

CHAPTER 6

National Movement Towards Freedom and Partition 1939-1947

SECOND WORLD WAR AND NATIONALIST 'RESPONSE

September 1, 1939: Germany attacks Poland, Second World War starts.

September 3, 1939: Britain declares war against Germany and declares India's support for the war without consulting Indian opinion.

June 1941: Germany attacks Russia and Russia is dragged into the War.

December 1941: Japan attacks Pearl Harbour. March 1942: After having overrun almost the whole of SouthEast. Asia, Japan occupies Rangoon.

Congress Position Before War

The Congress' hostility to Fascism, Nazism, militarism and imperialism had been much more consistent than the British record. But the Indian offer to cooperate in the war effort had two basic conditions:

1. After the war, a constituent assembly should be convened to determine political structure of a free India.

2. Immediately, some form of a genuinely responsible government should be established at the centre.

The offer was rejected by Linlithgow, the viceroy. The Congress argued that these conditions were necessary to win public opinion for war.

CWC Meeting at Wardha (September 10-14, 1939): Different opinions were voiced on the question of Indian support to British war efforts—

Gandhi advocated an unconditional support to the Allied powers as he made a clear distinction between the democratic states of Western Europe and the totalitarian Nazis.

Subhash Bose and the socialists argued that the war was an imperialist one since both sides were fighting for gaining or defending colonial territories. Therefore, the question of supporting either of the two sides did not arise. Instead,

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advantage should be taken of the situation to wrest freedom by immediately starting a civil disobedience movement.

Nehru made a sharp distinction between democracy and Fascism. He believed that justice was on the side of Britain, France and Poland, but he was also convinced that Britain and France were imperialist powers, and that the war was the result of the inner contradictions of capitalism maturing since the end of World War I. He, therefore, advocated no Indian participation till India itself was free. However, at the same time, no advantage was to be taken of Britain's difficulty by starting an immediate struggle.

The CWC resolution condemned Fascist aggression. It said that

- (i) India could not be party to a war being fought ostensibly for democratic freedom, while that freedom was being denied to India;
- (ii) if Britain was fighting for democracy and freedom, it should prove it by ending imperialism in its colonies and establishing full democracy in India;
- (iii) the Government should declare its war aims soon and, also, as to how the principles, of democracy were to be applied to India.

The Congress leadership wanted to give every chance to the viceroy and the British Government

Government's Response

The Government's response was entirely negative. Linlithgow, in his statement (October 17, 1939), tried to use the Muslim League and the princes against the Congress. The Government

- refused to define British war aims beyond stating that Britain was resisting aggression;
- said it would, as part of future arrangement, consult "representatives of several communities, parties and interests in India, and the Indian princes" as to how the Act of 1935 might be modified;
- said it would immediately set up a "consultative committee" whose advice could be sought whenever required.

Government's Hidden Agenda Linlithgow's statement was not an aberration, but a part of general British policy—

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"to take advantage of the war to regain the lost ground from the Congress" by provoking the Congress into a confrontation with the

Government. and then using the extraordinary situation to acquire draconian powers. Even before the declaration of war, emergency powers had been acquired for the centre in respect of provincial subjects by amending the 1935 Act. Defence of India ordinance had been enforced the day the war was declared, thus restricting civil liberties. In May 1940, a top secret Draft Revolutionary Movement Ordinance had been prepared, aimed at launching crippling pre-emptive strikes on the Congress. The Government could then call upon the Allied troops stationed in India. It could also win an unusual amount of liberal and leftist sympathy all over the world by painting an aggressive Congress as being pro-Japan and pro-Germany.

British Indian reactionary policies received full support from Prime Minister Winston Churchill and the Secretary of State, Zetland, who branded the Congress as a purely Hindu organisation.

It became clear that the British Government had no intention of loosening its hold, during or after the war, and was willing to treat the Congress as an enemy. Gandhi readed sharply to the Government's insensitivity to Indian public opinion- "there is to be no democracy for India if Britain can prevent it." Referring to the minorities and other special interests, Gandhi said, "Congress will safeguard minority rights provided they do not advance claims inconsistent with India's independence."

On October 23, 1939, the CWC meeting rejected the viceregal statement as a reiteration of the old imperialist policy, decided not to support the war, and called upon the Congress ministries to resign in the provinces. status of Westminster variety, after the war 411ltezollolLtitisholicy in India."

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Debate on the 'Question of Immediate Mass Satyagraha After Linlithgow's statement of October 1939, the debate on the question of immediate mass struggle began once again. Gandhi and his supporters were not in favour of an immediate struggle because they felt that the

- Allied cause was just; communal, sensitivity and lack of Hindu-Muslim unity could result in communal riots; Congress organisation was in shambles and the atmosphere was not conducive for a mass struggle; and
- masses were not ready for a struggle. They instead advocated toning up the Congress organisation, carrying on political work among the masses, and negotiating till all possibilities of a negotiated settlement were exhausted. Only then would the struggle be begun.

The views of the dominant leadership were reflected in the Congress resolution at the Ramgarh session (March 1940)-"Congress would resort to civil disobedience as soon as the Congress organisation is considered fit enough or if circumstances precipitate a crisis."

A coalition of leftist groups-Subhash Bose and his Forward Bloc, Congress Socialist Party, Communist Party, the Royists-characterised the war as an imperialist war giving an opportunity to attain freedom through an all-out struggle against British imperialism. This group was

convinced that the masses were ready for action, only waiting for a call from the leadership. They accepted hurdles, such as communalism and the shortcomings of the Congress organisation, but thought that these would be automatically swept away in the course of a struggle. They urged the Congress leadership to launch an immediate mass struggle.

Bose even proposed a parallel Congress to organise an immediate mass struggle if the Congress leadership was not willing to go along with them, but the CSP and CPI differed with Bose on this

Nehru considered the Allied powers as imperialists and his philosophy and political perception leant towards the idea

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of an early struggle but that would have undermined the fight against Fascism. He finally went along with Gandhi and the Congress majority.

Pakistan Resolution-Lahore (March 1940)

The Muslim League passed a resolution calling for "grouping of geographically contiguous areas where Muslims are in majority (North-West, East) into independent states in which constituent units shall be autonomous and sovereign and adequate safeguards to Muslims where they are in minority".

AUGUST OFFER Hitler's astounding success and the fall of Belgium, Holland and France put England in a conciliatory mood. To get Indian cooperation in the war effort, the viceroy announced the August Offer (August 1940) which proposed:

- dominion status as the objective for India.
- expansion of viceroy's executive council. setting up of a constituent assembly after the war. Indians would decide the constitution according to their social, economic and political conceptions, subject to fulfilment of the obligation of the Government regarding defence, minority rights, treaties with states, all India services.
- no future constitution to be adopted without the consent of minorities.

The Congress rejected the August Offer. Nehru said, "Dominion status concept is dead as a door nail." Gandhi said that the declaration had widened the gulf between the nationalists and the British rulers. The Muslim League welcomed the veto assurance given to the League, and reiterated its position that partition was the only solution to the deadlock.

Evaluation

For the first time, the inherent right of Indians to frame their constitution was recognised and the Congress demand for a constituent assembly was, conceded. Dominion status was explicitly offered.

In July 1941, the viceroy's executive council was enlarged

to give the Indians a majority of 8 out of 12 for the first time, but the whites remained in charge of defence, finance and home. Also, a National Defence Council was set up with purely advisory functions.

INDIVIDUAL SATYAGRAHAS

The Government had taken the adamant position that no constitutional advance could be made till the Congress came to an agreement with the Muslim leaders. It issued ordinance after ordinance taking away the freedom of speech and that of the press and the right to organise associations. Towards the end of 1940, the Congress once again asked Gandhi to take command. Gandhi now began taking steps which would lead to a mass struggle within his broad strategic perspective. He decided to initiate a limited satyagraha on an individual basis by a few selected individuals in every locality.

The aims of launching individual satyagraha were—

- (i) to show that nationalist patience was not due to weakness;
- (ii) to express people's feeling that they were not interested in the war they made no distinction between Nazism and the double autocracy that ruled India; and
- (iii) to give another opportunity to the Government to accept Congress' demands peacefully.

The demand of the satyagrahi would be the freedom of speech against the war through an anti-war declaration. If the Government did not arrest the satyagrahi, he or she would not only repeat it but move into villages and start a march towards Delhi, thus precipitating a movement which came to be known as the "Delhi Chalo Movement".

Vinoba Bhave was the first to offer the satyagraha and

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Nehru, the second. By May 1941, 25,000 people had been convicted for individual civil disobedience.

