chose to be arrested for they wanted to make use of the court as a forum for revolutionary propaganda.

In Bengal too revolutionary terrorist activities were revived. In April 1930, a raid was organised on the government armoury at Chittagong under the leadership of Surya Sen. This was the first of many attacks on unpopular government officials. A remarkable aspect of the terrorist movement in Bengal was the participation of young women.

The Government struck hard at the revolutionary terrorists. Many of them were arrested and tried in a series of famous cases, Bhagat Singh and a few others were also tried for the assassination of police officers. The statements of the young revolutionaries in the courts and their fearless and defiant attitude won the sympathy of the people. Particularly inspiring was the hunger strike they undertook as a protest against the horrible conditions in the prisons. As political prisoners they demanded an honourable and decent treatment. During the course of this hunger-strike, Jatin Das, a frail young man, achieved martyrdom after a 63 days' epic fast. Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru were executed on 23 March 1931, despite popular protest. In a letter to the Jail Superintendent written a few days before their execution the three affirmed: "Very soon, the final battle will begin. Its outcome will be decisive. We took part in the struggle and we are proud of having done so."

In two of his last letters, Bhagat Singh also affirmed the revolutionary terrorist faith in socialism. He wrote: "The peasants have to liberate

themselves not only from foreign yoke but also from the yoke of landlords and capitalists." In his last message of 3 March 1931 he declared that the struggle in India would continue so long as "a handful of exploiters go on exploiting the labour of the common people for their own ends. It matters little whether these exploiters are purely British capitalists, or British and Indians in alliance, or even purely Indian."

The heartless attitude of the Government in refusing to change their sentence to life imprisonment further hardened the people's anger, while the deep patriotism, invincible courage and determination, and sense of sacrifice displayed by the young revolutionaries stirred the Indian people. The revolutionary terrorist movement, which played an important role in spreading nationalist and socialist consciousness, soon abated though stray activities were carried on for several years more. Chandra Shekhar Azad was killed in a shooting encounter with the police in a public park, later renamed Azad Park, at Allahabad in February 1931. Surya Sen was arrested in February 1933 and hanged soon after. Hundreds of other revolutionaries were arrested and sentenced to varying terms of imprisonments.

Thus a new political situation was beginning to arise by the end of the twenties. Writing of these years, Lord Irwin, the Viceroy, recalled later that "some new force was working of which even those, whose knowledge of India went back for 20 or 30 years, had not yet learnt the full significance." The Government was determined to suppress this new trend. As we have seen, the terrorists were suppressed with ferocity. The growing trade union movement and Communist movement were dealt with in the same manner. In March 1929, thirty-one prominent trade union and communist leaders (including three Englishmen) were arrested and, after a trial (Meerut Conspiracy Case) lasting four years, sentenced to long periods of imprisonment.

Boycott of the Simon Commission

In November 1927, the British Government appointed the Indian Statutory Commission, known popularly after the name of its Chairman as the Simon Commission, to go into the question of further constitutional reform. All the members of the Commission were Englishmen. This announcement was greeted by a chorus of protest from all Indians. What angered them most was the exclusion of Indians from the Commission and the basic notion behind this exclusion that foreigners would discuss and decide upon India's fitness for self-government. In other words, the British action was seen as a violation of the principle of self-determination and a deliberate insult to the self-respect of the Indians. At its Madras Session in 1927, presided over by Dr. Ansari, the National Congress decided to boycott the Commission "at every stage and in every form." The Muslim League and the Hindu Mahasabha decided to support the Congress decision. In fact, the Simon Commission united, at least temporarily, different groups and parties in the country. As a gesture of solidarity with the nationalists, the Muslim League even accepted the

principle of joint electorates, provided seats were reserved for the Muslims.

All important Indian leaders and parties decided to meet the British challenge by drawing up an agreed constitution for India. An All Parties Conference was convened for the purpose first at Delhi and then at Poona. The Conference appointed a sub-committee headed by Motilal Nehru and included among its members Ali Imam, Tej Bahadur Sapru, and Subhash Bose. The sub-committee submitted its report known as the Nehru Report in August 1928. The Report recommended that the attainment of Dominion Status should be considered the "next immediate step," India should be a federation built on the basis of linguistic provinces and provincial autonomy, the executive should be fully responsible to the legislature, elections should be by joint electorates on the basis of adult suffrage, and that seats in the legislatures should be reserved for religious minorities for a period of 10 years. Unfortunately, the All Party Convention, held at Calcutta in December 1928, failed to pass the Nehru Report. Objections were raised by some of the communal-minded leaders belonging to the Muslim League, the Hindu Mahasabha and the Sikh League. The Muslim League was itself split on the issue along nationalist and communal lines. Mohammed Ali Jinnah put forth his "fourteen point" demands at this time, claiming, among other things, separate electorates, one third of the seats in the central legislature for the Muslims, reservation of seats for the Muslims in Bengal and the Punjab in proportion to population, and the vesting of residual powers in the provinces. The Hindu Mahasabha denounced the Report as pro-Muslim. Thus the prospects of national unity were foiled by communal groups.

So far as merely constitutional questions were concerned the gulf between the nationalists and the communalists was not really large at this time. The nationalists had willingly provided the necessary safeguards to protect the interests of the minorities. Religion, culture, language and the fundamental rights of individuals as well as the minorities were all to be protected. Unfortunately, these leaders failed to fully understand the psychology of the minorities at the time. The minorities, particularly the Muslims, felt what was perhaps an unreasonable fear of the majority. Only by practical experience of modern politics would they gradually lose this fear and then refuse to be exploited by reactionary leaders or the alien government. As Jawaharlal Nehru, for example, wrote in 1931 that:

'...the extent to which it is justified, or is at least unobjectionable in a political sense. A special responsibility does not attach to the Government in the field of Hindu-Muslim relations.'

because they are the majority community and because economically and educationally they are more advanced. The (Hindu) Malisabha, instead of discharging that responsibility, has acted in a manner which has undoubtedly increased the communalism of the Muslims and made them distrust the Hindus all the more. ...One communalism does not end the other; each feeds on the other and both fall.

In another article written in 1934, he advised: "We should therefore remove this fear complex and make the Muslim masses realise that they can have any protection that they really desire." Even Jinnah accepted this at the time. In a speech in 1931 he said:

My position is that I would rather have a settlement even on the footing of separate electorates, hoping and trusting that when we work out new constitution and when both Hindus and Muslims get rid of distrust, suspicion and fears, and when they get their freedom, we would rise to the occasion and probably separate electorate will go sooner than most of us think.

But most of the nationalist leaders would either not accept this view or in any case failed to act upon it at the time. On the one hand they were pressurized by the Hindu communalists, on the other they felt that since the fears of the minority were illusory and the communal leaders had no mass support, their demands could be safely rejected. This was a mistake. The result was that even a nationalist like Maulana Muhammad Ali complained that the nationalist leaders were willing to compromise with the British Government on the question of complete freedom but refused to conciliate their own communalists. Maulana Azad commented at that time¹ "The Muslims were fools to ask for safeguards, and the Hindus were greater fools to refuse them." In any case, Muslim communalism began to grow steadily after this.

