

# THE INDIAN STRUGGLE

Part II (1935-42)

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## CHAPTER I<sup>1</sup>

### India Since 1857 — A Bird's Eye View

Though the British conquest of India began in 1757 with the Battle of Plassey and the overthrow of the then independent King of Bengal, Nawab Sirajudowla, it was only by slow and gradual stages that the British occupation of India made progress. For instance, after the Battle of Plassey, only the financial administration of Bengal passed into the hands of the British — the political administration remaining in the hands of Nawab Mir Jaffar, the man who had betrayed Nawab Sirajudowla at the last moment and gone over to the British. It was only by stages that the British could take over the entire administration of Bengal. Likewise it was only by slow and gradual stages that the British rule could be extended over other parts of India. While this process of gradual annexation was going on, the British still formally recognised the suzerainty of the Emperor at Delhi. It should be noted that in the occupation of India, the British used not only arms — but more than arms, the weapons of bribery, treachery and every form of corruption. For instance, the founder of the British Empire in India, Robert Clive, who was later made a Lord, has been proved by historians to have been guilty of forgery. Likewise Warren Hastings, a Governor-General of India, was accused before the British Parliament by Edmund Burke, a member of the House of Commons, as being guilty of "high crimes and misdemeanours".

The greatest folly and mistake of our predecessors was their inability to realise at the very beginning, the real character and role of the Britishers who came to India. They probably thought that like the innumerable tribes that had wandered to India in the past and had made India their home, the British were just another such tribe. It was much later that they realised that the British had come to conquer and plunder and not to settle down in India. As soon as this was generally understood all over the country, a mighty revolution broke out in 1857, which has been incorrectly called by English historians "the Sepoy Mutiny", but

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<sup>1</sup> The preceding pages were written in English in the original in 1934 and deal with the period up to 1934. The following pages were written in 1943 and bring the book up to date—Writer.



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which is regarded by the Indian people as the First War of Independence. In the Great Revolution of 1857, the British were on the point of being thrown out of the country — but partly through superior strategy and partly through luck — they won at the end. Then there followed a reign of terror, the parallel of which it is difficult to find in history. Wholesale massacres took place in the course of which innocent men were bound hand and foot and were blown up from the mouths of cannon.

After the Revolution of 1857, the British realised that by sheer brutal force, they could not hold India long. They, therefore, proceeded to disarm the country. And the second greatest folly and mistake that our predecessors committed was to submit to disarmament. If they had not given up their arms so easily, probably the history of India since 1857 would have been different from what it has been. Having once disarmed the country completely, it has been possible for the British to hold India with the help of a small but efficient modern army.

Along with disarmament, the newly established British Government, now controlled directly from London, commenced its policy of "divide and rule". This policy has been the fundamental basis of British rule from 1858 till today. After 1857, for nearly forty years, the policy was to keep India divided, by putting three-fourths of the people directly under British control and the remaining one-fourth under the Indian Princes. Simultaneously, the British Government showed a great deal of partiality for the big landlords in British India. It is interesting to note, in this connection, the attitude of the British Government towards the Indian Princes since 1857. Up to 1857, the policy of the British was to get rid of the Princes, wherever possible, and take over the direct administration of their states. In the revolution of 1857, though a number of Indian rulers — e.g. the famous and heroic Rani (Queen) of Jhansi — fought against the British, many remained neutral or actively sided with them. Among the latter was the Maharaja of Nepal. It then, occurred to the British for the first time that it would perhaps be advisable not to disturb the existing Princes, but to make a treaty of alliance and friendship with them, so that in the event of there being trouble for the British, the Princes would come to their aid. The present British policy of partiality towards the Indian Princes goes back, therefore, to the year 1857. By the beginning of the present century the British realised, however, that they could no longer dominate India by simply playing the princes and the big landlords against the people. Then they discovered the Muslim problem in the year 1906, when



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Lord Minto<sup>2</sup> was the Viceroy. Prior to this, there was no such problem in India. In the great Revolution of 1857, Hindus and Muslims had fought side by side against the British and it was under the flag of Bahadur Shah, a Muslim, that India's First War of Independence had been fought.

During the last World War, when the British found that further political concessions would have to be made to the Indian people, they realised that it was not enough to try and divide the Muslims from the rest of the population and they then set about trying to divide the Hindus themselves. In this way, they discovered the caste problem in 1918 and suddenly became the champions and liberators of the so-called depressed classes. Till the year 1937, Britain had hoped to keep India divided by posing as the champions of the Princes, the Muslims, and the so-called depressed classes. In the general election held under the new constitution of 1935 — they found, however, to their great surprise, that all their tricks and bluffs had failed and that a strong nationalist feeling permeated the whole nation and every section of it. Consequently, British policy has now fallen back on its last hope. If the Indian people cannot be divided, then the country — India — has to be divided geographically and politically. This is the plan, called Pakistan, which emanated from the fertile brain of a Britisher and which has precedents in other parts of the British Empire. For instance, Ceylon which belonged geographically and culturally to India, was separated from India long ago. Immediately after the last war, Ireland which was always a unified state, was divided into Ulster and the Irish Free State. After the new constitution of 1935, Burma was separated from India. And if the present war had not intervened, Palestine would already have been divided into a Jewish State, an Arab State, and a British corridor running between the two. Having themselves invented Pakistan — or the plan for dividing India — the British have been doing a colossal, but skilful, propaganda in support of it. Though the vast majority of the Indian Muslims want a free and independent India — though the President of the Indian National Congress is Moulana Abul Kalam Azad, a Muslim — and though only a minority of the Indian Muslims supports the idea of Pakistan — British propaganda throughout the world gives the impression that the Indian Muslims are not behind the national struggle for liberty and want India to be divided up. The British themselves know that what they propagate is quite false — but they, nevertheless, hope that by repeating a falsehood, again and again, they will be

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<sup>2</sup> Lord Morley, who was the Secretary of State for India in the British Cabinet when Lord Minto was the Viceroy of India, stated that Lord Minto "had started the Moslem Hare" in 1906.



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able to make the world believe it. When Pakistan was originally invented, the idea was to divide India in a so-called Hindu India and a so-called Muslim India, however fantastic the plan might have been. Since then the fertile brains of the Britishers have developed the plan still further and if they could have their own way, they would now divide India not into two states, but into five or six. For instance, British politicians say that if the Indian Princes want to secede from the rest of India, they should have a separate state called Rajasthan. If the Sikhs want to secede, they should also have a separate state called Khalsistan. And these cunning Britishers are showing special solicitude for the Pathans — that section of the Indian Muslims living in the North-West of India — and they are urging that there should be a separate state in the North-West of India, called Pathanistan. Pathanistan seems to be the hot favourite of British politicians at the present moment. They hope that through this plan of Pathanistan they would win over some of the most troublesome people in India — namely, the people of the North-West Frontier Province of India and the independent tribes living between India and Afghanistan — and at the same time, get the sympathy of the Afghan people.

Pakistan is, of course, a fantastic plan and an unpractical proposition — for more reasons than one. India is geographically, historically, culturally, politically and economically an indivisible unit. Secondly, in most parts of India, Hindus and Muslims are so mixed up that it is not possible to separate them. Thirdly, if Muslim states were forcibly set up, new minority problems would be created in these states which would present new difficulties. Fourthly, unless Hindus and Muslims join hands and fight the British, they cannot liberate themselves and their unity is possible only on the basis of a free and undivided India. An independent Pakistan is an impossibility and Pakistan, therefore, means in practice, dividing India in order to ensure British domination for all. It is noteworthy that in his latest utterances, Mr Jinnah, the President of the Muslim League, and a champion of Pakistan, has acknowledged that the creation and maintenance of Pakistan is possible only with the help of the British.