The Congress leaders, released in December 1941, were anxious to defend Indian territory and go to the aid of the Allies. The CWC overrode Gandhi's and Nehru's objections and passed a resolution offering to cooperate with the Government in the defence of India, if

- (i) full independence was given after the war, and
 - (ii) substance of power was transferred immediately.
- It was at this time that Gandhi designated Nehru as his chosen successor.

CRIPPS MISSION

In March 1942, a mission headed by Stafford Cripps was sent to India with constitutional proposals to seek Indian support for the war. Stafford Cripps was a left-wing Laborite, the leader of the House of Commons and a member of the British War Cabinet who had actively supported the India national movement.

Why Cripps Mission was Sent?

- Because of the reverses suffered by Britain in South-East Asia, the Japanese threat to invade India seemed real now and Indian support became crucial.
- There was pressure on Britain from the Allies (USA, USSR, China) to seek Indian cooperation.
- Indian nationalists had agreed to support the Allied cause if substantial power was transferred immediately and complete independence given after the war.

Main Proposals

The main proposals of the mission were as follows.

1. An Indian Union with a dominion status would be set up; it would be free to decide its relations with the Commonwealth and free to participate in the United Nations and other international bodies.
2. After the end of the war, a constituent assembly would be convened to frame a new constitution. Members of this assembly would be partly elected by the provincial assemblies through proportional representation and partly nominated by the princes.
3. The British Government would accept the new constitution subject to two conditions: (i) any province not willing to join the Union could have a separate constitution and form a separate Union, and (ii) the new constitution-making body and the British Government would negotiate a treaty to effect the transfer of power and to safeguard racial and religious minorities.
4. In the meantime, defence of India would remain in British hands and the governor-general's powers would remain intact.

Departures from the Past and Implications

The proposals differed from those offered in the past in many respects—

- The making of the constitution was to be solely in Indian hands now (and not "mainly" in Indian hands—as contained in the August Offer). A concrete plan was provided for the constituent assembly.
- Option was available to any province to have a separate constitution—a blueprint for India's partition.
- Free India could withdraw from the Commonwealth.
- Indians were allowed a large share in the administration in the interim period.

Why Cripps Mission Failed?

The Cripps Mission proposals failed to satisfy Indian nationalists and turned out to be merely a propaganda device for US and Chinese consumption. Various parties and groups had objections to the proposals on different points—

The Congress objected to

- (i) the offer of dominion status instead of a provision for complete independence.
- (ii) representation of the states by nominees and not by elected representatives.
- (iii) right to provinces to secede as this went against the principle of national unity.

- (iv) absence of any plan for immediate transfer of power and absence of any real share in defence; the governor-general's supremacy had been retained, and the demand for governor-general being only the constitutional head had not been accepted.

Nehru and Maulana Azad were the official negotiators for the Congress.

The Muslim League

- (i) criticised the idea of a single Indian Union.
- (ii) did not like the machinery for the creation of a constituent assembly and the procedure to decide on the accession of provinces to the Union.
- (iv) thought that the proposals denied to the Muslims the right to self-determination and the creation of Pakistan.

Other groups also objected to the provinces' right to secede. The Liberals considered the secession proposals to be against the unity and security of India. The Hindu Mahasabha criticised the basis of the right to secede. The depressed classes thought that partition would leave them at the mercy of the caste Hindus. The Sikhs objected that partition would take away Punjab from them.

The explanation that the proposals were meant not to supersede the August Offer but to clothe general provisions with precision put British intentions in doubt.

The incapacity of Cripps to go beyond the Draft Declaration and the adoption of a rigid "take it or leave it" attitude added to the deadlock. Cripps had earlier talked of "cabinet" and "national government" but later he said that he had only meant an expansion of the executive council.

The procedure of accession was not well-defined. The decision on secession was to be taken by a resolution in the legislature by a 60% majority. If less than 60% of members supported it, the decision was to be taken by a plebiscite of adult males of that province by a simple majority. This scheme weighed against the Hindus in Punjab and Bengal if they wanted accession to the Indian Union.

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It was not clear as to who would implement and interpret the treaty effecting the transfer of power.

Churchill (the British prime minister), Amery (the secretary of state), Linlithgow (the viceroy) and Ward (the commander-in-chief) consistently torpedoed Cripps' efforts.

Talks broke down on the question of the viceroy's veto. Gandhi described the scheme as "a post-dated cheque"; Nehru pointed out that the "existing structure and autocratic powers would remain and a few of us will become the viceroy's liveried camp followers and look after canteens and the like".

Stafford Cripps returned home leaving behind a frustrated and embittered Indian people, who, though still sympathising with the victims of Fascist aggression, felt that the existing situation in the country had become intolerable and that the time had come for a final assault on imperialism.

QUIT INDIA MOVEMENT

After Cripps departure, Gandhi framed a resolution calling for British withdrawal and a non-violent non-cooperation movement against any Japanese invasion. The CWC meeting at Wardha (July 14, 1942) accepted the idea of a struggle.

Why Start a Struggle Now

The reasons were several:

1. The failure of the Cripps Mission to solve the constitutional deadlock exposed Britain's unchanged attitude on constitutional advance and made it clear that any more silence would be tantamount to accepting the British right to decide the fate of Indians without consulting them.
2. There was popular discontent because of rising prices and shortage of rice, salt, etc. and because of factors such as commandeering of boats in Bengal and Orissa. There were fears of Britain following a scorched earth policy in Assam, Bengal and Orissa against possible Japanese advance.
3. News of reverses suffered by the British in South-East Asia and an imminent British collapse enhanced popular willingness to give expression to discontent. Popular faith in

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the stability of British rule was so low that people were withdrawing deposits from banks and post offices.

4. The manner in which the British evacuated from South-East Asia leaving the subjects to their fate (two roads were provided—Black Road for Indian refugees and White Road exclusively for European refugees), and the rout by an Asian power shattered white prestige and exposed the racist tendencies of the rulers.
5. The leadership wanted to condition the masses for a possible Japanese invasion.

AICC Meeting—Gowalia Tank, Bombay (August 8, 1942) The Quit India Resolution was ratified and the meeting resolved to

- demand an immediate end to British rule in India.
- declare commitment of free India to defend itself against all types of Fascism and imperialism.
- form a provisional Government of India after British withdrawal.
- sanction a civil disobedience movement against British rule.
- Gandhi was named the leader of the struggle.

Gandhi's General Instructions to Different Sections

These were spelt out at the Gowalia Tank meeting but not actually issued. They were directed at various sections of society.

- Government servants: Do not resign but declare your allegiance to the Congress.

- Soldiers: Do not leave the Army but do not fire on compatriots.
- Students: If confident, leave studies.
- Peasants: If zamindars are anti-government, pay mutually agreed rent, and if zamindars are pro-government, do not pay rent.
- Princes: Support the masses and accept sovereignty of your people.
- Princely states' people: Support the ruler only if he

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is anti-government and declare yourselves to be a part of the Indian nation.

Gandhi followed up with the now-famous exhortation: "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."

Spread of the Movement

Gandhi had carefully built the tempo through individual civil disobedience movements, organisational revamping and a consistent propaganda campaign. The Government, however, was in no mood to either negotiate with the Congress or wait for the movement to be formally launched. In the early hours of August 9, in a single sweep, all the top leaders, of the Congress were arrested and taken to unknown destinations. Removal of established leaders left the younger and militant elements at their own initiative.

Public on Rampage

The general public attacked symbols of authority, hoisting national flags forcibly on public buildings. Satyagrahis offered themselves up to arrest, bridges were blown up, railway tracks were removed and telegraph lines were cut. This kind of activity was most intense in eastern UP and Bihar. Students responded by going on strikes in schools and colleges, participating in processions, writing and distributing illegal news sheets (patrikas) and acting as couriers for underground networks. Workers went on strike in Ahmedabad, Bombay, Jamshedpur, Ahmednagar and Poona.

Underground Activity

This was undertaken by the Socialists, Forward Bloc members, Gandhi ashramites, revolutionary terrorists and local organisations in Bombay, Poona, Satara, Baroda and other parts of Gujarat, Karnataka, Kerala, Andhra, UP, Bihar and Delhi. Underground activity was carried out by Rammanohar Lohia, Jayaprakash Narayan, Aruna Asaf Ali, Usha Sharma, Biju Patnaik, Chhotubhai Puranik, Achyut Patwardhan, Sucheta Kripalani and R.P. Goenka. Usha Sharma started an underground radio in

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Bombay. This phase of underground activity was meant to keep up popular morale by continuing to provide a line of command and guidance to distribute arms and ammunition.

Parallel Governments

Parallel governments were established at many places:

Ballia (in August 1942 for a week)—under Chittu Pandey. He got many Congress leaders released.

Tamluk (Midnapore, from December 1942 to September 1944)—which undertook cyclone relief work, sanctioned grants to schools, supplied paddy from the rich to the poor, organised Bidyut Bahinis etc.