It should also be noted that there existed a basic difference between the politics of the nationalists and the politics of the communalists. The nationalists carried on a political struggle against the alien government to win political rights and freedom for the country. This was not the case with the communalists, Hindu or Muslim. Their demands were made on the nationalists; on the other hand, they usually looked to the foreign government for support and favours. They frequently struggled against the Congress and cooperated with the Government.

Far more important than the proceedings of the All Parties Conference was the popular upsurge against the Simon Commission. The Commission's arrival in India led to a powerful protest movement in which nationalist enthusiasm and unity reached new heights.

On 3 February, the day the Commission reached Bombay, an all India *hartal* was organised. Wherever the Commission went it was greeted with *hartals* and black-flag demonstrations under the slogan 'Simon Go Back'. The Government used brutal suppression and police

HuacKs to break the popular opposition.

The anti-Simon Commission movement did not immediately lead to a wider political struggle because Gandhi, the unquestioned though undeclared leader of the national movement, was not yet convinced that the time for struggle had come. But popular enthusiasm could not be held back for long for the country

was once again in a mood of struggle.

Poomi Swaraja

The National Congress soon reflected this new mood. Gandhi came back to active politics and attended the Calcutta session of the Congress in December 1928. He now began to consolidate the nationalist ranks. The first step was to reconcile the militant left-wing of the Congress. Jawaharlal Nehru was now made the President of the Congress at the historic Lahore session of 1929. This event had its romantic side too. Son had succeeded father (Motilal Nehru was the President of the Congress- in 1928) as the official head of the national movement, marking a -unique family triumph In the annals of modern, history.

The Lahore session of the Congress gave voice to the new, militant spirit. It passed a resolution declaring Poorna Swaraj (Full Independence) to be the Congress objective. On 31 December 1929 wa« hoisted the



After the resolution demanding complete Independence was passed by the Congress, the Indian People observed 26 January at the "Independence Day" every year. The illustration shows mounted police charging people who had gathered to observe the "Independence Day¹" in Calcutta, 1931. {Couritsy: *Gandhi Smark Sangrahalya*

Samitt, New Delhi)

\$lebgc of 3nt>rpenbcnte

A* t'fcclt It thi Ptoru O1 tNW* on Puina SvMkDij Day, January 24, lt>

W>nr /> / rf fi /Ar /N«fw#wWr r/j|V o/ /ir JWJM ii of n> oftr
to Aiw /w/o« ^ <*>J0> /rMfi o/ /irir tod omd &n« iiv tfrttMn of fc/r. i<> fW /irj M*y bur fott opportunity »/
fro>/E. ?c Miw Jw /ikW r/ tt> toi'trmmffit Jcpwtvet s propU of tbr'e n|A/i ond «^^iin Mth, /4r &M1 1fneiirr njibi tQ diet it
m to wbdhb it. TAr 0rrfiA Coiwaatf >4 Wm 4u wof n*f) Jrpri%*J ti# fpr/ww /Arii freedom but bm bus*J lArlf om
ibt
*xpto *t*t*Mr of the Miki, sttd hot t*t*r4 f*Jn rcommicdly, pditrdfy, rjMMlf) omJ ipttrtmdfy Vr M*riC there far thmt
luJtm »**/ ariit /if brinb ik*a
omj ofto>n r^rM Skw^f w atmpttff isJr^rWrwy,
(gi flrr* mned nMiwrn//; 26r ■vic**t' /ra« oar people <t
m/ •/ Wf ptoporfiott fit out ettrowK. Oor tk'tri&t In come n xvt* ptt* f*r doy, smi of the h*wy torn nv poy 20% mtr raneJ
fro**tbe W rriVNiw dr rued from ihe peownry ond j% from ibe idi tor, width fiUt mo*J broiHy «« the pom
VfUdne Mti/nn, ■»rb 01 . bomd ipinxthfr bnr been detimyed-, (ht
peotonty aJte for *J trod /mr/ mombt tit tbr inr, *d JnH**b thei jnteHrt for » m/ o/ bondu tmf'if gmJ'UtfrtMK boi
Atr# jr ;« n/Arf rwiulrm, />r /&
trsfji iht detiroyed
Cnitiomi 4*d mrrewy Jmit been U> momptafed u iu hrafi fmrihrr bnrdent om tht >MMM/ry Brttab matttfrwin ted
goot rouihiue tbr bulk of ome loiporti Cdiomi inltfx bftroy titof p4rtidity for Brtiub mmuforlnrti, and fivt>me fi<tm
tbrm a M*f,t m>f it) Irwm the b*rJm on the mmwt but for mi/Whwk 4 bmdy 4*t**koJiutMjittattOH SiHt »ft>rr
0Tbtir*ry b\$st bfru fi*r if /Ai
9*(t*t wJH b rtwUfd im mtftntm Jrtturd *wtf /vow the trttmiry
rvtfu tly, lwJtrff i/Ufm bn unrr fcrn h trJurtl gt vitJer it* Bninb rtx>mt
No reform /mh' puttth d Jnmr to ibt pntpir. Tbv nf *J b*<* tf>
bfmi brfvrj f*n*W *»tburty> Thr Ti^Lli rtf fret txpmuau nf npuinrt W fwtt wito* to/ton b*ti t*VH JfntfJ to *nJ miits ttf
v*f tnniryneM are <o
In* tn edit ""4 rfimrtt io t'k'tr bt*nr* Alf sJttmnirithr tAent n
kiltld thr maivi 6«ir to be nitiirJ tutib h*Ji> ^Unt n«tei tad ifakbipt, C*t*h*tly* fbf lyitrm of tJimtnH bet toro mt from
nut i>onrw& mnt om trmouti hit moJr *t bog the t*rv rbitut th*i fund *».
S'iritmity,) iiiMrmnrHf />*< rnaJr m mmtustty tnJ thr pretense of
«t tittr army of orxfxut**m* em^toyeJ mffo JtoJty rfict'i to nnib lit «i ihe ipirt of t*ikl*at*, b*t m#lf tn tbiitk tbot wr t
Itjob. sfirr onrtein or pm! up 4
de fetter ojtoiHt fore*x* ojmretsiot*. ot n t* JrfruJ unr bom ft a>tJ fo>*ii(ti from *be ofmkt of tbki*r, robbers and
murm/i
Vt bcid it to be j crime mw Gait io tubmit guy fouler ta 4 roll
itfoi &* coottJ ibn foufidd dhdijfr to »tr ratmlry. Wr rera/titne, bou'ewe, ifut tbr mtnt rfuin K#> *tf freeJum if
uni through tie, W*
mUi tbrTifurr prprmc mtrrti-e* 61 iitbdr^Hin^ to for 4t ue cam, alf t'oinniory 4lO~ itoitvm /row ihe lirttnb
G'HrrHMftui, ohJ m 41 prrpotr for at'd Jnofadirfrr, mdmd* tmg *rtM-pfyrrnt uf tityn Wr orr toHtWitf tbtii ifue csa btii
withdraw our wittuidry brtp *od slop p*y>HCHt of U*et u it hunt JotM t turner, rven n*Jer prov^ toibt, fit «/ ibn
ntbumnt rtte n sturtJ Vr therefore berebx lolrmitiy rt- jo/it tt* firry tmf tbr CifUgrn Snt>»fjmt muni from itue to time
for ibe nepott of tsiMnbtHji Puno Su ere].