Now to resume our story. The struggle that is now going on in India is, in reality, a continuation of the Great Revolution of 1857. In the last four decades of the nineteenth century, the Indian movement expressed itself in agitation in the press and on the platform. This movement was crystallised into one organisation when the Indian National Congress was inaugurated in 1885. The beginning of this century saw a new awakening in India and along with it, new methods of struggle



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were devised. Thus, during the first two decades, we see the economic boycott of British goods, on the one side, and revolutionary terrorism on the other. The Indian revolutionaries made a desperate attempt to overthrow British rule with the help of arms during the last war — at a time when Germany, Austria-Hungary and Turkey were fighting our enemy — but they, the Indian revolutionaries, were crushed. After the war, India needed a new weapon of struggle — and at this psychological moment, Mahatma Gandhi came forward with his method of Satyagraha or passive resistance or civil disobedience.

During the last twenty-two years, the Congress under the Mahatma's leadership has built up a powerful organisation all over the country — including the states of the Princes. It has awakened political life in the remotest villages and among all sections of the people. Most important of all is the fact that the masses of India have learnt how to strike at the powerful enemy even without arms, and the Congress, under Gandhi's leadership, has demonstrated that it is possible to paralyse the administration through the weapon of passive resistance. In short, India has now a disciplined political organisation reaching the remotest villages with which a national struggle can be conducted and with the help of which — a new, independent state can be, later on, built up.

The younger generation in India has, however, learnt from the last twenty years' experience that while passive resistance can hold up or paralyse a foreign administration — it cannot overthrow or expel it, without the use of physical force: Impelled by this experience, the people today are spontaneously passing on from passive to active resistance. And that is why you read and hear today of the unarmed Indian people destroying railway, telegraph and telephone communications — setting fire to police stations, post-offices, and Government buildings, and using force in many other ways in order to overthrow the British yoke. The last stage will come when active resistance will develop into an armed revolution. Then will come the end of British rule in India.



## CHAPTER II

### FROM JANUARY, 1935, TILL SEPTEMBER, 1939

At the end of November, 1934, immediately after finishing the original book in English, the writer flew to India, on receipt of a cablegram from his mother saying that his father was on his deathbed. He arrived in Calcutta one day late. At the aerodrome he was received by a strong posse of police who put him under arrest. In his house, which was then in a state of mourning, he was interned for six weeks, until he left for Europe to resume his medical treatment.

During his stay in India, the writer found that the main topic of discussion was the recent elections to the Indian Legislative Assembly, India's Parliament. Contrary to the expectations of the Viceroy, Lord Willingdon, the Congress Party had remarkable success at the polls. It was clear that despite the repressive measures employed by Lord Willingdon's Government against the Congress Party from 1932 onwards, the vast majority of the people stood behind the Indian National Congress. It should be noted here that, unlike 1923-24, the parliamentary activity of the Congress was this time conducted by the Gandhi Wing.

The President of the Congress for the next twelve months in 1935 was Mr. Rajendra Prasad, an orthodox follower of Mahatma Gandhi, who was expected to adhere to the Gandhian line strictly.

The most important political event during 1935, was the passing of a new constitution for India by the British Parliament, called the Government of India Act, 1935. This constitution was brought into operation two years later — in 1937 — when the first elections were held. It is theoretically still in force, though actually suspended since the outbreak of the present war, in September 1939. The new constitution was unanimously rejected by Indian public opinion and, in particular, by the Congress, — because it was a scheme, not for self-government, but for maintaining British rule in the new political conditions, through the help of the Indian Princes and sectarian, reactionary and pro-British organisations.





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The provisions of the 1935 Constitution consisted of two parts, the Federal and Provincial. The proposed "Federation" was a new departure in that it provided for an all-India Central Government uniting both "British India" and the "Indian States". The federal chamber was to consist of two houses, in which the princes were to nominate two-fifths and one-third of the members respectively. Elaborate weighting governed the choice of elected members. Seats were allocated to prescribed groups, Moslems, Sikhs, Scheduled-Castes, Women, Anglo-Indians, Labour etc. In the Upper House, only 75 out of 260 seats were open to general election; in the Lower House, only 86 out of 375. In the Upper House the electorate was restricted to about 0.05 of the population of British India; in the Lower, it was about one-ninth. The powers of these legislatures were extremely limited. Defence and foreign policy were reserved for the Viceroy; financial policy and control of bureaucracy and police was also excluded from the competence of the Assemblies. No legislation could be passed on certain prescribed topics. The Viceroy had wide discretionary powers including the right to veto any legislation, dismiss Ministers, pass legislation rejected by the legislatures, dissolve the legislatures and suspend the constitution.

The provincial section of the constitution, applicable only to the eleven provinces of British India, was somewhat less narrow. There were no appointees of the Princes. The legislatures were wholly elected, though the franchise for the Upper House was restricted. There were no reserved topics except that the Secret Police was under the control of the Governor, who also had full emergency powers, if he thought the "tranquility of the province is endangered". The provinces thus offered some limited possibilities for popular government. The seats on the Assemblies were allocated to communal groups as at the centre, but 657 "general seats" were left open out of the 1585 in the eleven provinces. It was therefore possible for the National Congress while opposing the constitution, to participate in the first provincial elections in 1937, in which it won majorities in seven (later eight) out of eleven provinces.

As already anticipated at the end of chapter XIV of "The Indian Struggle 1920-34" nothing sensational happened in India during the years 1935 and 1936. The parliamentary wing of the Congress continued its activity and began slowly to gain in influence. On the other hand, the Congress Socialist Party began to rally the younger generation and also the more radical elements inside the Congress and among the Indian people in general. For the time being, both Satyagraha or



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Civil Disobedience and revolutionary terrorism had lost their charm and in the vacuum created thereby, the Congress Socialist Party naturally made headway. The Communist Party of India, a small group which had been declared illegal by the British Government, instructed its members to join the Congress Socialist Party and thereby use the public platform of the Congress Socialist Party, in order to push forward its own organisation and objective. It did succeed in extending its influence among a section of the students and factory workers. Later on, the Communist Party took the name of "National Front", in order to function publicly.

The Congress Socialist Party had the historic opportunity to throw up an alternative leadership, in place of the Gandhian leadership which had monopolised the political field since 1920. This development would have been easier, if Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, who gave his moral support to that party, had openly joined it and accepted its leadership. But he did not do so.

In the autumn of 1935, Pandit Nehru was suddenly released from prison in order to enable him to join his wife who was on her death-bed in Europe. He spent most of his time in Badenweiler in Germany, visiting London and Paris from time to time. During this visit to Europe, which terminated in March, 1936, he made contacts in London and in Paris which were to influence his future policy. He did not visit such countries as Russia or Ireland which were then regarded as anti-British, though during his previous tour in Europe, he had gone to Moscow. In countries like Italy and Germany, he carefully avoided making any contacts, either because of his dislike of Fascism and National Socialism, or because he did not want to offend his friends in England and France. During his stay in Europe, he published his Autobiography which made him tremendously popular with the liberal section of the English public.

In 1936, Nehru was elected President of the Indian National Congress and he presided over its annual session held at Lucknow in April. He was re-elected President at the end of the year and he presided over the next annual session held at Faizpur in Bombay Presidency. In the Presidential election, Nehru had the full support of the Gandhian Wing of the Congress on both occasions. As President, he held a middle position between the Gandhian Wing and the Congress Socialist Party — causing no annoyance to either, but giving a certain measure of moral support to the latter.



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Between 1933 and 1936, the writer toured practically the whole of Europe outside Russia and studied at first hand the conditions of post-Versailles Europe. He was several times in Italy and in Germany, and in Rome he was received by Signor Mussolini on several occasions. He studied, on the one hand, the growth of the new forces that were ultimately to challenge the old order that had been set up by the Treaty of Versailles — and on the other, he studied the League of Nations which symbolised that old order. He was specially interested in the changes that had been brought about by the Treaty of Versailles and, for that purpose, he made it a point to visit Austria-Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland and the Balkans. Through travel and study, he was able, not only to understand the situation in Europe at the time, but also to have a glimpse of coming events. In many countries in Europe, he was able to rouse interest in India and to help in founding organisations for developing contact with India. The tour concluded with a visit to Ireland, where he met President De Valera and other Ministers of his Government, as well as the leaders of the republican movement.