Satara (mid-1943 to 1945)—named "Prati Sarkar", was organised under leaders like Y.B. Chavan, Nana Patil, etc. Village libraries and Nyayaclan Mandals were organised, prohibition campaigns were carried on and 'Gandhi marriages' were organised.

Active help was provided by businessmen (through donations, shelter and material help), students (acting as couriers), simple villagers (by refusing information to authority), pilots and train drivers (by delivering bombs and other material) and government officials including police (who passed on secret information to activists).

Extent of Mass Participation

The participation was on many levels. Youth, especially the students of schools and colleges, remained in the forefront. Women, especially school and college girls, actively participated, and included Aruna Asaf Ali, Sucheta Kripalani and Usha Mehta. Workers went on strikes and faced repression. Peasants of all strata were at the heart of the movement. Even some zamindars participate. We peasants concentrated their offensive on symbols of authority and there was complete absence of anti-zamindar violence. Government officials, especially those belonging to lower levels in police and administration, participated resulting in erosion of government loyalty. Muslims helped by giving shelter to underground Activists. There were no communal clashes during the movement. Communists, despite their anti-war line, felt the irresistible pull of the movement. Princely states showed a low-key response.

Government Repression

Although martial law was not applied, the repression was severe. Agitating crowds were lathi-charged, tear-gassed and fired upon. The number of those killed is estimated at 10,000. The press was muzzled. The military took over, many cities; police and secret service reigned supreme. Rebellious villages were fined heavily and in many villages, mass flogging was done.

Estimate

- Main storm centres of the movement were eastern UP, Bihar, Midnapore, Maharashtra, Karnataka. Students, workers and peasants were the backbone of the movement while the upper classes and the bureaucracy remained largely loyal. Loyalty to Government suffered considerable erosion. This also showed how deep nationalism had reached.

- The movement established the truth that it was no longer possible to rule India without the wishes of Indians.

- The element of spontaneity was higher than before, although a certain degree of popular initiative had been sanctioned by the leadership itself, subject to limitations of instructions. Also, the Congress had been ideologically, politically and organisationally preparing for the struggle for a long time. The great significance was that the movement placed the demand for independence on the immediate agenda of the national movement. After Quit India, there could be no retreat.
- In this struggle, the common people displayed unparalleled heroism and militancy. The repression they faced was the, most brutal, and the circumstances under which resistance was offered were most adverse.

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February 1943 Gandhi, started a fast as an answer to an exhortation to the Government to condemn violence; the fast was of the state. The popular response to the news of the fast was immediate and overwhelming. Protests were organised at home and abroad through hartals, demonstrations and strikes. Three members of the viceroy's executive council resigned. The fast achieved the following purposes—

- public morale was raised.
- anti-British feeling was heightened.
- an opportunity was provided for political activity.

Government's high-handedness was exposed. Gandhi got the better of his opponents and refused to oblige by dying. March 23, 1943 Pakistan Day was observed.

FAMINE OF 1943

The worst-affected areas were south-west Bengal comprising the Tamruk-Contai-Diamond Harbour region, Dacca, Faridpur, Tippera and Noakhali. Around 1.5 to 3 million people perished in this basically man-made famine, the epidemics (malaria, cholera, small pox), malnutrition and starvation. The fundamental causes of the famine were as follows.

1. The need to feed a vast Army diverted foodstuffs.
2. Rice imports from Burma and South-East Asia had been stopped.
3. The famine got aggravated by gross mismanagement and deliberate profiteering; rationing methods were belated and were confined to big cities.

RAJGOPALACHARI FORMULA

Meanwhile, efforts were on to solve the ongoing constitutional crisis, and some individuals also tried to come up with constitutional proposals.

C. Rajagopalachari, the veteran Congress leader, prepared a formula for Congress-League cooperation. It was a tacit acceptance of the League's demand for Pakistan. Gandhi supported the formula. The main points in CR Plan were:

- Muslim League to endorse Congress demand for independence.
- League to cooperate with Congress in forming a provisional government at centre.
- After the end of the war, the entire population of Muslim majority areas in the North-West and North-East India to decide by a plebiscite, whether or not to form a separate sovereign state.

- In case of acceptance of partition, agreement to be made jointly for safeguarding defence, commerce, communications, etc.

The above terms to be operative only if England transferred full powers to India.

Jinnah's Objections

Jinnah wanted the Congress to accept the two-nation theory. He wanted only the Muslims of North-West and North-East to vote in the plebiscite and not the entire population. He also opposed the idea of a common centre. While the Congress was ready to cooperate with the League for the independence of the Indian Union, the League did not care for independence of the Union. It was only interested in a separate nation.

Hindu leaders led by Vir Savarkar condemned the CR Plan.

DESAI-LIAQAT PACT

Efforts continued to end the deadlock. Bhulabhai Desai, leader of the Congress Party in the Central Legislative Assembly, met Liaquat Ali Khan, deputy leader of the Muslim League in that Assembly, and both of them came up with the draft proposal for the formation of an interim government at the centre, consisting of—

- an equal number of persons nominated by the Congress and the League in the central legislature.
- 20% reserved seats for minorities. No settlement could be reached between the Congress

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and the League on these lines, but the fact that a sort of parity between the Congress and the League was decided upon, which had far-reaching consequences.

AVELL PLAN

Although the war in Europe came to an end in May 1945, the Japanese threat still remained. The Conservative Government in Britain led by Churchill was keen to reach a solution on the constitutional question in India. The viceroy, Lord Wavell was permitted to start negotiations with Indian leaders. Congress leaders were released from jails in June 1945.

Why the Government was Keen on a Solution Now

1. The general election in England was scheduled for mid-1945. The Conservatives wanted to be seen as sincere on reaching a solution.
2. There was pressure from the Allies to seek further Indian cooperation in the war.
3. The Government wanted to divert Indian energies into channels more profitable for the British.

The Plan

The idea was to reconstruct the governor-general's executive council pending the preparation of a new constitution. For this purpose, a conference was convened by the viceroy, Lord Wavell, at Shimla in June 1945. The main proposals of the Wavell Plan were as follows.

- With the exception of the governor-general and the commander-in-chief, all members of the executive council were to be Indians.

- Caste Hindus and Muslims were to have equal representation.
- The reconstructed council was to function as an interim government within the framework of the 1935 Act (i.e. not responsible to the Central Assembly).
- Governor-general was to exercise his veto on the advice of ministers.
- Representatives of different parties were, to submit a joint list to the viceroy for nominations to the executive

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council. If a joint list was not possible, then separate lists were to be submitted.

- Possibilities were to be, kept open for negotiations on a new constitution once the war was finally won.

Muslim League's Stand

The League wanted all Muslim members to be League nominees, because it feared that since the aims of other minorities—depressed classes, Sikhs, Christians, etc. were the same as those of the Congress, this arrangement would reduce the League to a one-third minority. (Wade wanted Khizr Hyatt Khan as the Muslim representative from Western Punjab.) The League claimed some kind of veto in the council with decisions opposed to Muslims needing a two-thirds majority for approval.

Congress Stand

The Congress objected to the plan as "an attempt to reduce the Congress to the status of a purely caste Hindu party and insisted on its right to include members of all communities among its nominees".

Wavell's Mistake

Wavell announced a breakdown of talks thus giving the League a virtual veto. This strengthened the League's position, as was evident from the elections in 1945-46, and boosted Jinnah's position; and exposed the real character of the Conservative Government of Churchill.

THE INDIAN NATIONAL ARMY

The idea of the Indian National Army (INA) was first conceived in Malaya by Mohan Singh, an Indian officer of the British Indian Army, when he decided not to join the retreating British Army and instead turned to the Japanese for help.

The First Phase

The Japanese handed over the Indian prisoners of war (POWs) to Mohan Singh who tried to recruit them into an Indian National Army. After the fall of Singapore, Mohan Singh further got 45,000 POWs into his sphere of influence. By the end of 1942, 40,000 men were ready to join the INA. The INA intended to go into action only on invitation of the Indian National Congress and the people of India. It was also seen by many as a check against the misconduct of

the Japanese against Indians in South-East Asia and a bulwark against a future Japanese occupation of India.

The outbreak of the Quit India Movement gave a fillip to the INA as well. In September 1942, the first division of the INA was formed with 16,300 men. With the Japanese contemplating an Indian invasion, the idea of an armed wing of INA seemed more relevant to them. But soon, serious differences emerged between the Indian Army officers led by Mohan Singh and the Japanese over the role to be played by the INA. Actually, the Japanese wanted a token force of 2,000 only while Mohan Singh wanted to raise an army of 2,00,000.