Printed by P. P. Desai at the Altabad Press, Altabad and
Published by the President, Government of India, A. D. C. P. Altabad

Text of the 'Pledge of Independence' as taken by (he People of India on Puina Swaraj Day, 26

January 1930

newly adopted tri-colour flag of freedom. 26 January 1930 was fixed as the first Independence Day, -which was to be so celebrated every year with the people taking the pledge that it was “a crime against man and God to submit any longer” to British rule. The Congress session also announced the launching of a civil disobedience movement. But it did not draw up a programme of struggle. That was left to Mahatma Gandhi, the Congress organisation being placed at his disposal. Once again the nationalist movement led by Gandhi faced the Government. The country was again filled with hope and exhilaration and the determination to be free.

The Second Civil Disobedience Movement

The Second Civil Disobedience Movement was started by Gandhi on 12 March 1930 with his famous Dandi March. Together with 78 chosen followers, Gandhi walked nearly 200 miles from Sabarmati Ashram to Dandi, a village on the Gujarat sea-coast. Here Gandhi and his followers made salt in violation of the salt laws. This act was a symbol of the Indian people’s refusal to live under British-made laws and therefore* under British rule. Gandhi declared:

The British rule in India has brought about moral, material, cultural, and spiritual ruin of this great country, I regard this rule as a curse. I am out to destroy this system or Government
Sedition has become my religion. Ours is a nonviolent
battle. We are not to kill anybody but it is our *dharma* to see that the curse of this Government
is blotted out.

The movement now spread rapidly. Everywhere in the country people joined *hartals*, demonstrations, and the campaign to boycott foreign goods and to refuse to pay taxes. Lakhs of Indians offered passive resistance. In many parts of the country, the peasants withheld payment of land revenue and rent. A notable feature of the movement was the wide participation of women. Thousands of them left the seclusion of their homes and offered Satyagraha. They took active part in picketing shops selling foreign cloth or liquor. They marched shoulder to shoulder with the men in processions.

The movement reached the extreme north-western corner of India and stirred the brave and hardy Pathans. Under the leadership of Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, popularly known as “the Frontier Gandhi”, the Pathans organised the society of Khudai Khidmatgars (or Servants of God), known popularly as Red Shirts. They were pledged to non-violence and the freedom struggle. Another noteworthy incident occurred in Peshawar at this time. Two platoons of Garhwali soldiers refused to open fire on mass demonstrators even though it meant facing court martial and long terms of imprisonment. This episode showed that nationalism was beginning to penetrate the Indian army, the chief instrument of

British rule.

Similarly, the movement found an echo in the easternmost corner of India. The Manipuris took a brave part in it and Nagaland produced a brave heroine in Ram Gaidinliu who at the age of 13 responded to the call of Gandhi and the Congress and raised the banner of rebellion against foreign rule. The young Rani was captured in 1932 and sentenced to life imprisonment. She wasted her bright youthful years in the dark cells of various Assam jails, to be released only in 1947 by the Government of free India. Jawaharlal Nehru was to write of her in 1937 : "A day will come when India also will remember her and cherish her"

The Government's reply to the national struggle was the same as before —an effort to crush it through ruthless repression, lathi charges and firing on unarmed crowds of men and women. Over 90,000 Satyagrahis, including Gandhi and other Congress leaders, were imprisoned. The Congress was declared illegal. The nationalist press was gagged through strict censorship of news. According to official figures over 110 persons were killed and over 300 wounded in police firings. Unofficial estimates place the number of dead far higher. Moreover, thousands of persons had their heads and bones broken in lathi charges. South India in particular experienced repression in its most severe form. The police often beat up men just for wearing khadi or Gandhi cap. In the end people resisted at Elhira in Andhra, leading to a firing by the police in which several people lost their lives.

Meanwhile, the British Government summoned in London in 1930 the first Round Table Conference of Indian leaders and spokesmen of the British Government to discuss the Simon Commission Report. But the National Congress boycotted the Conference and its proceedings proved abortive. For a conference on Indian affairs without the Congress was like staging Ramlila without Rama.

The Government now made attempts to negotiate an agreement with the Congress so that it would attend the Round Table Conference. Finally, Lord Irwin and Gandhi negotiated a settlement in March 1931. The Government agreed to release those political prisoners who had remained non-violent, while the Congress suspended the Civil Disobedience Movement and agreed to take part in the Second Round Table Conference. Many of the Congress leaders, particularly, the younger, left-wing section, were opposed to the Gandhi-Irwin Pact for the Government had not accepted even one of the major nationalist demands. It had not agreed even to the demand that the death sentence on Bhagat Singh and his two comrades be commuted to life imprisonment. But Gandhi was convinced that Lord Irwin and the British were sincere in their desire to negotiate on Indian demands. His concept of Satyagraha included the need to give the opponent every chance to show a change of heart. He prevailed upon the Karachi session of the Congress to approve the agreement. The Karachi session is also memorable for a resolution on Fundamental Rights and the National Economic Programme. The resolution guaranteed basic civil and political rights to the people. It provided for the nationalization of key industries

and transport, better conditions for the workers, agrarian reform, and free and compulsory primary education. It also assured that "the culture, language and script of the minorities and of the different linguistic areas shall be protected."

Gandhi went to England in September 1931 to attend the Second Round Table Conference. But in spite of his powerful advocacy, the British Government refused to concede the basic nationalist demand for freedom on the basis of the immediate grant of Dominion Status. On his return, the Congress resumed the Civil Disobedience Movement.

The Government now headed by the new Viceroy Lord Willington was this time fully determined and prepared to crush the Congress. In fact, the bureaucracy in India had never relented. Just after the signing of the Gandhi-Irwin Pact, a crowd had been fired upon in East Godavari, in Andhra, and four persons were killed simply because the people had put up Gandhi's portrait. After the failure of the Round Table Conference, Gandhi and other leaders of the Congress were again arrested and the Congress declared illegal. The normal working of laws was suspended and the administration carried on through special ordinances. The police indulged in naked terror and committed innumerable atrocities on the freedom fighters. Over a lakh of satyagrahis were arrested; the lands, houses, and other property of thousands was confiscated. Nationalist literature was banned while the nationalist newspapers were again placed under censorship.