The writer spent a part of his time in Geneva in 1933 and 1934 with a view to studying the organisation of the League of Nations and exploring the possibility of utilising the League for advancing the cause of India's freedom. This was also the aim of the veteran nationalist leader, Mr. V. J. Patel, ex-President of the Indian Legislative Assembly, who had come to Geneva for that purpose. Unfortunately, Mr. Patel<sup>3</sup> was taken ill immediately after his arrival and he died in a Swiss Sanatorium in October, 1933. After his death, the writer was left alone but he continued his work in Geneva for some time. During this period, he worked in collaboration with the International Committee on India which had its headquarters in Geneva and he helped in the publication of a monthly bulletin on India. This bulletin was published in three languages — French, German, and English — and was sent all over the world to people interested in India. Towards the end of his stay in Geneva, the writer realised that the machinery of the League of Nations was controlled fully by Britain and France and that it was impossible to utilise the League for India's liberty, though India was an original member of that body. Thereupon, he started an agitation to the effect that India was wasting her money by remaining a member of the League and that she should resign from that body as soon as possible. This agitation found wide support among the Indian public.

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<sup>3</sup> Mr. Patel was one of the few Indian leaders interested in foreign propaganda. He was responsible for founding the Indo-Irish League in Dublin.



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During his stay in Europe, the writer was everywhere watched and followed by the agents of the British Government who tried their best to prevent his making contacts with different governments and with important personalities in different countries. In Fascist or pro-Fascist countries, the British agents tried to paint him as a Communist. In Socialist or democratic countries, on the other hand, they tried to describe him as a Fascist. In spite of these obstacles, however, he was able to do useful propaganda for India and rouse sympathy for the Indian freedom movement in several countries in Europe. In some of these countries, organisations were started for developing cultural and economic contact with India.

In April, 1936, the writer returned to Bombay with the intention of attending the Lucknow session of the Congress. He had been warned in writing by the British Government through the British Consul in Vienna that he would be arrested if he returned to India, but in a spirited reply, he had rejected that warning, challenging the Government to do its worst. He was taken to prison at Bombay, the moment he set foot on Indian soil.

In the autumn of 1936, Mr. M. N. Roy, formerly of the Communist International, was released from prison after serving a term of six years in connection with Bolshevik Conspiracy Case at Cawnpore. Because of his revolutionary past and his international experience, Mr. M. N. Roy was a popular and attractive figure, with a halo round his name. Young men flocked to him and very soon a new group, called the Roy group, came into public limelight.

The New Constitution for India which brought about the separation of Burma from India had been passed by the British Parliament in 1935. This gave the Indian people a certain measure of autonomy in the Provinces. Provincial elections under the new Constitution were to be held in the winter of 1936-37. The Parliamentary Wing of the Congress (which was now synonymous with the Gandhian Wing) began to prepare for these elections and also for the acceptance of ministerial office, thereafter, in the provinces. The Congress Socialist Party had originally opposed participation in these elections — an attitude which was reminiscent of the attitude of the orthodox Gandhite "no-change party" in 1922-23. Later on, the C. S. Party modified its attitude and supported the idea of contesting the elections, but strongly opposed the idea of accepting ministerial office. The C. S. P. did not have a clear revolutionary perspective and this was probably due to the fact that in the ranks of that Party, there were disillusioned



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ex-Gandhiites who were, however, still under the influence of Gandhian concepts — while there were others in the Party who were under the influence of Nehru's sentimental politics.

In 1936-37, the C. S. Party sponsored an "Anti-Ministry" movement with the objective of opposing the acceptance of ministerial office by Congressmen. Among those who supported this move, but were not members of the C.S.P, were Sardar Sardul Singh Cavesheer of Punjab<sup>4</sup>, Rafi Ahmed Kidwai<sup>5</sup>, of the United Provinces, Mrs. V. L. Pandit<sup>6</sup> and Sarat Chandra Bose<sup>7</sup> (brother of the writer). Pandit Nehru gave his moral support to the movement.

In spite of all the checks and safeguards provided in the New Constitution for preventing the Nationalists from getting a majority, the Congress Party emerged from the provincial parliamentary elections with a practical majority in seven out of eleven provinces in British India. At that time, the anti-ministry movement was going strong — but the Parliamentarian (or Gandhian) leaders of the Congress handled the situation with such consummate skill, that in July, 1937, they successfully torpedoed the anti-ministry movement and got the All India Congress Committee to decide in favour of taking Cabinet office in the provinces.

The writer was released from internment from a Calcutta hospital in March, 1937, after the parliamentary elections were over. Within the next few months, the majority of political prisoners were gradually set at liberty, with the exception of those in Bengal and in the Andaman Islands. The political prisoners in Bengal numbered several thousands, the majority of whom had been imprisoned or interned without any trial whatsoever. There were also a few hundred political prisoners in the Andaman Islands — the penal settlement in the Bay of Bengal, who had been sentenced to long terms of imprisonment and they were mostly from Bengal, Punjab and the United Provinces. In July, 1937, the Congress Party took Cabinet-office in seven out of eleven provinces, and in these provinces, practically all the political prisoners were released. Soon after this, the political prisoners in the Andaman Islands went on hunger-strike, demanding their release, whereupon they were brought over to prisons in the mainland.

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<sup>4</sup> Cavesheer later became the Vice-President of the All-India Forward Bloc.

<sup>5</sup> Kidwai later became the Home Minister of the Congress Cabinet in U.P.

<sup>6</sup> Mrs. Pandit also became a Minister in U.P.

<sup>7</sup> Bose became later the leader of the Congress Party in the Bengal Legislature.



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The seven provinces which had a Congress Cabinet were — Frontier Province, United Provinces, Bihar, Bombay Presidency, Central Provinces, Madras Presidency and Orissa. Assam had a Congress Cabinet in September, 1938, after the first Cabinet was thrown out. Sindh<sup>8</sup> has had a Cabinet supported by the Congress Party, without participating in it. In Bengal<sup>9</sup>, since December, 1941, there has been a new Cabinet with the Congress Party participating in it. Only in Punjab, has the Ministry of Sir Sikandar Hyat Khan been always in opposition to the Congress Party.

After the Congress Party took office in seven provinces — the administration there became distinctly nationalist in character and the prestige of the Congress went up by leaps and bounds. People in general had the feeling that the Congress was the coming power. But apart from this, there was no remarkable change. Power still remained in the hands of the Provincial Governor and of the permanent officials of the Indian Civil Service, the majority of whom were British, and the Congress Party could not therefore undertake far-reaching reforms in the administration. After some time, it could be noticed that a large section of Congressmen was gradually being infected with the parliamentary or constitutionalist mentality and was losing its revolutionary fervour.

The emergence of the Congress Socialist Party in 1934 was a sure indication of the resurgence of the radical or left-wing forces in the country. This was accompanied by a phenomenal awakening among the peasantry and the students, and to some extent, among the workers. For the first time, there emerged a centralised All India Peasants' Organisation, called the All India Kisan Sabha, the most prominent leader of which was Swami Sahajananda Saraswati. The students' movement also, which had gone through many ups and downs in the past, was centralised under the leadership of the All India Students' Federation<sup>10</sup>. The All

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<sup>8</sup> The pro-Congress Premier of Sindh, Mr. Allah Buksh, resigned his post in October, 1942, as a protest against the repressive policy of the British Government in India and also gave up the title of "Khan Bahadur" which he had received from the British Government.

<sup>9</sup> It is reported that the Ministers belonging to the Congress Party were unconstitutionally removed from the Cabinet by the British Governor of the province a few months ago, on the ground that they were secretly in league with the "Forward Bloc".

<sup>10</sup> A split in the All-India Student's Federation occurred at Nagpur, in December, 1940. The Communist group in the Federation seceded and set up a separate organisation. The main body of students now follows the political lead of the Forward Bloc.



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India Trade Union Congress, which had experienced two successive splits — in 1929 at Nagpur and again in 1931 at Calcutta — was once again unified under a joint leadership representing all shades of opinion, both Right and Left. In the literary world, too, there was an attempt to organise the progressive writers.