The Second Phase

The next phase began with the arrival of Subhash Bose in Singapore in July 1943. Earlier, he had left the Congress after having developed differences with Gandhi and had formed the Forward Bloc in 1940: In March 1941, he escaped from India, where he had been under house arrest, and approached the Russian leaders for help against Britain. When in June 1941 the Soviet Union joined the war on behalf of the Allies, Bose went to Germany and from there he reached Japan in February 1943. He asked for Japanese help for an armed struggle against the British rule. He came to Singapore in July 1943 where he was assisted by Rashbehari Bose and others, such as the Indian residents of South-East Asia and the Indian POWs from Burma, Malaya and Singapore. In October 1943, he set up a Provisional Indian Government with headquarters at Rangoon and Singapore. This Provisional Government was recognised by the Axis powers. Recruits were trained and funds collected for the INA. Even a women's regiment called the Rath Jhansi Regiment was formed. In July 1944, Subhash Bose asked for Gandhi's blessings for "India's last war of independence".

One INA battalion commanded by Shah Nawaz was allowed to accompany the Japanese Army to the Indo-Burma front and participate in the Imphal campaign. But the discriminatory treatment by the Japanese, which included being denied rations and arms and being made to do menial work for the Japanese units, completely demoralised the INA units.

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The failure of the Imphal campaign and the steady Japanese retreat thereafter quashed any hopes of the INA liberating the nation. The retreat continued till mid-1945 and ended only with the final surrender to the British in South-East Asia.

But when the INA POWs were brought back to India after the war to be court-martialled, a powerful movement emerged in their defence.

POST-WAR NATIONAL UPSURGE—JUNE 1945 TO FEBRUARY 1946

Two basic strands of national upsurge can be identified during the last two years of British rule—

(i) tortuous negotiations involving the Government, Congress and Muslim League, increasingly accompanied by communal violence and culminating in freedom and the partition.

(ii) sporadic, localised and often extremely militant and united mass action by workers, peasants and states' peoples which took the form of a countrywide strike wave. This kind of activity was occasioned by the INA Release Movement, Royal Indian Navy (RIN) revolt, Tebhaga movement, Worli revolt, Punjab Kisan Morchas, Travancore peoples' struggle (especially the Punnapra-Vayalar episode) and the Telangana peasant revolt.

When the Government lifted the ban on the Congress and released the Congress leaders in June 1945, they expected to find a demoralised people. Instead, they found tumultuous crowds impatient to do something. Popular energy resurfaced after three years of repression. People's expectations were heightened, by the release of their leaders. The Wavell Plan backed by the Conservative Government in Britain failed to break the constitutional deadlock.

In July 1945, Labour Party formed the Government in Britain. Clement Attlee took over as the new prime minister and Pethick Lawrence as the new secretary of state.

In August 1945, elections to central and provincial assemblies were announced.

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In September 1945, it was announced that a constituent assembly would be convened after the elections and that the Government was working according to the spirit of the Cripps Offer.

Why a Change in Government's Attitude

1. The end of the War resulted in a change in balance of global power—the UK was no more a power while the USA and USSR emerged as superpowers, both of which favoured freedom for India.
2. The new Labour Government was more sympathetic to Indian demands.
3. Throughout Europe, there was a wave of socialist radical governments.
4. British soldiers were weary and tired and the British economy lay shattered.
5. There was an anti-imperialist wave in South-East Asia—in Vietnam and Indonesia—resisting efforts to replant French and Dutch rule.
6. Officials feared another Congress revolt, a revival of 1942 situation but much more dangerous because of a likely combination of attacks on communications, agrarian revolts, labour trouble, army disaffection joined by government officials and the police in the presence of INA men with some military experience.
7. Elections were inevitable once the war ended since the last elections had been, held in 1934 for the centre and in 1937 for the provinces.

The British would have had to retreat; the Labour Government only quickened the process somewhat.

CONGRESS ELECTION CAMPAIGN AND INA TRIALS

Elections were held during the winter of 1945-46. The most significant feature of the election campaign was that it sought to mobilise the Indians against the British; it did not just appeal to the people for votes.

The election campaign expressed, the nationalist sentiments against the state repression of the 1942 Quit India

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upsurge. This was done by the glorification of martyrs and condemnation of officials. The brave resistance of the leaderless people was lauded; martyrs' memorials were set up; relief funds were collected for sufferers; the officials responsible for causing pain were condemned; and promises of enquiry and threats of punishment to guilty officials were spelt out.

The Government failed to check such speeches. This had a devastating effect on the morale of the services. The prospect of the return of Congress ministries, especially in those provinces where repression had been most brutal, further heightened these fears. A 'gentleman's agreement' with the Congress seemed necessary to the Government.

Mass pressure against the trial of INA POWs, sometimes described as "an edge of a volcano", brought about a decisive shift in the Government's policy. The British had initially decided to hold public trials of several hundreds of INA prisoners besides dismissing them from service and detaining without trial around 7000 of them. They compounded the folly by holding the first trial in the Red Fort at Delhi in November 1945 and putting on dock together a Hindu, Prem Kumar Sehgal, a Muslim, Shah Nawaz Khan and a Sikh, Gurbaksh Singh Dhillon.

Another issue was provided by the use of Indian Army units in a bid to restore French and Dutch colonial rule in Vietnam and Indonesia which enhanced the anti-imperialist feeling among a section of urban population and the Army.

Congress Support for INA Prisoners

- At the first postWar Congress session in September 1945 at Bombay, a strong resolution was adopted declaring Congress support for the INA cause.
- Defence of INA prisoners in the court was organised by Bhulabhai Desai, Tej Bahadur Sapru, Kailash Nath Katju, Nehru and Asaf Ali.
- INA Relief and Enquiry Committee distributed small sums of money and food, and helped arrange employment for the affected. Fund collection was organised.

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The INA Agitation—A Landmark on Many Counts The high pitch and intensity at which the campaign for the release of INA prisoners was conducted was unprecedented. The agitation got wide publicity through extensive press coverage with daily editorials, distribution of pamphlets often containing threats of revenge, graffiti conveying similar messages, holding of public meetings and celebrations of INA Day (November 12, 1945) and INA week (November 5-11).

The campaign had a wide geographical reach and witnessed the participation of diverse social groups and political parties. While the nerve centres of the agitation were Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, UP towns and Punjab, the campaign spread to distant places such as Coorg, Baluchistan and Assam. The forms of participation included fund contributions made by many people from film stars, municipal committees, Indians living abroad and gurudwaras to tongawallas; participation in meetings; shopkeepers closing shops; political groups demanding release of prisoners; contributing to INA funds; student meetings and boycott of classes; organising kisan conferences and All India Women's Conference demanding release of INA prisoners.

Those who supported the INA cause in varying degrees, apart from the Congress, included the Muslim League, Communist Party, Unionists, Akalis, Justice Party, Ahrars in Rawalpindi, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, Hindu Mahasabha and the Sikh League.

Pro-INA sentiments surfaced in traditional bulwarks of the Raj. Government employees collected funds. The loyalists—the gentlemen with titles—appealed to the Government to abandon trials for good Indian-British relations. Men of the armed forces were unexpectedly sympathetic and attended meetings, received those released (often in uniforms) and contributed funds.

The central theme became the right of Britain to decide a matter concerning Indians. Britain realised the political significance of the INA issue, which with each day assumed more and more of an 'Indian versus British' colour.

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THREE UPSURGES—WINTER OF 1945-46

The nationalist sentiment which reached a crescendo around the INA trials developed into violent confrontations with the authority in the winter of 1945-46. There were three major upsurges—

1. November 21, 1945—in Calcutta over the INA trials.
 2. February 11, 1946—in Calcutta against the seven-year sentence to INA officer Rashid Ali.
 3. February 18, 1946—in Bombay, strike by the Royal Indian Navy Ratings.
- All three upsurges showed a similar three-stage pattern—

I. When a Group Defies Authority and is Repressed

Upsurge 1 (November 21, 1945): A student procession comprising some Forward Bloc sympathisers, Student Federation of India (SFI) activists and Islamia College students who had tied together the League, Congress and red flags as a symbol of anti-imperialist unity marched to Dalhousie Square—the seat of government in Calcutta. These protestors refused to

disperse and were lathicharged. They retaliated by throwing stones and brickbats. The police resorted to firing in which two persons died.

Upsurge 2 (February 11, 1946): The protest was led by Muslim League students in which some Congress and communist students' organisations joined. Some arrests provoked the students to defy Section 144. There were more arrests and the agitating students were lathicharged.

Upsurge 3 (February 18, 1946): 1100 naval Ratings of HMIS Talwar went on a strike to protest against

- * racial discrimination (demanding equal pay for Indian and white soldiers)

- * unpalatable food

- * abuse by superior officers

- * arrest of a rating for scrawling. 'Quit India' on HMIS Talwar

- * INA trials

- * use of Indian troops in Indonesia, demanding their withdrawal.