Government repression succeeded in the end, helped as it was by the differences among Indian leaders on communal and other questions. The Civil Disobedience Movement gradually waned and political enthusiasm and exhilaration gave way to frustration and depression. The Congress officially suspended the movement in May 1933 and withdrew it in May 1934. Gandhi once again withdrew from active politics. Congress membership dropped to less than five lakhs.

NATIONALIST POLITICS, 1935-1939

The Government of India Act, 1935

While the Congress was in the thick of battle, the Third Round Table Conference met in London in November 1932, once again without the leaders of the Congress. Its discussions eventually led to the passing of the Government of India Act of 1935. The Act provided for the establishment of an All India Federation and a new system of government for the provinces on the basis of provincial autonomy. The federation was to be based on a union, of the provinces of British India and the Princely States. There was to be a bicameral federal legislature in which the States were given disproportionate weightage. Moreover, the representatives of the States were not to be elected by the people, but appointed directly by the rulers. Only 14 per cent of the total population in British India was given the right to vote. Even this legislature, in which the Princes were once again to be used to check and counter the nationalist elements, was denied any real power. Defence and foreign affairs remained outside its control, while the Governor-

General retained special control over the other subjects. The Governor-General and the Governors were to be appointed by the British Government and were to be responsible to it. In the provinces, local power was increased. Ministers responsible to the provincial assemblies were to control all departments of provincial administration. But the Governors were given special powers. They could veto legislative action and legislate on their own. Moreover, they retained full control over the civil service and the police. The Act could not satisfy the nationalist aspiration for both political and economic power continued to be concentrated in the hands of the British Government, foreign rule was to continue as before, only a few popularly elected ministers were to be added to the structure of British administration in India. The Congress condemned the Act as "totally disappointing."

The federal part of the Act was never introduced but the provincial part was soon put into operation. Bitterly opposed to the Act though the Congress was, it decided to contest the elections under the new Act of 1935, though with the declared aim of showing how unpopular the Act was. The elections conclusively demonstrated that a large majority of Indian people supported the Congress which swept the polls in most of the provinces. Congress ministries were formed in July 1937 in seven out of eleven provinces. Later, Congress formed coalition governments in two others. Only Bengal and the Punjab had non- Congress ministries.

The Congress Ministries

The Congress ministries, could obviously not change the basically imperialist character of British administration in India and they failed to introduce a radical era. But they did try to improve the condition of the people within the narrow limits of the powers given to them under the Act of 1935. The Congress ministers reduced their own salaries drastically to Rs. 500 per month. Most of them travelled second or third class on the railways. They set up new standards of honesty and public service. They paid greater attention to primary, technical, and higher education and public health. They helped the peasant by passing anti-usury and tenancy legislation. They promoted civil liberties. Political prisoners were released. There was relaxation of police and secret service raj. Freedom of the press was enhanced. Trade unions felt freer and were able to win wage increases for workers. The largest gain was psychological. People felt as if they were breathing the air of victory and self-government, for was it not a great achievement that men who were in prison till the other day were now ruling in the secretariat?

The period between 1935 and 1939 witnessed several other important political developments which, in a way, marked a new turn in the nationalist movement and the Congress.

Growth of Socialist Ideas

The 1930's witnessed the rapid growth of socialist ideas within and outside the Congress. In 1929 there was a great economic slump or depression in the

United States which gradually spread to the rest of the world. Everywhere in the capitalist countries there was a steep decline in production and foreign trade, resulting in economic distress and large scale unemployment. At one time, the number of unemployed was 3 million in Britain, 6 million in Germany, and 12 million in the United States. On the other hand, the economic situation in the Soviet Union was just the opposite. Not only was there no slump, but the years between 1929 and 1936 witnessed the successful completion of the first two Five Year Plans which pushed the Soviet industrial production by more than four times. The world depression, thus, brought the capitalist system into • disrepute and drew attention towards Marxism, socialism, and economic planning. Consequently, socialist ideas began to attract more and more people, especially the young, the workers, and the peasants.

The economic depression also worsened the conditions of the peasants and workers in India. The prices of agricultural products dropped by over 50 per cent by the end of 1932. The employers tried to reduce wages. The peasants all over the country began to demand land reforms, abolition of zamindari, reduction of land revenue and rent, and relief from indebtedness. Workers in the factories and plantations increasingly demanded better conditions of work and recognition of their trade union rights. Consequently, there was rapid growth of trade unions in the cities and the kisan sabhas (peasants' unions) in many areas, particularly, in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, and the Puqjab. The first all-India peasant organisation, the All-India Kisan Sabha was formed in 1936. The peasants also began to take a more active part in the national movement.

Within the Congress the left-wing tendency found reflection in the election of Jawaharlal Nehru as president for 1936 and 1937 and of Subhash Chandra Bose for 1938 and 1939. In his presidential address to the Lucknow Congress in 1936, Neji ru urged the Congress to accept socialism as Us goal and to bring itself closer to the peasantry and the working class. This was also, he felt, the best way of weaning away the Muslim *masses* from the influence of their reactionary communal leaders. He said:

I am convinced that the only key to the solution of the world's problems and of India's problems liM in socialism, *and*, when I use this word, I do so not in a. vague humanitarian way but in the scientific, economic sense _____. That involves vast and revolutionary changes in our political and social structure, the ending of vested interests in land and industry, as well as the feudal and autocratic Indian states system. That means the ending of private property, except in a restricted sense, and the replacement of the present profit system by a higher ideal of cooperative service. It means ultimately a change in our instincts and habits and desires. In short, it means a new civilization, radically different from the present capitalist order.

Outside the Congress, the socialist tendency led to the growth of the Communist Party under the leadership of P.C. Joshi and the foundation of the Congress Socialist Party under the leadership of Acharya Narendra Dev and Jai Prakash Narayan. In 1938, Subhash Chandra Bose had been re-elected president

of the Congress even though Gandhi had opposed him. But opposition of Gandhi and his supporters in the Congress Working Committee compelled Bose to resign from the presidentship of the Congress in 1939. He and many of his left-wing followers now founded the Forward Bloc.

Congress and World Affairs

A second major development of the period 1935-1939 was the increasing interest the Congress took in world affairs. The Congress had from its inception in 1885 opposed the use of the Indian army and of India's resources to serve British interests in Africa and Asia. It had gradually developed a foreign policy based on opposition to the spread of imperialism. In February 1927, Jawaharlal Nehru on behalf of the National Congress attended the Congress of oppressed nationalities at Brussels organised by political exiles and revolutionaries from the countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America, suffering from economic or political imperialism. The Congress was called to coordinate and plan their common struggle against imperialism. Many left-wing intellectuals and political leaders of Europe also joined the Congress. In his address to the Congress, Nehru said:

We realise that there is much in common in the struggle which various subject and semi-subject and oppressed peoples are carrying on today. Their opponents are often the same, although they sometimes appear in different guises and the means employed for their subjection are often similar,

Nehru was elected to the Executive Council of the League Against Imperialism that was born at this Congress. In 1927, the Madras session of the National Congress warned the Government that the people of



Jawaharlal Nehru and V.K. Krishna Menon with General Lister at General Lister's headquarters in Spain. (Courtesy; Nehru Memorial Museum and Library)

India would not support Britain in any war undertaken to further its imperialist aims.