Pandit .Nehru's Presidentship for two terms was marked by energy and initiative at the top and gave a fillip to the radical forces in the Congress, while, at his instance a number of socialists were employed as permanent Congress officials. But Pandit Nehru could have achieved much more. The years 1936-37 represented the high-water mark of his popularity and in a certain sense, his position was then stronger than that of Mahatma Gandhi, because he had the support of the entire Left, which Gandhi had not. But the Mahatma's position was organisationally very strong, for he had built up a party of his own, the Gandhi Wing, within the Congress Party, and with the help of the former he could dominate the latter. Nehru, on the other hand, inspite of his tremendous popularity, did not have a party of his own. There were two courses open to him, if he wanted to live in history — either to accept the tenets of Gandhism and join the Gandhi Wing within the Congress Party, or to build up his own party in opposition to the Gandhi Wing. He could not do the former, because though he was personally loyal to the Mahatma, he did not accept all the tenets of Gandhism. On the other hand, he did not build up his own party, because that would have given offence to the Gandhi Wing, and he has never in his own life had the courage to do anything in opposition to the Mahatma. Thus, Nehru began to drift along, trying to please both the Right and the Left — without joining either the Gandhi Wing or any other radical party — and thus remaining in effect, a lone figure within the Congress Party. That is his position today — in December, 1942. After 1937, he moved closer to Gandhi, till in 1939, he almost became a member of the Gandhi Wing. For this, he was rewarded by the Mahatma, when the latter announced in January, 1942, that he was appointing Nehru as his successor. If Nehru had given unquestioning obedience to Gandhi, he would have remained in that position. But over the visit of Sir Stafford Cripps to India and the problem of the future relations between India and Britain, Nehru advocated a policy of compromise and collaboration, which was repudiated by the Mahatma and his party. As a result of this difference of opinion, Nehru now stands virtually alone and it is highly probable that after this experience, the Gandhi Wing will not easily accept Nehru as leader in succession to the Mahatma.





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In December, 1937, the writer paid another visit to his favourite health-resort, Badgastein, in Austria, and from there he visited England. While in England, in January, 1938, he received news that he had been unanimously elected President of the Congress. During the course of this visit, he met members of the British Cabinet, like Lord Halifax and Lord Zetland, as well as prominent members of the Labour and Liberal Parties who then professed sympathy for India, e.g. Mr. Attlee, Mr. Arthur Greenwood, Mr. Bevin, Sir Stafford Cripps, Mr. Harold Laski, Lord Allen etc.

As Congress President, the writer did his best to stiffen the opposition of the Congress Party to any compromise with Britain and this caused annoyance in Gandhian circles who were then looking forward to an understanding with the British Government. Later in the year 1938, he launched the National Planning Committee for drawing up a comprehensive plan of industrialisation and of national development. This caused further annoyance to Mahatma Gandhi who was opposed to industrialisation. After the Munich Pact, in September, 1938, the writer began an open propaganda throughout India in order to prepare the Indian people for a national struggle, which should synchronise with the coming war in Europe. This move, though popular among the people in general, was resented by the Gandhiites who did not want to be disturbed in their ministerial and parliamentary work and who were at that time opposed to any national struggle.

The breach between the writer and the Gandhi Wing was now wide, though not visible to the public. At the Presidential election in January, 1939, he was therefore vigorously opposed by the Gandhi Wing as well as by Pandit Nehru. Nevertheless, he was victorious with a comfortable majority. This was the first time since 1923-24 that the Mahatma suffered a public defeat and in his weekly paper, Harijan, he openly acknowledged the defeat. The election had served to show the wide and influential following that the writer had, throughout the country, in open opposition to both Gandhi and Nehru.

In March, 1939, at the annual session of the Congress, the writer who presided made a clear proposal that the Indian National Congress should immediately send an ultimatum to the British Government demanding Independence within six months and should simultaneously prepare for a national struggle. This proposal was opposed by the Gandhi Wing and by Nehru and was thrown out. Thus a situation arose in which though the writer was the President of the





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Congress, his lead was not accepted by that body. Moreover, it was seen that on every conceivable occasion, the Gandhi Wing was opposing the President with a view to making it impossible for him to function. A complete deadlock within the Congress was the result. There were two ways of removing this deadlock — either the Gandhi Wing should give up its obstructionist policy, or the President should submit to the Gandhi Wing. With a view to finding a possible compromise, direct negotiations between Mahatma Gandhi and the writer took place, but they proved to be abortive. Under the constitution of the Congress, the President was entitled to appoint the Executive (Working Committee) for the coming year, but it was clear that the Gandhi Wing would continue to obstruct, if the Executive was not appointed according to its choice. And the position of the Gandhi Wing within the Congress was such that determined obstruction on its part would render it virtually impossible for the President to function in an independent manner.

The Gandhi Wing was determined neither to accept the lead of the writer, nor to allow him to control the machinery of the Congress, and it would tolerate him only as a puppet President. The Gandhi Wing had, moreover, this tactical advantage that it was the only organised party within the Congress, acting under a centralised leadership. The Left Wing or radical elements in the Congress who were responsible for the writer's re-election as President in January, 1939, were numerically in a majority — but they were at a disadvantage, because they were not organised under one leadership, as the Gandhi Wing was. There was till then, no party or group commanding the confidence of the entire Left Wing. Though at that time the Congress Socialist Party was the most important party in the Left Wing, its influence was limited. Moreover, when the fight between the Gandhi Wing and the writer began, even the Congress Socialist Party began to vacillate. Thus, in the absence of an organised and disciplined Left Wing, it was impossible for the writer to fight the Gandhi Wing. Consequently, India's primary political need in 1939 was an organised and disciplined Left Wing Party in the Congress.

The negotiations between Mahatma Gandhi and the writer revealed that on the one side, the Gandhi Wing would not follow the lead of the writer and that, on the other, the writer would not agree to be a puppet President. There was, consequently, no other alternative but to resign the Presidentship. This the writer did on the 29th April, 1939 and he immediately proceeded to form a radical and progressive party within the Congress, with a view to rallying the entire Left Wing under one banner. This Party was called the Forward, Bloc. The first



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President of the Bloc was the writer and the Vice-President (now acting President) was Sardar Sardul Singh Cavesheer of Punjab.

Long before 1939, the writer had been convinced that an international crisis in the form of a war would break out in the near future and that India should make the fullest use of that crisis in order to win her freedom. Since the Munich Pact — that is, since September, 1938 — he had been trying to bring the Indian public round to this point of view and he had been endeavouring to induce the Congress to shape its own policy in conformity with the march of events abroad. In this task, he had been obstructed by the Gandhi Wing at every step — because the latter had no comprehension of coming international developments and was looking forward eagerly to a compromise with Britain without the necessity of a national struggle. Nevertheless, the writer knew that within the Congress and among the people in general, he had a very large measure of support and that all that he needed was an organised and disciplined Party behind him.

In organising the Forward Bloc, the writer had two-expectations. Firstly, in the event of a future conflict with the Gandhi Wing, he would be able to fight more effectively; and further, he could hope to win the entire Congress over to his point of view one day. Secondly, even if he failed to win over the entire Congress to his point of view, he could, in any major crisis, act on his own, even if the Gandhi Wing failed to rise to the occasion. Future developments fulfilled the expectations of the founder of the Forward Bloc to a remarkable degree.

As soon as the Forward Bloc was launched, the full wrath of the Gandhi Wing fell on it. Since the death of Deshbandhu C. R. Das in 1925, this was the first serious challenge to Gandhi's leadership and could not be tolerated by him or by his followers. While facing the frowns of the Gandhi Wing, the Forward Bloc had simultaneously to put up with persecution and harassment at the hands of the British Government, because for the latter, the Forward Bloc was politically much more dangerous than the Gandhi Wing was.