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I. The rebellious ratings hoisted the tricolour, crescent and the hammer and sickle flags on the mast of the rebel fleet. Other ratings soon joined and they went around Bombay in lorries holding Congress flags threatening Europeans and policemen. Crowds brought food to the ratings and shopkeepers invited them to take whatever they needed.

II. When the City People Join In This phase was marked by a virulent anti-British mood resulting in the virtual paralysis of Calcutta and Bombay. There were meetings, processions, strikes, hartals, attacks on Europeans, police stations, shops, tram depots, railway stations, banks, and forcible stopping of rail and road traffic by squatting on tracks and barricading of streets.

II. When People in Other Parts of the Country Express Sympathy and Solidarity While the students boycotted classes and organised hartals and processions to express sympathy with other students and the ratings, there were sympathetic strikes in military establishments in Karachi, Madras, Visakhapatnam, Calcutta, Delhi, Cochin, Jamnagar, Andamans, Bahrain and Aden. There were strikes by the Royal Indian Air Force in Bombay, Poona, Calcutta, Jessore and Arnabala. Patel and Jinnah persuaded the ratings to surrender on February 23 with an assurance that national parties would prevent any victimisation.

Evaluation of Potential and Impact of the Three Upsurges

The three upsurges were significant in many ways—

- Fearless action by masses was an expression of militancy in the popular mind.

- Revolt in the armed forces had a great liberating effect on the minds of people.

- RIN revolt was seen as an event marking the end of British rule as finally as the Independence Day.

- These upsurges prompted the British to extend some concessions:

On December 1, 1946, the Government announced that only those INA members accused of murder or brutal treatment of fellow prisoners would be brought to trial.

Imprisonment sentences passed against the first batch were remitted in January 1947.

Indian soldiers were withdrawn from Indo-China and Indonesia by February 1947.

The decision to send a parliamentary delegation to India (November 1946) was taken.

The decision to send Cabinet Mission was taken in January 1946.

But could the communal unity witnessed during these events, if built upon, have offered a way out of the communal deadlock? Or, in other words, what was the potential of these upsurges?

These upsurges were in the nature of direct and violent conflict with authority, which had obvious limitations. Only the more militant sections could participate.

These upsurges were short-lived and were confined to a few urban centres while the general INA agitation reached the remotest villages.

Communal unity witnessed was more organisational than a unity among the people. Muslim ratings went to the League to seek advice and the rest to the Congress and the Socialists.

Despite considerable erosion of the morale of the bureaucracy, the British infrastructure to repress was intact. They were soon able to control the situation. It was a Maratha battalion in Bombay that rounded up the ratings and restored them to their barracks.

Congress Strategy

The leftists claim that the Congress indifference to the revolutionary situation arose because of two considerations—that the situation would go out of its control and that disciplined armed forces were vital in a free India. They also claim that if the Congress leaders had not surrendered to power play, a different path to independence would have emerged. But actually these upsurges were an extension of earlier nationalist activity fostered by the Congress

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through its election campaign. advocacy of the INA cause and highlighting of the excesses of 1942.

These upsurges were distinguishable from the earlier activity because of their form of articulation. These were violent challenges to the authority while the earlier activity was a peaceful demonstration of national solidarity.

The Congress did not officially support these upsurges because of their tactics and timing.

Negotiations had been an integral part of the Congress strategy, to be explored before a mass movement could be launched, especially when the British were seen to be preparing to leave soon.

If union at the barricade is honest, there should be a union at the constitutional front also.

Gandhi remarked that the mutiny was badly advised: if they mutinied for India's freedom, they were doubly wrong; if they had any grievances, they should have waited for the guidance of leaders.

ELECTION RESULTS

Congress' Performance

- It got 91% of non-Muslim votes.
- It captured 57 out of 102 seats in the Central Assembly.
- In the provincial elections, it got a majority in most provinces except in Bengal, Sindh and Punjab. The Congress majority provinces included NWFP and Assam which were being claimed for Pakistan.

Muslim League's Performance

- It got 86.6% of the Muslim votes.
- It captured the 30 reserved seats in the Central Assembly.
- In the provincial elections, it got a majority in Bengal and Sindh.
- Unlike in 1937, now the League clearly established itself as the dominant party among Muslims.

Punjab, A Unionist-Congress-Akali coalition under Khizr Hyatt Khan assumed power.

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Significant Feature of Elections

The elections witnessed communal voting in contrast to the strong anti-British unity shown in various upsurges due to

1. separate electorates,
2. limited franchise—for the provinces, less than 10% of the population could vote and for the Central Assembly, less than 1% of the population was eligible.

THE CABINET MISSION

The Attlee Government announced in February 1946 the decision to send a high-powered mission of three British Cabinet members (Pethick Lawrence, Secretary of State for India; Stafford Cripps, President of the Board of Trade; and A.V. Alexander, First Lord of Admiralty to India to find out ways and means for a negotiated, peaceful transfer of power to India.

Why British Withdrawal Seemed Imminent Now?

1. The success of nationalist forces in the struggle for hegemony was fairly evident by the end of the War. Nationalism had penetrated into hitherto untouched sections and areas.
2. There was a demonstration among the bureaucracy and the loyalist sections, because the paucity of ICS recruits and a policy of Indianisation had ended the British domination of the ICS as early as the First World War and by 1939, there existed British-Indian parity. The long war had caused weariness and economic worries. Now only a depleted, warweary bureaucracy battered by 1942 events remained.

3. The British strategy of conciliation and repression had its limitations and contradictions—
* after Cripps' Offer there was little left to offer for conciliation except full freedom;
* when non-violent resistance was repressed with force, the naked force behind the Government stood exposed, while if the Government did not clamp down on "sedition" or made offers for truce, it was seen to be unable to wield authority, and its prestige suffered;
* efforts to woo the Congress dismayed the loyalists.

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3. This policy of an unclear mix presented a dilemma for the services, who nevertheless had to implement it. The prospect of Congress ministries coming to power in the provinces further compounded this dilemma.
4. Constitutionalism or Congress Raj had proved to be a big morale-booster and helped in deeper penetration of patriotic sentiments.
5. Demands of leniency for INA prisoners from within the Army and the revolt of RIN Ratings had raised fears that the armed forces may not be as reliable if the Congress, started a 1942-type mass movement, this time aided by provincial ministries.
6. The only alternative to an all-out repression of a mass movement was an entirely official rule which seemed impossible now because the necessary numbers and efficient, officials were not available.
7. The Government realised that a settlement was necessary for burying the ghost of a mass movement and for good future Indo-British relations.

Now the overarching aim of the British policy-makers was a graceful withdrawal, after a settlement on the modalities of the transfer of power and nature of post-imperial India-Britain relations.

On the Eve of Cabinet Mission Plan

The Congress demanded that power be transferred to one centre and that minorities' demands be worked out in a framework ranging from autonomy to Muslim-majority provinces to self-determination or secession from the Indian Union—but, only after the British left.

The British bid for a united and friendly India and an active partner in defence of the Commonwealth, because a divided India would lack in defence and would be a blot on Britain's diplomacy.

The British policy in 1946 clearly Deflected this preference for a united India, in sharp contrast to earlier declarations. On March 15, 1946, the British Prime Minister Clement Attlee said: "though mindful of the rights of minorities cannot allow a minority to place their veto on advance of the majority." This was a far cry from the Shimla conference where Wavell had allowed Jinnah to wreck the conference.

Cabinet Mission in India

The mission reached Delhi on March 24, 1946. It had prolonged discussions with Indian leaders of all parties and groups on the issues of—

- (i) interim government,
- (ii) principles and procedures for framing a new Constitution giving freedom to India.

As the Congress and the League could not come to any agreement on the fundamental issue of the unity or partition of India, the mission put forward its own plan for the solution of the constitutional problem in May 1946.

Cabinet Mission Plan—Main Points

- Rejection of the demand for a full-fledged Pakistan, because—
 - (i) the Pakistan so formed would include a large non-Muslim population—38% in the North-West and 48% in the North-East;
 - (ii) the very principle of communal self-determination would claim separation of Hindu-majority Western Bengal and Sikh- and Hindu-dominated 'Ambala and Jullundur divisions of Punjab (already some Sikh leaders were demanding a separate state if the country was partitioned);
 - (iii) deep-seated regional ties would be disturbed if Bengal and Punjab were partitioned;
 - (iv) partition would entail economic and administrative problems, for instance, the problem of communication between the western and eastern parts of Pakistan; and
 - (v) the division of armed forces would be dangerous.
- Grouping of existing provincial assemblies into three sections—

Section-A: Madras, Bombay, Central Provinces, United Provinces, Bihar and Orissa (Hindu-majority provinces).