In the 1930's the Congress took a firm stand against imperialism in any part of the world and supported national movements in Asia and Africa. It condemned Fascism which was rising at the time in Italy, Germany, and Japan as the most extreme form of imperialism and racialism and gave full support to the people of Ethiopia, Spain, Czechoslovakia, and China in their fight against aggression by the fascist powers. In 1937, when Japan launched an attack on China, the National Congress passed a resolution calling upon the Indian people "to refrain from the use of Japanese goods as a mark of their sympathy with the people of China." And in 1938, it sent a medical mission, headed by Dr. M. Atal, to work with the Chinese armed forces.

The National Congress fully recognised that the future of India was closely interlinked with the coming struggle between fascism and the forces of freedom, socialism and democracy. The emerging Congress approach to world problems, the awareness of India's position in the world, were clearly enunciated in Jawaharlal Nehru's presidential address to the Lucknow Congress in 1936:

Our struggle was but part of a far wider struggle for freedom, and the forces that moved us were moving millions of people all over the world and driving them into action. Capitalism, in its difficulties, took to fascism. It became, even in some of its homelands, what its imperialist counterpart had long been in the subject colonial countries. Fascism and imperialism thus stood out as the two faces of the now decaying capitalism. Socialism in the west and the rising nationalism of the Eastern and other dependent countries opposed this combination of fascism, and imperialism.

While stressing the Congress opposition to any participation of Indian Government in a war between imperialist powers, it offered full cooperation "to the progressive forces of the world, to those who stood for freedom and the breaking of political and social bonds," for "in their struggle against imperialism and fascist reaction, we realise that our struggle is a common one."

States Peoples' Struggle

The third major development during this period was the spread of national movement to the princely states. Appalling economic, political, and social conditions prevailed in most of them. Peasants were oppressed, land revenue and taxation were excessive and unbearable, education was retarded, health and other social services were extremely backward, and freedom of the press and other civil rights hardly existed. The bulk of the state revenues were spent on the luxuries of the princes. In several states serfdom, slavery, and forced labour flourished. Throughout history, a corrupt and decadent rule was checked to some extent by the challenge of internal revolt or external aggression. British rule freed the princes of both these dangers, and they felt free to indulge in gross misgovernment.

Moreover, the British authorities began to use the princes to prevent the growth of national unity and to counter the rising national movement. The princes in turn depended for their self-preservation from popular revolt on the

protection by the British power and adopted a hostile attitude to the national movement. In 1921, the Chamber* of prince? was created to enable the princes to meet and discuss under British guidance matters of common interest. In the Government of India Act of 1935, the proposed federal structure was so planned as to check the forces of nationalism. It was provided that the princes would get 2/5th of the seats in the Upper House and 1/3rd of the seats in the Lower House,

People of many of the princely states now began to organise movements for democratic rights and popular governments. All-India States* Peoples' Conference had already been founded in December 1927 to coordinate political activities in the different states. The second non-cooperation movement produced a deep impact on the feelings of the people of* these states and stirred them into political activity. Popular struggles were waged in many of the states, particularly in Rajkot, Jaipur, Kashmir, Hyderabad, and Travancore: The people's fight these struggle, with Violent repression. Some of them also took course¹⁶ edffihufialarii.

The Nizam of Hyderabad declared that the popular agitation was anti-Muslim; the Maharaja of Kashmir branded it as anti-Hindu; while the Maharaja of Travancore claimed that Christians were behind the popular agitation.

The National Congress supported the states' people's struggle and urged the princes to introduce democratic representative government and to grant fundamental civil rights. In 1938, when the Congress defined its goal of independence it included the independence of the princely states. Next year, at the Tripuri session, it decided to take a more active part in the states' people's movements. As if to emphasise the common national aims of the political struggles in India and in the states, Jawaharlal Nehru became the President of the All India States' People's Conference in 1939. The States' people's movement awakened national consciousness among the people of the states. It also spread a new consciousness of unity all over India.

Growth of Communalism

The fourth important development was the growth of communalism. Once again the elections for the legislative assemblies, organised on the basis of restricted franchise and separate electorates, had produced separatist sentiments. Moreover, the Congress failed to win many seats reserved for the minorities—it won 26 out of 482 seats reserved for Muslims and even out of these 26 seats 15 were won in the North Western Frontier Provinces—though the Muslim League too did not capture many of these seats. The Muslim League, led by Jinnah, now turned to bitter opposition to the Congress. It began to spread the cry that the Muslim minority was in danger of being engulfed by the Hindu majority. It propagated the unscientific and unhistorical theory that Hindus and Muslims were two separate nations which could, therefore, never live together. In 1940 the Muslim League passed a resolution demanding partition of the country and the creation of a state to be called Pakistan after independence.

The Muslim League propaganda gained by the existence of such communal

bodies among the Hindus as the Hindu Mahasabha, The Hindu communalists echoed the Muslim communalists by declaring that the Hindus were a distinct nation and that India was the land of the Hindus. Thus they too accepted the two-nation theory, They actively apposed the policy of giving adequate safeguards to the minorities so as to remove their fears of domination by the majority. In one respect, Hindu communalism had even less justification. In every country, the Religious or linguistic or national minorities have, because of their numerical position, felt at one time or the other that their social and cultural interests might suffer. But when the majority has by word and deed given proof that these fears are groundless the fears of the minorities have disappeared, but if a section of the people belonging to the majority become communal or sectional and start talking and working against the minorities, the minorities tend to feel unsafe. Communal or sectional leadership of the minorities is then strengthened. For example, during the 1930's the Muslim League was strong only in areas where the Muslims were in a minority. On the other hand in such areas as the North-Western Frontier Province, the Punjab, the Sindh, and Bengal, where the Muslims were in a majority and, therefore, felt relatively securer, the Muslim League remained weak. Interestingly enough, the communal groups—Hindu as well as Muslim—did not hesitate to join hands against the Congress. In the North-Western Frontier Province, the Punjab, Sindh, and Bengal, the Hindu communalists helped the Muslim League and other communal groups to form ministries which opposed the Congress. Another characteristic the various communal groups shared was their tendency to adopt pro-government political attitudes. It is to be noted that none of the communal groups and parties, which talked of Hindu and Muslim nationalism, took active part in the struggle against foreign rule. They saw the people belonging to other religions and the nationalist leaders as the real enemies.