The birth of the Forward Bloc sharpened the internal conflict within the Congress and it was not possible for anybody to avoid taking sides any longer. In this internal crisis the man who was inconvenienced most was Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. Up till now, he had, with great skill and ingenuity, been able to ride two horses at the same time and had thereby been able to secure the support of the Gandhi Wing, while being a friend or patron of the Left. Challenged by the



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Forward Bloc, he had to make his choice and he began to move towards the Right — the Gandhi Wing. And as the relations between the Gandhi Wing and the Forward Bloc became strained, Nehru rallied more and more to the support of the Mahatma.

The best thing for India would have been for the entire Congress led by the Gandhi Wing to take up the policy advocated by the Forward Bloc. This would have obviated a loss of energy and time caused by internal conflict and would have enhanced the fighting strength of the Congress, vis-à-vis the British Government. But human nature acts under its own laws. Since September, 1938, Mahatma Gandhi had consistently urged that a national struggle was out of the question in the near future, while others, like the writer, who were not less patriotic than him, were equally convinced that the country was internally more ripe for a revolution than ever before and that the coming international crisis would give India an opportunity for achieving her emancipation, which is rare in human history. When all other attempts to influence Gandhi failed, the only way left was to organise the Forward Bloc and proceed to win over the mass of the people and thereby put indirect pressure on the Mahatma. This method ultimately proved to be effective. As a matter of fact, if this had not been done, Gandhi would not have altered his original attitude and would have still remained where he stood on the outbreak of the war in September, 1939.

The writer still remembers clearly the long and interesting discussion which he had with Nehru in Calcutta, in April, 1939, when he announced his desire to resign the Presidentship of the Congress and organise a new party. Nehru argued that such a step would create a split within the Congress and would thereby weaken the national organisation at a critical moment. The writer urged, on the contrary, that one should distinguish between the unity which led to more effective action and the unity which resulted in inaction. Unity could be preserved superficially in the Congress only by surrendering to the Gandhi Wing — but since the Gandhi Wing was opposed to the idea of a national struggle, such unity if maintained, would serve to stultify all dynamic activity on the part of the Congress in future. If, on the contrary, a party with a dynamic programme was organised within the Congress now, that party might one day move the Gandhi Wing and the entire Congress to militant action. Moreover, more critical times were ahead and a war was bound to break out in the near future. If one wanted to act in such an international crisis, then there should be a party ready to seize that opportunity. If the Gandhi Wing was unwilling to play that role, another party



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should be formed at once — when there was still time to organise such party. If that task was neglected or postponed, it could not be done later, when the international crisis actually overtook India. And without a well-organised party ready to utilize the coming international crisis for winning freedom, India would once again repeat her mistake of 1914.

This discussion did not, however, convince Nehru and he continued to support the Gandhi Wing. But the more he did so, the more was he isolated from the Left Wing.

It was in September, 1938, that the writer for the first time realised that in the event of an international crisis, Gandhi would not seize the opportunity for attacking the British Government. It was then that he also realised for the first time that Gandhi regarded a struggle with Britain in the near future as outside the domain of possibility. (This estimate of the Indian situation was, however, a purely subjective one — due probably to Gandhi's old age.) In September, 1938, at the time of the Munich crisis, the writer was the President of the Congress and he naturally presided over the meetings of the Congress Working Committee which met in order to decide what steps should be taken if a war actually broke out in Europe at that time. These meetings were in the nature of a rehearsal of the meetings held one year later, in September, 1939, when war actually broke out, and they afforded a clear insight into the mentality of Mahatma Gandhi and other important leaders of the Congress.

When in September, 1938, it appeared to the intelligent observer that Mahatma Gandhi, for some reason or other, had lost dynamism and initiative, the following possibilities for developing an alternative leadership existed in India.

(1) *Through Pandit Nehru.*

As we have already remarked above, Pandit Nehru deliberately neglected this opportunity, largely because of his internal weakness, lack of self-confidence, and lack of revolutionary perspective.

(2) *Through M. N. Roy.*

M. N. Roy did form a party and did talk of alternative leadership. But there was some defect in his character, owing to which, within a short time, he made more enemies than friends. Nevertheless, he still had a future — but with the outbreak



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of the present war, he began to advocate unconditional cooperation with the British Government, and that brought about his political doom.

### *(3) Through the Congress Socialist Party.*

Between 1934 and 1938, this party had the best chance of developing as the future national party of India, but it failed. This was anticipated by the writer in Chapter XVIII of "The Indian Struggle 1920-34". The C. S. Party lacked a clear revolutionary perspective from the outset. It began to function more as a parliamentary opposition within the Congress than as the spearhead of a revolutionary movement. After September, 1939, the leaders of this party were won over by Gandhi and Nehru and that blasted the future of the Party.

### *(4) Through the Communist Party.*

When the Congress Socialist Party failed to rise to the occasion, there was an opportunity for the Communist Party — then functioning under the name "National Front" — to come to the forefront. But the Communist Party, besides being numerically small, lacked a proper national perspective and could not develop as the organ of national struggle. Not having its roots in the soil, this party very often erred in estimating a particular situation or crisis and consequently adopted a wrong policy.

Throughout 1938, the writer repeatedly advised the Congress Socialist Party to broaden its platform and form a Left Bloc, for rallying all the radical and progressive elements in the Congress. This the Party did not do. The mistake of the C. S. Party was that it talked too much about Socialism, which was after all a thing of the future. India's immediate requirements were an uncompromising struggle with British Imperialism and methods of struggle more effective than what Mahatma Gandhi had produced. Gandhism had been found wanting, because it was wedded to non-violence and therefore contemplated a compromise with Britain for the solution of the Indian problem. Moreover, it lacked a proper understanding of international affairs and of the importance of an international crisis for achieving India's liberation. A party was needed which could remedy these defects and bring about the complete liberation of India.

The immediate objective of the Forward Bloc was an uncompromising struggle with British Imperialism for winning India's independence. To this end, all possible means should be employed and the Indian people should not be hampered by any philosophical notions like Gandhian non-violence, or any



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sentimentalism like Nehru's anti-Axis foreign policy. The Bloc stood for a realistic foreign policy and a post-war order in India on a Socialist Basis.

The Forward Bloc sprang into existence in response to an historical necessity. That is why from the very beginning, it had a tremendous mass appeal — and its popularity began to increase by leaps and bounds. In fact, some months later, the Mahatma remarked that the writer's popularity had increased after he resigned the Congress Presidentship.

When war broke out in Europe, in September, 1939, the people who had been sceptics before, appreciated the writer's political foresight in having advocated a six month's ultimatum to the British Government in March of that year, at the annual session of the Congress at Tripuri. This further enhanced the Bloc's popularity.



## CHAPTER III

### FROM SEPTEMBER, 1939, TILL AUGUST, 1942

The propaganda offensive of the Forward Bloc was in full swing from May, 1939, onwards. In July of that year, the Gandhi Wing reacted by trying to curb this activity. On some pretext or other, "disciplinary action" was taken against some members of the Bloc by the Congress Working Committee. But this only served to strengthen the morale of the Bloc members and to increase their popularity among the masses.

On September 3, 1939, the writer was addressing a mammoth meeting on the sea-beach in Madras where about two hundred thousand people were present — the biggest meeting he has ever addressed — when somebody from the audience put an evening paper into his hand. He looked and read that Britain was at war with Germany. Immediately, the speaker switched over to the subject of the war. The much expected crisis had at last come. This was India's golden opportunity.

On the same day that Britain declared war on Germany, the Viceroy declared India a belligerent and issued an ordinance containing the most stringent powers for the suppression of internal disorder. On September 11, he announced that the inauguration of the federal constitution under the Act of 1935 was postponed for the duration of the war.

On the 6th September, Mahatma Gandhi, after meeting the Viceroy, Lord Linlithgow, issued a press statement saying that in spite of the differences between India and Britain on the question of Indian independence, India should cooperate with Britain in her hour of danger. This statement came as a bomb-shell to the Indian people, who since 1927, had been taught by the Congress leaders to regard the next war as a unique opportunity for winning freedom. Following the above statement of Gandhi, many leaders belonging to the Gandhi Wing began to make public declarations to the effect that though they demanded freedom for India, they wanted Britain to win the war. As this sort of propaganda was likely to have a very unfortunate effect on Indian public opinion, the Forward Bloc, which was by now an All-India organisation, commenced counter-propaganda on a large scale. As against the Gandhi Wing, the Forward Bloc took



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the line that the Congress had since 1927 repeatedly declared that India should not cooperate in Britain's war and that the Congress should now put that policy into practice. The members of the Forward Bloc also declared openly that they did not want Britain to win the war because only after the defeat and break-up of the British Empire could India hope to be free.