Section-B: Punjab, North-West Frontier Province and Sindh (Muslim-majority provinces).

Section-C: Bengal and Assam (Muslim-majority provinces).

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- Three-tier executive and legislature at provincial, section and union levels.
- A constituent assembly to be elected by provincial assemblies by proportional representation (voting in three groups—General, Muslims, Sikhs). This constituent Assembly to be a 389-member body with provincial assemblies sending 292, chief commissioner's provinces sending 4, and princely states sending 93 members. This was a good, democratic method not based on weightage.
- In the constituent assembly, members from groups A, B and C were to sit separately to decide the constitution for provinces and if possible, for the groups also. Then, the whole constituent assembly (all three sections A, B and C combined) would sit together to formulate the Union constitution.
- A common centre would control defence, communication and external affairs. Communal questions in central legislature were to be decided by a simple majority of both communities present and voting.

- Provinces were to have full autonomy and residual powers. Princely states were no longer to be under paramountcy of British Government. They would be free to enter into an arrangement with successor governments or the British Government.
- After the first general elections, a province was to be free to come out of a group and after 10 years, a province was to be free to call for a reconsideration of the group or the Union constitution.
- Meanwhile, an interim government to be formed from the constituent assembly.

Different Interpretations of the Grouping Clause: Each party or group looked at the plan from its own point of view.

Congress: The Cabinet Mission Plan is against Pakistan since grouping is optional; one constituent assembly is envisaged; League's veto is gone.

Muslim League: Pakistan is implied in compulsory grouping. (The Mission later clarified that the grouping was compulsory.)

Main Objections

Different parties objected to the plan on different points.

Congress

- Provinces should not have to wait till the first general elections to come out of a group. They should have the option of not joining a group in the first place. (Congress had the Congress-ruled provinces of NWFP and Assam in mind which had been included in groups B and C respectively.)
- Compulsory grouping contradicts the oft-repeated insistence on provincial autonomy.
- Absence of provision for elected members from the princely states in the constituent assembly (they could only be nominated by the princes) was not acceptable.

League

- Grouping should be compulsory with sections B and C developing into solid entities with a view to future secession into Pakistan. The League had thought that the Congress would reject the plan, thus prompting the Government to invite the League to form the interim government.

Acceptance

The Muslim League on June 6 and the Congress on June 24, 1946 accepted the long-term plan put forward by the Cabinet Mission.

Wavell's "Breakdown Plan"

Wavell presented this plan to the Cabinet Mission in May 1946 which visualised a middle course between "repression" and "scuttle". This plan envisaged the withdrawal of the British Army and officials to the Muslim provinces of North-West and NorthEast and handing over the rest of the country to the Congress. Though superseded by the Cabinet Mission Plan, Wavell's plan was an evidence of

- British recognition of the impossibility of suppressing any future Congress-led rebellion.

- desire in some high official circles to make a "Northern Ireland" of Pakistan.

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July 1946 Elections were held in provincial assemblies for the Constituent Assembly. July 10, 1946 Nehru stated, "We are not bound by a single thing except that we have decided to go into the Constituent Assembly (implying that the Constituent Assembly was sovereign and would decide the rules of procedure). The big probability is that there would be no grouping as NWP and Assam would have objections to joining sections B and C."

July 29, 1946 The League withdrew its acceptance of the long-term plan in response to Nehru's statement and gave a call for "direct action" from August 16 to achieve Pakistan.

COMMUNAL HOLOCAUST AND THE INTERIM GOVERNMENT

From August 16, 1946, the Indian scene was rapidly transformed. There were communal riots on an unprecedented scale, which left around 5000 dead.

the worst-hit areas were Calcutta, Bombay, Noakhali, Bihar and Garhmukteshwar (UP).

Changed Government Priorities

Wavell was now eager to somehow get the Congress into the Interim Government, even if the League stayed out (a departure from Wavell's stand during the Shimla conference). This attitude was against the League's insistence that all settlements be acceptable to it and against earlier government postures of encouraging communal forces, of denying the legitimacy of nationalism, and of denying the representative nature of Congress.

Thus, continuance of British rule had demanded one stance from Britain, and the withdrawal and post-imperial links dictated a contrary posture.

Interim Government Sworn In

Fearing mass action by the Congress, a Congress-dominated Interim Government headed by Nehru was sworn in on September 2, 1946 with Nehru still insisting on his party's opposition to the compulsory grouping.

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Despite the title, the Interim Government was little more than a continuation of the old executive of the viceroy. (Wavell overruled the ministers on the question of the release of INA prisoners in his very last cabinet meeting in March 1947).

Wavell quietly brought the Muslim League into the Interim Government on October 26, 1946. The League was allowed to join

- without giving up the 'direct action, despite its rejection of the Cabinet Mission's long-term and short-term plans,

- despite insistence on compulsory grouping with decisions being taken by a majority vote by a section as a whole (which would reduce the opponents of Pakistan in Assam and NWFP to a position of helpless minority).

Obstructionist Approach and Ulterior Motives of League

The League did not attend the Constituent Assembly which had its first meeting on December 9, 1946. Consequently, the Assembly had to confine itself to passing a general "Objectives Resolution" drafted by Nehru stating the ideals of an independent sovereign republic with autonomous units, adequate minority safeguards and social, political and economic democracy.

The League refused to attend informal meetings of the cabinet to take decisions. The League questioned the decisions and appointments made by the Congress members. Liaqat Ali Khan as the finance minister hamstrung the functioning of other ministries.

The League had only sought a foothold in the Government to fight for Pakistan. For them, it was a continuation of the civil war by other means. The Congress demand that the British get the League to change its attitude in the Interim Government or quit had been voiced ever since the League joined the Interim Government.

In February 1947, nine Congress members of the cabinet wrote to the viceroy demanding the resignation of League members and threatening the withdrawal of their own nominees

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. The last straw came with the League demanding the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly. A crisis seemed to be developing rapidly.

ATTLEE'S STATEMENT-FEBRUARY 20, 1947 The main points outlined in the British Prime Minister Clement Attlee's statement are given below.

- A deadline of June 30, 1948 was fixed for transfer of power even if the Indian politicians had not agreed by that time on the constitution.
- The British would relinquish power either to some form of central government or in some areas to the existing provincial governments if the Constituent Assembly was not fully representative i.e., if the Muslim majority provinces did not join.
- British powers and obligations vis-a-vis the princely states would lapse with transfer of power, but these would not be transferred to any successor government in British
- Mountbatten would replace Wavell as the viceroy.

The statement contained clear hints of partition and even Balkanisation of the country into numerous states and was, in essence, a reversion of the Cripps Offer.

Why a Date Fixed by Government for Withdrawal?

- The Government hoped that a fixed date would shock the parties into an agreement on the main question.

- The Government was keen to avert the developing constitutional crisis.
- The Government hoped to convince the Indians of British sincerity.
- The Government could not deny the truth in Wavell's assessment that an irreversible decline of the Government's authority had taken place.

Congress' Stand

The provision of transfer of power to more than one centre was acceptable to Congress because it meant that the existing Assembly could go ahead and frame a Constitution for the areas represented by it, and it offered a way out of the existing deadlock.

But the illusory hopes of a settlement were soon shattered as the statement proved to be a prelude to the final showdown. The League launched a civil disobedience movement to overthrow the coalition government in Punjab, as it felt emboldened by the statement.

TOWARDS PARTITION

The communal riots and the unworkability of the CongressLeague coalition compelled many in early 1947 to think in terms of accepting the so far unthinkable partition. The most insistent demand now came from the Hindu and Sikh communal groups in Bengal and Punjab who were alarmed at the prospect of compulsory grouping which might find them in Pakistan. The Hindu Mahasabha in Bengal was assessing the feasibility of a separate Hindu province in West Bengal.

On March 10, 1947, Nehru stated that the Cabinet Mission's was the best solution if carried out; the only real alternative was the partition of Punjab and Bengal.

In April 1947, Congress President Kripalani communicated to the Viceroy—"rather than have a battle, we shall let them have their Pakistan provided you allow Bengal and Punjab to be partitioned in a fair manner."

Mountbatten as the Viceroy

Mountbatten proved more decisive and quick in taking decisions than his predecessors because he was informally given more powers, to decide things on the spot, and he had the advantage of a firm decision of the British Government to quit at the earliest. His task was to explore the options of unity and division till October 1947 and then advise the British Government on the form of transfer of power. But he soon discovered that the broad contours of the scenario to emerge were discernible even before he came. The Cabinet Mission Plan was a dead horse and Jinnah was obdurate that he would settle for nothing less than a sovereign state. But a serious attempt at unity would involve supporting those forces which wanted a unified India and countering those who opposed it. Mountbatten preferred to woo both sides.