The communal groups and parties also shied away from social and economic demands of the common people, which as we have seen above, were being increasingly taken up by the nationalist movement. In this respect, they increasingly came to represent the upper class vested interests. Jawaharlal Nehru noted this as early as 1933 :

The bulwork of communalism today is political reaction and so we find that communal leaders inevitably tend to become reactionaries in political and economic matters. Groups of upper class people try to cover up their own class interests by making it appear that they stand for the communal demands of religious minorities or majorities. A critical examination of the various communal demands put forward on behalf of Hindus, Muslims or others reveals that they have nothing to do with the masses.

NATIONAL MOVEMENT DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR

The Second World War broke out in September 1939 when Nazi Germany invaded Poland in pursuance of Hitler's scheme for German expansion. Earlier he had occupied Austria in March 1938 and Czechoslovakia in March 1939. Britain and France, which had tried their best to placate Hitler, were forced to go to Poland's aid. The Government of India immediately joined the war

without consulting the National Congress or the elected members of the central legislature,

The National Congress was in full sympathy with the victims of fascist aggression. It was willing to help the forces of democracy in their struggle against Fascism. But, the Congress leaders asked, how 'was' it possible for an enslaved nation to aid others in their fight for freedom? They therefore demanded that India must be declared free—or at least effective power put in Indian hands—before it could actively participate in the War. The British Government refused to accept this demand, and the Congress ordered its ministries to resign. In October 1940, Gandhi gave the call for a limited satyagraha by a few selected individuals. The satyagraha was kept limited so as not to embarrass Britain's war effort by a mass upheaval in India. The aims of this movement were explained as follows by Gandhi in a letter to the Viceroy.

... The Congress is as much opposed to victory for Nazism as any British citizen can be. But their objective cannot be carried to the extent of their participation in the war. And since you and the Secretary of State for India have declared that the whole of India is voluntarily helping the war effort, it becomes necessary to make clear that the vast majority of the people of India are not interested in it. They make no distinction between Nazism and the double autocracy that rules India.

Two major changes in world politics occurred during 1941. Having occupied Poland, Belgium, Holland, Norway, and France in the west as well as most of Eastern Europe, Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941. On 7 December Japan launched a surprise attack on the American fleet at Pearl Harbour and joined the war on the side of Germany and Italy. It quickly overran the Philippines, Indo-China, Indonesia, Malaya and Burma. It occupied Rangoon in March 1942. This brought the war to India's doorstep.

The British Government now desperately wanted the active cooperation of Indians in the war effort. To secure this cooperation it sent to India in March 1942 a mission headed by a Cabinet Minister, Sir Stafford Cripps, who had earlier been a radical member of the Labour Party and a strong supporter of Indian national movement. Even though Cripps declared that the aim of British policy in India was "the earliest possible realisation of self-government in India", detailed negotiations between him and the Congress leaders broke down. The British Government refused to accept the Congress demand for the immediate transfer of effective power to Indians. On the other hand, the Indian leaders could not be satisfied by mere promises for the future while the Viceroy retained his autocratic powers in the present. They were anxious to cooperate in the war effort, especially as the Japanese army endangered Indian territory. But they could do so, they felt, only when a national government was formed in the country.

The failure of the Cripps Mission embittered the people of India. While they still fully sympathised with the anti-Fascist forces, they felt that the existing political situation in the country had become intolerable. The Congress now decided to take active steps to compel the British to accept the Indian demand for independence. The All India Congress Committee met at Bombay on 8

August 1942. It passed the famous 'Quit India' Resolution and proposed the starting of a non-violent mass struggle under Gandhi's leadership to achieve this aim. The resolution declared.

... .the immediate ending of British rule in India is an urgent necessity, both for the sake of India and for the success of the cause of the United Nations.... India, the classic land of modern imperialism, has become the crux of the question, for by the freedom of India will Britain and the United Nations be judged, and the peoples of Asia and Africa be filled with hope and enthusiasm. The ending of British rule in this country is thus a vital and immediate issue on which depends the future of the war and the success of freedom and democracy. A free India will assure this success by throwing all her great resources in the struggle for freedom and against the aggression of Nazism, Fascism and Imperialism.

Addressing the Congress delegates on the night of 8 August, Gandhi said :

I, therefore, want freedom immediately, this very night, before dawn, if it can be had... .Fraud and untruth today are stalking the world ...You may take it from me that I am not going to strike a bargain with the Viceroy for mil. is tries and the like. I am not going to be satisfied with anything short of complete freedom .. .Here is a *mantra*, a short one, that I give you. You may imprint it on your hearts and let every breath, of yours give expression to it. The *mantra* is: "Do or Die". We shall either free India or die in the attempt; we shall not live to see the perpetuation of our slavery.

But before the Congress could start a movement, the Government struck hard. Early in the morning of 9 August, Gandhi and other Congress leaders were arrested and the Congress was once again declared illegal.

The news of these arrests left the country aghast, and a spontaneous movement of protest arose everywhere, giving expression to the pent up anger of the people. Left leaderless and without any organisation, the people reacted in any manner they could. All over the country there were *hartals*, strikes in factories, schools and colleges, and demonstrations which were lathi-charged and fired upon. Angered by repeated firings and repression, in many places the people took to violent actions. They attacked the symbols of British authority—the police stations, post offices, railway stations, etc. They cut telegraph and telephone wires and railway lines, and burnt government buildings. Madras and Bengal were the most effected in this respect. In many places the rebels seized temporary control over many towns, cities, and villages. British authority disappeared in parts of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, Orissa, Andhra, Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra. In some areas, the revolutionaries set up 'parallel governments'. In general, the students, workers, and the peasants provided the backbone of the 'revolt' while the upper classes and the bureaucracy remained loyal to the Government.

The Government on its part went all out to crush the 1942 movement. Its repression knew no bounds. The press was completely muzzled. The demonstrating crowds were machine-gunned and even bombed from the air. Prisoners were tortured. The police and secret police reigned supreme. The military took over many towns and cities. Over 10,000 people died in police and military firings. Rebellious villages had to pay huge sums as punitive fines and the villagers had to undergo mass floggings. India had not witnessed such

intense repression since the Revolt of 1857.

In the end the Government succeeded in crushing the movement. The Revolt of 1942, as it has been termed, was in fact short-lived. Its importance lay in the fact that it demonstrated the depth that nationalist feeling had reached in the country and the great capacity for struggle and sacrifice that the people had developed.

After the suppression of the Revolt of 1942, there was hardly any political activity inside the country till the war ended in 1945. The established leaders of the national movement were behind the bars, and no new leaders arose to take their place or to give a new lead to the country. In 1943, Bengal was plunged into the worst famine in recent history. Within a few months over three million people died of starvation. There was deep anger among the people for the Government could have prevented the famine from taking such a heavy toll of life. This anger, however, found little political expression.