Apart from the general propaganda carried on by the Forward Bloc, the writer made a lecture tour throughout the country, in the course of which he must have addressed about a thousand meetings in the course of ten months. That the British Government should permit such anti-British and anti-war propaganda came as a surprise to many, including the writer. The fact, however, was that the British Government was afraid that if drastic measures were taken against the Forward Bloc, it would provoke the Congress and the public in general to launch a campaign of passive resistance against the British Government. Because of sheer nervousness on the part of the British Government, the Forward Bloc was able to continue its anti-British and anti-war propaganda, though in the course of this propaganda, many members were thrown into prison.

The propaganda of the Forward Bloc found an enthusiastic echo all over India. Mahatma Gandhi and his followers thereupon realised that the policy of cooperation with Britain would not find any support among the public and would surely lead to the loss of their influence and popularity. Consequently, they began to alter their attitude gradually.

More strange even than Gandhi's attitude was the attitude of Nehru. From 1927 to 1938, he had figured prominently in all the anti-war resolutions of the Congress. Consequently, when the war broke out, people naturally expected him to take the lead in an anti-war policy. According to the previous resolutions of the Congress, the party should have immediately non-cooperated with Britain's war-effort in September, 1939 and if after that, the Government had exploited India for the war — the Congress party should have actively resisted the British Government. Not only did Nehru not adopt this policy, but he used all his influence in order to prevent the Congress from embarrassing the British Government while the war was on.

The Executive (Working Committee) of the Congress met on the 8th September, at Wardha to decide what attitude the Congress should take up towards the war. The writer, who was not a member then, was especially invited to the meeting





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and he gave expression to the view of the Forward Bloc that the struggle for freedom should begin at once. He added that in case the Congress Executive did not take the necessary steps in this connection, the Forward Bloc would consider itself free to act as it thought fit in the best interest of the country.

This uncompromising attitude had its effect and the Gandhi Wing gave up altogether the idea of cooperation with the British Government. Then there followed prolonged discussions and ultimately on September 14, the Working Committee passed a lengthy resolution asking the British Government to declare its war aims. The resolution, further, declared that if India were granted freedom, then "a free and democratic India will gladly associate herself with other free nations for mutual defence against aggression and for economic cooperation."

This resolution was, in substance, an offer of cooperation in Britain's war-effort under certain conditions.

On October 17, the Viceroy replied to this resolution of the Congress with a statement which was published in London as a White Paper. The Viceroy's offer was a proposal to establish a "Consultative Group", including Indian representatives, which would advise the Viceroy on questions pertaining to the war. He also reaffirmed the pledge of Dominion Status at some future date, which had been first made ten years ago by the then Viceroy, Lord Halifax (Irwin).

Apart from this reply of the British Government, what infuriated the Indian people most was that while the Allied Powers were talking of fighting for "freedom and democracy", in India the Constitution of 1935 was suspended, all powers were concentrated in the hands of the Viceroy, and in many parts of India severe restrictions on personal liberty were imposed — e.g. prohibition of all public meetings and demonstrations, imprisonment without trial etc.

The writer is definitely of the opinion that if the Congress as a whole had taken up a bold and unequivocal attitude of determined opposition to the war from the very outset — Britain's war-production in India would have been seriously affected and it would not have been easy for the British Government to send Indian troops on active service to different theatres of war, far away from India. Consequently, in his view, by postponing a final decision on the war-issue — Gandhi, Nehru and their followers helped the British Government indirectly. It is but natural that when the Congress did not give a clear lead to the country, the



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propaganda carried on by the agents of British Imperialism in India should partially succeed in winning the cooperation of certain sections of the Indian people.

On October 29, the Congress Working Committee replied to the Viceroy's pronouncement of October 17 with a resolution which contained a threat of civil disobedience (or passive resistance). Along with this, the Committee ordered the Congress Ministers in eight provinces to lay down office. Since the Viceroy was issuing orders to the Provincial Governments to carry out the war-policy of the British Government, the Congress Ministers had either to cooperate in the war-effort or to resign office.

It was generally expected that after the Congress Ministers resigned office, the campaign of passive resistance would begin. But this expectation was not fulfilled. Many people are of opinion that British intrigue was responsible for this. The British Government sent out to India some British Liberals and Democrats in order to influence Congress leaders. For instance, in October, 1939, the well-known writer, Mr. Edward Thompson, visited India and he was followed by Sir Stafford Cripps who came in December.

Besides carrying on a continuous propaganda against cooperation in the war and in favour of commencing a national struggle for independence, the Forward Bloc organised periodic demonstrations for focussing public attention on these issues. For instance, in October, 1939, an Anti-Imperialist Conference was held at Nagpur which was a great success. And at the end of six months, the Bloc's propaganda culminated in a huge demonstration at Ramgarh in March, 1940, where the annual session of the Congress was being held at the time. The demonstration was called the All-India Anti-Compromise Conference. It was convened by the Forward Bloc and the Kisan Sabha (Peasants' Organisation) and it was a greater success than the Congress meeting at Ramgarh which was presided over by Moulana Abul Kalam Azad.

The Congress did not decide anything at Ramgarh about its war-policy. For six months its policy had been non-committal, with the result that the British Government had been going on exploiting India for war purposes. The Anti-Compromise Conference at Ramgarh, led by the writer and Swami Sahajananda Saraswati, the peasant leader, decided, therefore to immediately launch a fight over the issue of the war and of India's demand for independence. During the



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National Week in April (April 6th to April 13th), 1940, — the Forward Bloc commenced, all over the country, its campaign of civil disobedience. Prominent members of the Bloc were gradually put in prison. In Bengal too, where the writer was living at the time, the campaign flared up and early in July, the writer along with hundreds of his co-workers were put in prison.

A few days before he was thrown into prison, that is, in June, 1940, the writer had his last long talk with Mahatma Gandhi and his principal lieutenants. India had received the news of the final collapse of France. The German troops had made a triumphal entry into Paris. British morale, in England and in India, had sunk low. A British Minister had found it necessary to rebuke the British public for going about "with long faces as if they were at a funeral". In India, the civil disobedience campaign started by the Forward Bloc was going on and many of the Bloc leaders were already in prison. The writer, therefore, made a passionate appeal to the Mahatma to come forward and launch his campaign of passive resistance — since it was now clear that the British Empire would be overthrown and it was high time for India to play her part in the war. But the Mahatma was still non-committal and he repeated that, in his view, the country was not prepared for a fight and any attempt to precipitate it, would do more harm than good to India. However, at the end of a long and hearty talk, he told the writer that if his (the writer's) efforts to win freedom for India succeeded — then his (Gandhi's) telegram of congratulation would be the first that the writer would receive.

On this occasion, the writer had also long talks with the leaders of some other organisations — e.g. with Mr. Jinnah, the President of the Muslim League and Mr. Savarkar, the President of the Hindu Mahasabha. Mr. Jinnah was then thinking only of how to realise his plan of Pakistan (division of India) with the help of the British. The idea of putting up a joint fight with the Congress, for Indian independence, did not appeal to him at all though the writer suggested that in the event of such a united struggle taking place, Mr. Jinnah would be the first Prime Minister of Free India. Mr. Savarkar seemed to be oblivious of the international situation and was only thinking how Hindus could secure military training by entering Britain's army in India. From these interviews, the writer was forced to the conclusion that nothing could be expected from either the Muslim League or the Hindu Mahasabha.

On May 20, 1940, Pandit Nehru made an astounding statement in which he said, "Launching a civil disobedience campaign at a time when Britain is engaged in a



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life and death struggle would be an act derogatory to India's honour." Similarly, the Mahatma said, "We do not seek our independence out of Britain's ruin. That is not the way of non-violence." It was clear that the Gandhi wing was doing everything possible in order to arrive at a compromise with Britain.