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MOUNTBATTEN PLAN, JUNE 3, 1947

The freedom with partition formula was coming to be widely accepted well before Mountbatten came. One major innovation (actually suggested by V.P. Menon) was the immediate transfer of power on the basis of grant of

dominion status (with 'a right of secession), thus obviating the need to wait for an agreement in the Constituent Assembly on a new political structure.

Main Points

The important points of the plan were

- Punjab and Bengal would meet in two, groups Hindus and Muslims, to vote for partition. If a simple majority of either group voted for partition, then these provinces would be partitioned.
- In case of partition, two dominions and two constituent assemblies would be created.
- Sindh would take its own decision.
- Referendum: in NWFP and Sylhet district of Bengal would decide the fate of these areas.
- Since the Congress had conceded a unified India, all their other points would be met
 - (i) independence for princely states ruled out, they would either join India or Pakistan.
 - (ii) independence for Bengal ruled out.
 - (iii) accession of Hyderabad to Pakistan ruled out (Mountbatten supported the Congress on this).
- Freedom would come on August 15, 1947.
- A boundary commission would be set up if partition was to be effected.

Thus, the League's demand was conceded to the 'extent that Pakistan would be created and the Congress' position on unity was taken into account to make Pakistan as small as possible. Mountbatten's formula was to divide India but retain maximum unity.

Why Congress Accepted Dominion Status?

The Congress was willing to accept dominion status despite its being against the Lahore Congress (1929) spirit because

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- (i) it would ensure a peaceful and very quick transfer of power;
- (ii) it was more important for the Congress to assume authority to check the explosive situation; and
- (iii) it would allow for some much needed continuity in bureaucracy and army.

For Britain, the dominion status offered a chance to keep India in the Commonwealth, even if temporarily, considering the economic strength, defence potential and greater value of trade and investment in India.

Rationale for an Early Date (August 15, 1947)

Britain wanted to secure Congress' agreement to the dominion status. At the same time the British could escape the responsibility for the communal situation.

The plan was put into effect without the slightest delay. The Legislative Assemblies of Bengal and Punjab decided in favour of partition of these two provinces. Thus, East Bengal and West Punjab joined Pakistan; West Bengal and East Punjab remained with the Indian

Union. The referendum in Sylhet resulted in the incorporation of that district in East Bengal. Two boundary commissions, one in respect of each province, were constituted to demarcate the boundaries of the new provinces. The referendum in NWFP decided in favour of Pakistan, the Provincial Congress refraining from the referendum. Baluchistan and Sindh threw in their lot with Pakistan.

INDIAN INDEPENDENCE ACT On July 18, 1947 the British Parliament ratified the Mountbatten Plan as the "Independence of India Act-1947". The Act was implemented on August 15, 1947.

The Act provided for the creation of two independent dominions of India and Pakistan with effect from August 15, 1947. Each dominion was to have a governor-general to be responsible for effective operation of the Act. The constituent assembly of each new dominion was to exercise the powers of the legislature of that dominion, and the existing Central Legislative Assembly and the Council of States were to be

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Plan Balkan

Between March and May of 1947, Mountbatten decided that the Cabinet Mission Plan had become untenable and formulated an alternative plan. This plan envisaged the transfer of power to separate provinces (or to a confederation, if formed before the transfer), with Punjab and Bengal given the option to vote for partition of their provinces. The various units thus formed along with the princely states (rendered independent by lapse of paramountcy) would have the option of joining India or Pakistan or remaining separate. The plan was quickly abandoned after Nehru reacted violently to it.

automatically dissolved

For the transitional period, i.e., till a new constitution was adopted by each dominion, the governments of the two dominions were to be carried on in accordance with the Government of India Act, 1935.

As per the provisions of the Indian Independence Act, 1947, Pakistan became independent on August 14 while India got its freedom on August 15, 1947. M.A. Jinnah became the first Governor-General of Pakistan. India, however, decided to request Lord Mountbatten to continue as the GovernorGeneral of India.

PROBLEMS OF EARLY WITHDRAWAL

The breakneck speed of events under Mountbatten caused anomalies in arranging partition details and totally failed to prevent the Punjab massacre, because

- there were no transitional institutional structures within which partition problems could be tackled.
- Mountbatten had hoped to be the common GovernorGeneral of India and Pakistan, thus providing the necessary link, but Jinnah wanted the position for himself in Pakistan.

- there was a delay in announcing the Boundary Commission Award (under Radcliffe); the award was ready by August 12, 1947 but Mountbatten decided to make it public after August 15 only so that the responsibility would not fall on the British.

INTEGRATION OF STATES

During 1946-47 there was a new upsurge of State. People's Movement demanding political rights and elective representation in the Constituent Assembly. Nehru presided over the All India State People's Conference sessions in Udaipur (1945) and Gwalior (April 1947). He declared that the states refusing to join the Constituent Assembly would be treated as hostile. In July 1947, Vallabhbhai Patel took charge of the new States' Department. Under Patel, the incorporation of Indian states took place in two phases with a skilful combination of baits and threats of mass pressure in both:

Phase I, By August 15, 1947, all states except Kashmir, Hyderabad and Junagarh had signed an Instrument of Accession with the Indian Government, acknowledging central authority over defence, external affairs and communication. The princes agreed to this fairly easily because

- (1) they were "surrendering" only what they never had (these three functions had been a part of the British paramountcy) and
- (2) there was no change in the internal political structure.

Phase II, The second phase involved a much more difficult process of "integration" of states with neighbouring provinces or into new units like the Kathiawar Union, Vindhya and Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan or Himachal Pradesh alongwith internal constitutional changes in states which for some years retained their old boundaries (Hyderabad, Mysore, TravancoreCochin). This phase was accomplished within a year. The principal bait offered was a generous privy purse while some princes were made governors and rajpramukhs in free India.

This rapid political unification of the country after independence was Patel's greatest achievement.

WHY CONGRESS ACCEPTED PARTITION?

The Congress was only accepting the inevitable due to the long-term failure to draw Muslim masses into the national movement. The partition reflects the success-failure dichotomy of the Congress-led anti-imperialist movement.

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The Congress had a two fold task—(i) structuring diverse classes, communities, groups and regions into a nation, and (ii) securing independence for this nation. While the Congress succeeded in building up sufficient national consciousness to exert pressure on the British to quit India, it failed in completing the task of welding the nation, especially in integrating the Muslims into the nation.

- Only an immediate transfer of power could forestall the spread of 'direct action' and communal violence. The virtual collapse of the Interim Government also made the notion of Pakistan appear unavoidable.

The partition plan ruled out independence for the princely states which could have been a greater danger to the Indian unity as it would have meant Balkanisation of the country.

- Acceptance of partition was only a final act of the process of step-by-step concessions to the League's championing of a separate Muslim state.

During Cripps Mission (1942), autonomy of Muslim majority provinces was accepted.

During Gandhi-Jinnah talks (1944), Gandhi accepted the right of self-determination of Muslim-majority provinces.

After the Cabinet Mission Plan (1946) Congress conceded the possibility of Muslim majority provinces setting up a separate constituent assembly. Later, the Congress accepted, without demur, that grouping was compulsory (December 1946).

Official reference to Pakistan came in March 1947; CWC resolution stated that Punjab (and by implication, Bengal) must be partitioned if the country was divided.

3rd June Plan: Congress accepted partition. • While loudly asserting the sovereignty of the Constituent Assembly, the Congress quietly accepted compulsory grouping and accepted the partition most of all because it could not stop the communal riots.

There was nevertheless much wishful thinking and lack

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of appreciation of the dynamics of communal feeling by the Congress, especially Nehru "Once the British left, Hindu-Muslim differences would be patched up and a free,, united India would be built up."

"Partition is only temporary." – "Partition would be peaceful-once Pakistan was conceded, what was there to fight for?"

The communalism of the 1920s and the 1930s was different from that in the 1940s. Now it was an all-out effort for an assertive "Muslim nation". Congress leadership underestimated the potential of this type of communalism.

Gandhi's Helplessness

Gandhi felt helpless because there had been a communalisation of the people. He accepted partition because the people wanted it. How could there be a movement to fight communalism based on a communalised people? He asked the Congressmen, however, not to accept it in their hearts.

Views

I have not become His Majesty's first Minister to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire. Winston Churchill.

The British Cabinet saw the growing rift between the Congress and the Muslim League as their trump card. Both Linlithgow and the Cabinet looked to the rivalry of the Congress and the League as their most useful weapon against the demands of either. B.R. Tomlinson.

Our time in India is limited and our power to control events almost gone. We have only prestige and previous momentum to trade on and these will not last long. Lord Wavell (October 1946).