The national movement, however, found a new expression outside the country's frontiers, Subhas Chandra Bose had escaped from India in March 1941 to go to the Soviet Union for help. But when the Soviet Union joined the allies in June 1941, he went to Germany. In February 1943 he left for Japan to organise an armed struggle against British rule with Japanese help. In Singapore he formed

the Azad Hind Fauj (Indian National Army or INA for short) to conduct a military campaign for the liberation of India. He was assisted by Rash Behari Bose, an old terrorist revolutionary. Before the arrival of Subhash Bose, steps towards the organisation of the INA had been taken by General Mohan Singh (at that time a Captain in the British Indian army). The INA was joined in large numbers by Indian residents in South-east Asia and by Indian soldiers released by the Japanese forces in Malaya, Singapore and Burma. Subhash Bose, who was now called Netaji by the soldiers of the INA, gave his followers the battle cry of 'Jai Hind', The INA joined the Japanese army in its march on India from Burma. Inspired by the aim of freeing their homeland, the soldiers and officers of the INA hoped to enter India as its liberators with Subhash Bose at the head of the Provisional Government of Free India.

With the collapse of Japan in the War during 1944-45, the INA too met defeat, and Subhash Bose was killed in an aeroplane accident on his way to Tokyo. Even though his strategy of winning freedom in cooperation with the Fascist powers was criticised at the time by most Indian nationalists, by organising the INA he set an inspiring example of patriotism.



Subhash Chandra Bose at a rally of Indian women in Singapore (Courtesy: Nehru Memorial Museum and Library)

before the Indian people and the Indian army, He was hailed as Netaji by the entire country.

Post-War Struggle

With the end of the war in Europe in April 1945, India's struggle for freedom entered a new phase. The Revolt of 1942 and the INA had revealed the heroism and determination of the Indian people. With the release of the national leaders from jail, the people began to look forward to another, perhaps the final, struggle for freedom.

The new struggle took the form of a massive movement against the trial of the soldiers and officers of the INA. The Government decided to put on trial in the Red Fort at Delhi Generals Shah Nawaz, Gurdial

Singh Dhillon, and Prem Sehgal of the INA, who had earlier been officers in the British Indian army. They were accused of having broken their oath of loyalty to the British Crown and thus of having become 'traitors'. On the other

hand, the people welcomed them as national heroes. Huge popular demonstrations demanding their release were held all over the country. The entire country now seethed with excitement and confidence. The time the struggle would be won. They would not let these Britishers. But, the British Government was this time in no two minds in its opinion. Even though the Court Martial held the INA guilty, the Government felt it expedient to set them free.

The changed attitude of the British Government is explained by several factors.

Firstly, the war had changed the balance of power in the world. Not only Britain but the United States of America and the Soviet Union emerged as one of the war as big powers. Both supported India's demand for freedom.

Secondly, even though the British was on the winning side in the war, its economic power was shattered. It would take Britain years to rehabilitate itself. Moreover, there was a change of government in Britain. The Conservatives were replaced by the Labour Party many of whose members supported the Congress demands. The British soldiers were weary of war. Having fought and shed their blood for nearly six years, they had no desire to spend many more years away from home in India suppressing the Indian people's struggle for freedom.

Thirdly, the British Indian Government could no longer rely on the Indian personnel of its civil administration and armed forces to suppress the national movement. The INA had shown that patriotic ideas had entered the ranks of the professional Indian army, the chief instrument of British rule in India. Another straw in the wind was the famous revolt of the Indian naval ratings at Bombay in February 1946. The ratings had fought a seven-hour battle with the army and navy and had surrendered only when asked to do so by the national leaders. Moreover,

there were also widespread strikes in the Indian Air Force. The Indian Signal Corps at Jabalpur also went on strike. The other two major instruments of British rule, the police and the bureaucracy, were also showing signs of nationalist leanings. They could no longer be safely used to suppress the national movement. For example, the police in Bihar and Reilly went on strike.

Fourthly, and above all, the confident and determined mood of the Indian people was by now obvious. They would no longer tolerate the humiliation of foreign rule. They would no longer rest till freedom was won. There was; the Naval Mutiny and the struggle for the release of INA prisoners. In addition there were during 1945-46 numerous agita-



Jawaharlal Nehru, Tej Bahadur Sapru and Kailash Math Katju arriving to defend INA prisoners.
(Courtesy: Nehru Memorial Museum and Library)

lions, strikes, *hartals* and demonstrations all over the country, even in many Princely States such as Hyderabad, Travancore, and Kashmir. For example, 111 November 1945, lakh,¹ of people demonstrated in the streets in Calcutta to demand the release of the INA prisoners. For three days there was virtually no government authority left in the city. Again, on

12 February 1946, there was another mass demonstration in the city to demand the release of Abdul Rashid, one of the INA prisoners. On 22 February, Bombay observed a complete *hartal* and general strike in factories and offices in sympathy with the naval ratings in revolt. The army was called in to suppress the popular upsurge. Over 250 people were shot dead on the streets in 48 bouts.

There was also large scale labour unrest all over the country. There was hardly an industry in which strikes did not occur. In July 1946, there was an all-India strike by the postal and telegraph workers. Rail/way workers in South India went on strike in August 1946. Peasant movement also became more militant in this period. Struggles for land and against high rents took place in Hyderabad, Malabar, Bengal, U.P., Bihar, and Maharashtra. Students in schools and colleges took a leading part in organizing strikes, *hartals*, and demonstrations.

The British Government, therefore, sent in March 1946 a Cabinet Mission to India to negotiate with the Indian leaders the terms for the transfer of power to Indians. The Cabinet Mission proposed a two-tiered federal plan which was expected to maintain national unity while conceding the largest measure of regional autonomy. -There was to be a federation of the provinces and the states,

with the federal centre controlling only defence, foreign affairs, and communications. At the same time, individual provinces could form regional unions to which they could surrender by mutual agreement some of their powers. Both the National Congress and the Muslim League accepted this plan. But the two could not agree on the plan for an interim government which would convene a constituent assembly to frame a constitution for the free, federal India. The two also put differing interpretations on the Cabinet Mission scheme to which they had agreed earlier. In the end, in September 1946, an Interim Cabinet, headed by Jawaharlal Nehru, was formed by the Congress. The Muslim League joined the Cabinet in October after some hesitation; but it decided to boycott the constituent assembly. On 20 February 1947, Clement Attlee, British Premier, declared that the British would quit India by June 1948.

But the elation of coining independence was marred by the large-scale communal riots during and after August 1946. The Hindu and Muslim communalists blamed each other for starting the heinous killings and competed with each other in cruelty. Mahatma Gandhi, engulfed in gloom at this total disregard of elementary humanity and seeing truth and non-violence cast to the winds, toured East Bengal and Bihar on foot to check the riot. Many other Hindus and Muslims laid down their lives in the effort to extinguish the fire of communalism. But the seeds had been sown too deep by the communal elements, aided and abetted by the alien government. Gandhi and other nationalists fought vainly against communal prejudices and passions.