On July 27, the All-India Congress Committee in a meeting at Poona which the Mahatma did not attend, made an offer of cooperation with Britain in the war, provided the demand of the Congress for independence was conceded. At this time, the Mahatma retired from the leadership of the Congress, because it was difficult for him to support the war-effort owing to his faith in non-violence.

The Viceroy's reply to the Congress resolution came on August 8, when he made an offer to include a number of representative Indians in his Executive Council, as well as on his Consultative Council. But that was not independence or anything approaching it.

In the meantime, after the writer's incarceration in July, 1940, the campaign of the Forward Bloc continued with increasing vigour. This campaign stirred the rank and file of the Gandhi Wing. In spite of orders from above that no followers of the Gandhi Wing should commence passive resistance, the rank and file, and especially the volunteers, look up the campaign in some provinces. This produced a great commotion among the Gandhian leaders. Some of them began to press the Mahatma to launch the fight — otherwise, they would lose all influence and prestige in the country. Others began gradually to join the fight without waiting for his orders. Ultimately, Gandhi's hands were forced. On September 15, the Congress withdrew its offer of cooperation and invited the Mahatma to resume the leadership of the Congress. In October, 1940, the Mahatma declared that he had decided to commence resistance to the British Government's war-efforts — but not on a mass scale. In November, 1940, Gandhi's campaign began and within a short time, all the Congress Ministers in eight provinces who participated in the movement were taken to prison, along with hundreds of influential leaders.

The campaign in 1940-41 was not conducted by the Mahatma with that enthusiasm and vehemence which one had seen in 1921 and again in 1930-32 — though objectively the country was more ripe for a revolution than before. Evidently, Gandhi still wanted to keep the door open for a compromise — which would not be possible if too much bitterness against the British was roused in the



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course of the campaign. Nevertheless, the Forward Bloc was jubilant that Gandhi's hands had been forced. Now that both wings of the Congress — the Gandhi Wing and the Forward Bloc — were definitely committed to an anti-British and anti-war policy, it was time to consider bigger plans for achieving the independence of India.

The writer was then confined in prison without any trial. Long study and deliberation had convinced him about three things. Firstly, Britain would lose the war and the British Empire would break up. Secondly, in spite of being in a precarious position, the British would not hand over power to the Indian people and the latter would have to fight for their freedom. Thirdly, India would win her independence if she played her part in the war against Britain and collaborated with those powers that were fighting Britain. The conclusion he drew for himself was that India should actively enter the field of international politics.

He had already been in British custody eleven times, but he now felt that it would be a gross political blunder to remain inactive in prison, when history was being made elsewhere. He then explored the possibility of being released in a legal manner, but found that there was none, because the British Government was determined to keep him locked up, so long as the war lasted. Thereupon, he sent an ultimatum to the Government pointing out that there was no moral or legal justification for detaining him in jail and that if he was not released forthwith, he would fast unto death. He was determined to get out of prison, whether dead or alive.

The Government laughed at the ultimatum and did not reply. At the last moment, the Home Minister requested his brother, Sarat Chandra Bose, Leader of the Congress Party in the Provincial Parliament, to inform the writer that it was a mad project and that Government could do nothing. Late at night, he was visited in his prison-cell by his brother who conveyed the Minister's message to him and informed him, further, that the attitude of the Government was very hostile. The next morning the fast began as already announced. Seven days later, the authorities suddenly got frightened, lest the writer should die in prison. A secret conference of high officials was hurriedly held and it was decided to release him, with the intention of re-arresting him after a month or so, when his health improved.



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After his release, the writer was at home for about forty days and did not leave his bedroom. During this period, he surveyed the whole war-situation and came to the conclusion that Indian freedom-fighters should have first-hand information as to what was happening abroad and should join the fight against Britain and thereby contribute to the break-up of the British Empire. After considering the different means whereby this could be done, he found no other alternative but to travel abroad himself. Towards the end of January, 1941, he quietly left his home one night at a late hour. Though he was always closely watched by the Secret Police, he managed to dodge them and after an adventurous journey, managed to cross the Indian frontier. It was the biggest political sensation that had happened in India for a long time.

During the year 1941, the Civil Disobedience Movement continued — but without much enthusiasm on the part of Gandhi and his followers. The Mahatma had calculated that by following a mild policy, he would ultimately open the door towards a compromise — but in this, he was disappointed. His goodness was mistaken for weakness and the British Government went on exploiting India for war-purposes to the best of its ability. The Government also exploited to the fullest extent such agents, as the erstwhile Communist leader, M. N. Roy, who were prepared to sell themselves to Britain.

Ultimately, the British Government woke up from its self-complacency when in November, 1941, war-clouds appeared in the Far Eastern horizon. Early in December, the Congress leaders belonging to the Gandhi Wing were suddenly set free. But simultaneously, leaders belonging to the Left Wing were clapped in prison. For instance, when the war in the Far East broke out, Sarat Chandra Bose, the brother of the writer, was sent to prison without any trial. This was followed, some time later, by the incarceration of Sardar Sardul Singh Cavesheer, the Acting President of the Forward Bloc. The Government probably thought that by this dual policy of arresting the Leftists and releasing the Gandhiites, it would come to a settlement with the Congress.

The desire of the British Government for a compromise with the Congress was reciprocated by the Gandhi Wing. The Congress Working Committee, meeting at Wardha on the 16th January, 1942, passed a resolution offering co-operation in the war-effort once again. Soon after — that is, in February, 1942, at the instance of the British Government, Marshal Chiang Kai Shek visited India with a view to inducing the Congress leaders to come to an understanding with the British



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Government. A month later — in March, 1942, — an American Technical Mission, some American diplomats and journalists and several American military units arrived in India. In April, the British Commander-in-Chief in India was forced to seek the help of Marshal Chiang Kai Shek and bring Chinese troops to Burma.

The fall of Singapore on February 15, 1942, after one week's fighting, caused consternation in Britain and in America. When the Japanese forces after finishing the Malayan campaign advanced into Burma, the British Prime Minister was forced to turn over a new leaf and on March 11, made a conciliatory speech announcing the visit of Sir Stafford Cripps to India on behalf of the War Cabinet.

Sir Stafford Cripps arrived in India in March, 1942, under auspicious circumstances. In view of the rapid and brilliant success of the Japanese forces, the British Government was in a chastened mood and Cripps was regarded by the general public as the right man for the right job. But his efforts, nevertheless, failed, because all that he had brought with him, was a promise of Dominion Status after the war ended. Coupled with this promise, was the threat that India would probably be divided, when the war was over. On April 10, the Congress Working Committee rejected the Cripps proposals on the ground that they in no way met India's demand for freedom. Sir Stafford Cripps made his farewell broadcast to the Indian people on the 11th April and then left India a disappointed man.

Following the departure of Cripps from India, the Congress Working Committee met at Allahabad on April 27 and the following days. On May 1, a resolution was passed rejecting the Cripps proposals and at the same time resolving to offer non-violent non-cooperation, if any foreign army entered India. In the absence of a compromise with Britain, there was no question of actively fighting on the side of Britain, against the Japanese or any other army.

Mahatma Gandhi did not attend this meeting, but he sent a draft resolution to the Committee which was strongly criticised by Nehru and some other members. "The whole background of the draft", declared Nehru, "is one which will inevitably make the whole world think we are passively linking up with the axis powers." Then Nehru made another draft which was at first rejected — but later on, owing to the passionate appeal of the Congress President, Moulana Abul Kalam Azad, it was adopted unanimously. The Congress President, in supporting





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Nehru's draft said that there was no difference in meaning between the original draft of the Mahatma and the subsequent draft of Nehru and the difference was only one of approach.