The offer of Cripps really gave us nothing. If we accepted his offer, we might have cause to rule it in future. In case the British went back on their word, we should not even have the justification for launching a fresh struggle. War had given India

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an opportunity for achieving her freedom. We must not lose it by depending upon a mere promise. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad.

The British were neither the foes of the Hindus nor friends of the Muslims. They set up Pakistan not as a gesture of friendship towards the Muslims, but under the compulsions of their international policies. Wall Khan.

It was not so much that Britain pursued a policy of divide and rule as that the process of devolving power by stages in a politically and socially desperate country was inherently divisive. R.J. Moore.

The truth is that we were tired men, and we were getting on in years too. Few of us could stand the prospect of going to prison again—and if we had stood out for a united India as we wished it, prison obviously awaited us. We saw the fires burning in the Punjab and heard everyday of the killings. The plan for partition offered a way out and we took it. Jawaharlal Nehru.

I felt that if we did not accept partition, India would be split into many bits and would be completely ruined. My experience of office for one year convinced me that the way we have been proceeding would lead us to disaster. We would not have had one Pakistan but several. We would have had Pakistan cells in every office. Sardar Patel.

Congress, as well as the Muslim League, had accepted partition. The real position was, however, completely different. The acceptance was only in a resolution of the AICC of the Congress and on the register of the Muslim League. The people of India had not accepted partition with free and open minds. Some had accepted it out of sheer anger and resentment and others out of a sense of despair. Maulana Azad.

I alone with the help of my Secretary and my typewriter won Pakistan. for the Muslims. M.A. Jinnah.

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Summary

CONGRESS STAND ON EVE OF WORLD WAR II:

It would cooperate in war if

- (i) freedom was given after the War.
- (ii) some form of genuinely responsible government was immediately set up.

September 1, 1939: World War-II broke out and Britain declared India's support for war. September 10-14, 1939: At CWC meeting at Vardha: Gandhi was for unconditional support to Britain's war efforts. Subhash Bose and Leftists were, for taking advantage of Britain's difficulties and starting a

mass movement to dislodge colonialism. Nehru recognised the imperialist nature of the war, but was against taking advantage of Britain's difficulties, as well as against Indian participation in war. The CWC resolved—No Indian participation unless freedom is granted; Government should declare its war aims soon. LINLITHGOW'S STATEMENT (OCTOBER 17, 1939) Britain's war aim is to resist aggression. All interest groups are to be consulted to modify 1935 Act for future. Immediately a "consultative committee" is to be formed for advising functions.

CONGRESS' RESPONSE

No Indian support to the war Congress ministries in provinces to resign But no immediate mass struggle to be launched. MARCH 1940 "Pakistan Resolution" passed at Lahore session of Muslim League AUGUST OFFER (AUGUST 1940). Dominion status to be the long-term objective After the war. constituent assembly to be formed comprising mainly Indians

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Summary

Minorities consent to be essential for any future settlement.

Congress rejected the Offer

OCTOBER 1940 Congress launched individual civil disobedience movement; 25000 satyagrahis courted arrest;

MARCH 1942 Japan reached Rangoon after having overrun almost the whole of South-East Asia.

CRIPPS MISSION (MARCH 1942) It offered—

an Indian Union with dominion status, with right to withdraw from Commonwealth.

after war, a constituent assembly elected by provincial assemblies to frame the constitution.

freedom to any province unwilling to join the Union to have a separate agreement with Britain. Meanwhile, defence of India to remain in British hands.

The Congress objected to

- * dominion status
- * right of provinces to secede
- * no immediate transfer of power
- * retention of governor-general's supremacy.

The Muslim League objected to

- * Pakistan not being explicitly offered.
- the machinery for creation of Constituent Assembly.

QUIT INDIA MOVEMENT

Why launch a movement now?

Failure of Cripps Offer, an evidence of British lack of will to concede Indian demands.

Public discontent against wartime hardships.

A feeling of imminent British collapse.

Indian leadership's desire to prepare masses for possible Japanese invasion.

AICC Meeting (Bombay–August 8, 1942).

The meeting ratified Quit India Resolution.

August 9, 1942 All prominent leaders arrested.

Major Activity

Public on rampage, especially Eastern UP, Bihar, Bengal– attacking symbols of authority.

Underground activity.

to provide a line of command.

Parallel governments in Ballia (UP), Tamluk (Bengal) and Satara (Maharashtra).

Sections participating included youth, women, workers, peasants, government officials, some communists.

February 1943: Gandhi started a fast.

March 23, 1943: Pakistan Day observed.

C. RAJAGOPALACHARI FORMULA (MARCH 1944) League should immediately support independence for India and cooperate in Interim Government After War.

Muslim majority areas to exercise right to self-determination In case of partition, common centre for defence, commerce, communications, etc.

Jinnah rejected the offer as he wanted Congress to accept the two-nation theory.

DESAI-LIAQAT PACT Congress and League nominees to have equal representation in Central Executive.

20% of seats reserved for minorities.

WAVELL PLAN (SHIMLA CONFERENCE–JUNE 1945)

An all-Indian executive council except the governor-general and commander-in-chief Equal representation for caste Hindus and Muslims.

Muslim League wanted all Muslims to be its nominees and claimed a communal veto in the executive council. Congress objected to it being painted purely as a caste Hindu party.

LAST TWO YEARS OF BRITISH RULE : Two basic strands

1. Tortuous negotiations resulting in freedom and partition, accompanied by communal violence .

2. Sporadic, localised mass action.

July 1945 Labour Government comes to power in Britain.

August 1945 Elections to central and provincial assemblies announced.

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Summary

September 1945 Announcement of a Constituent Assembly after War.

A change in Government's attitude due to

Change in global power equations;

UK no longer a power
Labour Government sympathetic to India;
Tired British soldiers and shattered British economy;
Anti-imperialist wave throughout Asia ;
Officials feared another Congress revolt.

Two Main Election Planks for Congress

1. Repression of 1942
2. Mass pressure against trial of INA POWs.

INA Agitation—Main Features

Had unprecedented, high pitch and intensity.

Had wide geographical and social spread.

Penetrated traditional bulwarks of Raj.

Government employees and loyalists With each day, became a purely India versus Britain, issue Three Upsurges

1. November 21, 1945 in Calcutta over INA trials.
2. February 11, 1946 in Calcutta over seven-year sentence to an INA officer.

3. February 18, 1946 in Bombay, strike by Royal Indian Navy Ratings.

Congress did not support these upsurges because of their timing and tactics .

Election Results

CONGRESS won 57 out of 102 seats in Central Assembly — got majority in Madras, Bombay, UP, Bihar, Orissa and Central Provinces and coalition partner with Unionists and Akalis in Punjab.

MUSLIM LEAGUE won 30 reserved seats in Central Assembly—got majority in Bengal, Sindh.

Why British Withdrawal Seemed Imminent by 1946

1. Success of nationalist forces in struggle for hegemony.
2. Demoralisation among bureaucracy and the loyalist sections.

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3. Limitations of British strategy of conciliation and repression.
4. Demands of leniency for INA by army men and RIN ratings' revolt.
5. An entirely official rule was impossible.

Main Aim of Government Policy Now

A graceful withdrawal after settlement on modalities of transfer of power, and post-imperial Indo-British relations.

CABINET MISSION Proposals

Rejection of Pakistan.

Grouping of existing assemblies into three sections A, B, C.

Three-tier executive and legislature at province, princely states and union level Provincial assemblies to elect a constituent assembly.

Common centre for defence, communications, external affairs.

Provinces to have autonomy and residual powers.
Princely states free to have an arrangement with the successor government or the British Government In future, a province free to come out of the section or the union Meanwhile, an interim government to be formed from constituent assembly.

Interpretation

Congress claimed that the grouping was optional while the League thought that the grouping was compulsory. Mission decided the matter in the League's favour.

Acceptance League, followed by Congress, accepted Cabinet Mission proposals in June 1946.

Further Developments: July 1946 League withdrew from the Plan after Nehru's press statement, and gave a call for "direct action" from August 16, 1946.

September 1946 An Interim Government headed by Nehru sworn in.

October 1946 League joins Interim Government and follows an obstructionist approach.

February 1947 Congress members demand removal of

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League members; League demands dissolution of Constituent Assembly.

ATTLEE'S STATEMENT (FEBRUARY 20, 1947) June 30, 1948 as deadline for transfer of power.

Power may be transferred to one centre or in some areas to existing provincial governments.

MOUNTBATTEN PLAN JUNE 3, 1947

Punjab and Bengal Assemblies to take decision on partition. Sindh to take its own decision Referendum to be held in NWFP and Sylhet district. Two dominions to be created if partition is to take place, with two Constituent Assemblies.

Freedom to be granted on August 15, 1947

JULY 18, 1947 British Parliament passes the "Indian Independence Act 1947" which is implemented on August 15, 1947.