Finally, Lord Louis Mountbatten, who had come to India as Viceroy in March 1947, worked out a compromise after long discussions with the leaders of the Congress and the Muslim League: the country was to be free but not united. India was to be partitioned and a new state of Pakistan was to be created along with a free India. The nationalist leaders agreed to the partition of India in order to avoid the large-scale bloodbath that communal riots threatened. But they did not accept the two-nation theory. They did not agree to hand over one-third of the country to the Muslim League as the latter wanted and as the proportion of the Muslims in Indian population would have indicated. They agreed to the separation of only those areas where the influence of the Muslim League was predominant, in the North Western Frontier Province, and the Sylhet district of Assam where the influence of the League was doubtful, a plebiscite was to be held. In other words the country was to be partitioned but not on the basis of Hinduism and Islam.

The Indian nationalists accepted partition not because there were two nations in India—a Hindu nation and a Muslim nation—but because the historical development of communalism, both Hindu and Muslim, over the past 70 years or so had created a situation where the alternative to partition was mass killing of lakhs of innocent people in senseless and barbaric communal riots. If these riots had been confined to one section of the country, the Congress leaders could have tried to curb them and taken a strong stand against partition. But unfortunately the fratricidal riots were taking place everywhere and actively

involved both Hindus and Muslims. On top of it all, the country was still ruled by the foreigner who did little to check the riots. On the other hand, the foreign government rather encouraged these riots by their divisive policies, perhaps hoping to play the two newly independent states against each other.*

The announcement that India and Pakistan would be free was made on 3 June 1947. The princely states were given the choice of joining either of the new states. Under the pressure of the popular states' people's movements and guided by the masterful diplomacy of Sardar Patel, the Home Minister, most of them acceded to India. The Nawab of Junagadh, the Nizam of Hyderabad, and the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir held back for some time. The Nawab of Junagadh, a small state on the coast of Kathiawar, announced accession to Pakistan even though the people of the state desired to join India. In the end, Indian troops occupied the state and a plebiscite was held which went in favour of joining India. The Nizam of Hyderabad made an attempt to claim an independent status but was forced to accede in 1948 after an internal revolt had broken out in its Telengana area and after Indian troops had marched into Hyderabad. The Maharaja of Kashmir also delayed accession to India or Pakistan even though the popular forces led by the National Conference wanted accession to India. However, he acceded to India in October 1947 after Pathans and irregular armed forces of Pakistan invaded Kashmir.

On 15 August 1947, India celebrated with joy its first day of freedom. The sacrifices of generations of patriots and the blood of countless martyrs had borne fruit. Their dream was now a reality. In a memorable address to the Constituent Assembly on the night of 14 August, Jawaharlal Nehru, giving expression to the feelings of the people, said :

Long years ago we made a tryst with destiny, and now the time comes when we will redeem our pledge, not wholly or in full measure, but very substantially.

•Referring to communalism Jawaharlal Nehru had written in 1946 in *Discovery of India*:

It is our fault, of course, and we must suffer for our failings. But I cannot excuse or forgive the British authorities for the deliberate part they have played in creating disruption in India. All other injuries will pass, but this will continue to plague us for a much longer period.

At the stroke of midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom. A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends, and when the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance. It is fitting that at this solemn moment we take the pledge of dedication to the service of India and her people and to the still larger cause of humanity. We end today a period of ill fortune and India discovers herself again. The achievement we celebrate today is but of incessant striving so that we may fulfil the pledges we have so often taken.

But the sense of joy, which should have been overwhelming and unlimited, was mixed with pain and sadness. The dream of Indian unity had been shattered and brother had been torn from brother; what was worse, even at the very moment of freedom a communal orgy, accompanied by indescribable brutalities, was consuming thousands of lives in both India and Pakistan. Lakhs of refugees, forced to leave the lands of their forefathers, were pouring into the two new states.* The symbol of this tragedy at the moment of

national triumph was the forlorn figure of Gandhiji—the man who had given the message of non-violence, truth, and love and courage and manliness to the Indian people, the man who symbolised all that was best in Indian culture. In the midst of national rejoicing, he was touring the hate-torn land of Bengal, trying to bring comfort to people who were even then paying through senseless communal slaughter the price of freedom. And the shouting and the celebrations had hardly died down when on 30 January 1948 an assassin—a hate-filled Hindu fanatic—extinguished the light that had shown so bright in our land for over 70 years. Thus Gandhi “died a martyr to the cause of unity to which he had always been devoted.”**

In a way, with the achievement of freedom, the country had taken only the first step: the overthrow of foreign rule had only removed the chief obstacle in the path of national regeneration. Centuries of backwardness, prejudice, inequality, and ignorance still weighed on the land and the long haul had just begun. For as Rabindranath Tagore had remarked

♦Writing of those months, Nehru wrote later:

Fear and hatred blinded our minds and all the restraints which civilization imposes were swept away. Horror piled on horror, and sudden emptiness seized us at the brute savagery of human beings. The lights seemed all to go out; not all, for a few still flickered in the raging tempest. We sorrowed for the dead and the dying, and for those whose suffering was greater than that of death. We sorrowed even more for India, our common mother, for whose freedom we had laboured these long years.

♦Earlier, in reply to a journalist on the occasion of his birthday in 1947, Gandhi had said that he no longer wished to live but that he would “invoke the aid of the Almighty to take me away from this ‘vale of tears’ rather than make me a helpless witness of the butchery by which I become a savage, whether he dares to call himself a Muslim or Hindu or what not.”

three months before his death in 1941 :

The wheels of fate will some day compel the English to give up their Indian Empire. But what kind of India will they leave behind, what stark misery? When the stream of their centuries' administration runs dry at last, what a waitc of mud uid filth will they leave behind them.

With confidence in their capacity and their will to succeed, the people of India now set out to change the face of their country and to build the just and the good society.

EXERCISE ' S

1. In what ways did the developments during the first World War and in the immediate post-war years favour the resurgence of nationalism in Africa and Asia in general and in India in particular?
2. Trace the early development of Gandhi as a political leader and discuss his basic political ideas.
3. Trace the development of the Non-Cooperation Movement and the Khilafat agitation from 1919 to 1922. How far did ihese two movements represent a new stage in the growth of the national movement?
4. What were the different aspects of nationalist resurgence in the years 1927 to 1929?
5. Discuss the course of the nationalist movement from the Lahore Session of 1929 to the withdrawal of the Second Civil Disobedience Movement in 1934.
6. Bring out the major political developments in India in the 1930's with special reference to the Congress Ministries, growth of socialist ideas, Congress attitude to world affairs, national movement in the princely states, and the growth of communalism.
7. Why do you think did the British change their attitude towards India after 1945?
8. How did the National Congress react to the Second World War? What progress did the national movement make during the war years. Clearly bring out the role of the "Quit India Resolution," the Revolt of 1942, and the Indian National Army.
9. Write short notes on :

(a) The Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms, (b) The Rowlatt Act, (c) The Swarajists, (d) The Revolutionary Terrorist Movement after 1925, (e) The Government of India Act of 1935, (0 The Cabinet Mission, (g) Gandhi and the partition of India, (h) IntegSRoit—at Jthe princely states with the Union of India. ^{at} '-