In his original draft resolution, the Mahatma had *inter alia* said: — "Britain is incapable of defending India...The Indian Army is a segregated body, unrepresentative of the Indian people, who can in no sense regard it as their own...Japan's quarrel is not with India. She is warring against the British Empire. If India were freed, her first step would probably be to negotiate with Japan. The Congress is of opinion that if the British withdrew from India, India would be able to defend herself in the event of the Japanese or any other aggressors attacking India." In the same draft resolution, the Committee assured the Japanese Government and people that India bore no enmity towards Japan, etc. Nehru's draft which was finally accepted by the Congress Working Committee contained no reference to Japan or to Britain's incapacity to defend India.

A few months later, the British Government made a great fuss over Gandhi's draft resolution, by suddenly giving it world-wide publicity and simultaneously trying to paint Gandhi as a pro-Axis agent.

There was, however, nothing objectionable in the above draft resolution and its contents were in full accord with the policy consistently propagated by the Forward Bloc.

The much criticised draft resolution showed that Gandhi was not an ideological fanatic like Nehru and was much more of a realist than the latter. The outstanding feature of the Congress meeting was the departure from the Congress movement of Rajagopalachari, the leading protagonist of a compromise with Britain.

After the failure of Cripps' mission, people gradually thought that was the end of all talk of compromise between India and Britain and that cooperation between the two was, therefore, impossible. Nevertheless, Pandit Nehru began a propaganda to the effect that even without a compromise, India should fight with Britain against Fascism. But this point of view was not accepted either by the Mahatma, or by the Gandhi Wing or by the general public. Ultimately Nehru had to climb down and come round to the Mahatma's point of view.





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Although the majority of the Congress was gradually coming round to the conclusion that, in view of the intransigence of the British War Cabinet, an open conflict with Britain was inevitable, the idea of a possible compromise with Britain was not altogether dead.

But as nothing more was to be expected from the British Government beyond the mess of pottage offered by Sir Stafford Cripps and unanimously rejected by the Congress, there was no other alternative for the Congress than to give practical expression to the Congress' demand for immediate independence. The Indian public opinion was also getting restless and it was no more possible to continue the policy of drift. As the Congress itself registered in its resolution of July 14, there was a "rapid and widespread increase of ill-will against Britain and a growing satisfaction at the success of Japanese arms". Something positive had to be done.

After two months of relative passivity the Congress Working Committee finally met in Wardha on July 6, 1942, and after 9 days' deliberations passed the famous "Quit India" resolution on July 14, declaring that "Britain's rule in India must end immediately". In case this "appeal" went unheeded, the resolution further said, the Congress would then reluctantly be compelled to utilise, under the inevitable leadership of Gandhi, "all the non-violent strength it has gathered since 1920, when it adopted non-violence as part of its policy for the vindication of its political rights and liberty." There is no doubt that the Congress resolution came nearest in expressing the wish of the vast majority of the Indian people. It also brought the Congress fundamentally near the stand always taken by the writer, namely, that the destruction of British power in India was the sine qua non for the solution of all India's problems, and that the Indian people would have to fight for the achievement of this goal.

Although the resolution passed by the Congress at Wardha was interpreted by Gandhi as "open rebellion", it did not entirely bridge the gulf that separated the Congress leadership as a whole from the policy of immediate, uncompromising and all-out fight against the British rule in India advocated by the writer. Expressions in the resolution itself, such as, that the Congress has no desire whatever "to embarrass Great Britain or the Allied Powers in their prosecution of the war", or "jeopardize the defensive capacity of the Allied Powers", or that the Congress would be agreeable to the stationing of the armed forces of the allies in India for defensive purposes if India was free, clearly show that the idea of the



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desirability of an understanding with Britain and the possibility for realising this desired understanding was still in the minds of some Congress leaders. They also show much shifting of ground by the Congress from the position taken by Gandhi in his draft resolution submitted to the Congress Working Committee on May 27. This draft resolution, we may recall, declared inter alia that Japan's quarrel was not with India; she was warring against the British Empire; India's participation in the war had not been with the consent of the Indian people; and that if India were freed, her first step would probably be to negotiate with Japan. In fact, the illusions cherished by a few Congress leaders made them go so far as to hope that the United Nations and specially America might intervene in the Indian question in favour of India's national demand.

However, these people constituted a very tiny minority. Even Nehru who, most ardently wished an understanding with Britain answered in the negative when asked by foreign correspondents after the Wardha meeting "if an American guarantee of the British promise to give India complete independence after the war would meet the case". What Congress was interested in, said Nehru, was "independence here and now". No doubt this was also the mood of the country.

The passing of the "Quit India" resolution by the Congress cleared the political atmosphere of the country vitiated by Cripps negotiations. By declaring that the Congress would launch civil disobedience movement, it forestalled all possible weakening through mutual dissension of the national will for independence, which it was the intention of the British Government to undermine by sending Sir Stafford Cripps to India.

The Congress Working Committee decided to meet early in August to discuss once again the Wardha resolution before submitting it for final ratification to the All-India Congress Committee scheduled to meet in Bombay on August 7. The political fever in the country rose as August approached. British correspondents in India complained in their despatches that Congress leaders were "stumping the country" calling the people to revolt. In any case, moderates and liberals through their frantic activities to persuade the Congress not to begin direct action before a new modus vivendi could be found to end the deadlock, indicated that the Congress decision effectively pointed to a revolutionary development of the political tension prevailing in the country.



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The final draft resolution passed by the Congress Working Committee on August 4, on which the All-India Congress Committee were to begin deliberations on August 7, displayed what the correspondent of the Manchester Guardian called "a more constructive approach" than the Wardha resolution of mid-July. The assurance that Free India will "throw all her great resources" into the struggle on Britain's side indicated that in Congress view a free India would never contemplate a separate peace. Thus it is clear that before finally launching its decisive struggle to achieve India's freedom, the Congress went still farther in holding out the olive branch to the British Government.

On August 8, the All-India Congress Committee adopted by overwhelming majority the Working Committee's resolution. Only a negligible minority consisting of Communists and some followers of Rajagopalachari voted against it. After the announcement of the result, Mahatma Gandhi, in a stirring ninety minute speech, gave expression to his determination to fight to the finish even if he stood alone against the whole world.

While all this was taking place, the British authorities were not sitting idle. Preparations were in full swing to strike at the Congress first and hard. But in keeping with the practice of the British Imperialists to give an air of constitutional legality to all their repressive and illegal acts against the Indian people, the Indian Government published a lengthy justificatory statement immediately following the ratification of the "Quit India" resolution by the All-India Congress Committee. This statement, referring to the Congress demand for the immediate withdrawal of British power from India, and the decision to start "a mass struggle on non-violent lines on the widest possible scale", declared that the Government "had been aware, too, for some days past of the dangerous preparations by the Congress party for unlawful, and in some cases violent, activities directed, among other things, to interruption of communications and public utility services, the organisation of strikes, tampering with the loyalty of Government servants, and interference with defence measures, including recruitment". In the view of the Government of India, so went on the statement, — a masterpiece of British hypocrisy — the acceptance of the Congress demand would mean not only the betrayal of "their responsibilities to the people of India" but must also "mean betrayal of the allies, whether in or outside India, the betrayal in particular of Russia and China, the betrayal of those ideals to which so much support has been given and is being given today from the true heart and mind of India...". The fact was however that the British Government, in preparing



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for the brutal suppression of the national will to freedom of the Indian people, was acting in total and cynical disregard of the principles of freedom so pompously enunciated in the Atlantic Charter by Churchill and the President of the United States.

The All-India Congress Committee concluded its session on Saturday night. In the early hours of the morning of Sunday, August 9, the Indian Government struck. As Bombay's British Commissioner of Police came to arrest Mahatma Gandhi, he very typically asked for half an hour's grace to finish his morning prayers. Gandhi's last message was: we get our freedom or we die.

At the same time, the police were busy rounding up all the Congress leaders assembled in Bombay and elsewhere. In the course of a few hours, the entire Congress movement with its ramifications spread over the length and breadth of the country had become underground. The Churchill, Amery and Company had dropped their hypocritical mask as champions of liberty and democracy. The horrible face of a soulless alien despotism had revealed itself to the Indian people in all its nakedness. A new chapter in the history of India's struggle for freedom had begun.

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