

**THE INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS
A RECONSTRUCTION**

VOLUME TWO : 1919-1923



THE PATH TO LIBERTY: AMRITSAR WAY.

An early Low cartoon from India

The Indian National Congress A Reconstruction

Volume Two : 1919-1923

IQBAL SINGH

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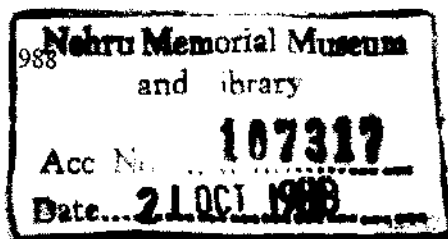
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TO PRITPAL AND RAJ, ANITA AND RITU
IN FOND REMEMBRANCE

.....Death
whenever he call,
must call too soon.
W.S. Gilbert

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## APROPOS VOLUME II

The friendly editor of a prestigious radical weekly published from Delhi, while handing over the first volume of this "Reconstruction" to a reviewer, accompanied it with a word of caution. He told him that when reviewing the book he should bear in mind that the next volume might be a long time coming his way. His cautionary admonition was, of course, perfectly in order. Anybody who has undertaken the task of grappling with so large and almost open-ended a theme as the rise and growth of the Indian National Congress, would know that all manner of difficulties, to say nothing of inward blocks, are apt to arise and frustrate the good intentions and resolve of writers far more disciplined and less given to the incurable habit of procrastination than I can hope to be. However, in this case as it happened though the amiable editor could not have known it, by the time the review appeared in his journal, the second volume was all but complete. The delay of six months or more in its publication is mainly attributable to the fact that it had to take its turn in the publication schedule of the institution under whose auspices it is being published.

Not that there was any particular urgency in the matter. The response to the first volume has not been such as to flatter me to

think that avid readers are queuing up at bookshops, or even the Congress Party offices, impatient to lay their hands on the next instalment of the story. Indeed, in spite of the prevalence of historians and "historiographers" of varying talents and persuasions in our times, the impression is hard to avoid that the lay public shares the view nicely and vehemently expressed by the late Henry Ford, the original begetter of the famous T-model, that history is "bunk." And one can hardly blame it. So, if there has been any psychological goad prompting one to get on with the work in hand, it has been the thought of one's own appointment in Samara which none can tell when and where it has to be kept.

But there comes the rub. Contrary to the common belief, a writer is not entirely a free agent, but rather a prisoner—and in a dual sense: prisoner, firstly, of the material which has to be worked upon and, secondly, of the method chosen to handle that material. It was stated in the argument for the first volume that in so far as my aim has been to try to present the Congress story in its own terms rather than fitting it into some preconceived schematic and theoretical mould of one's own preference, the direct narrative form suggested itself as the most appropriate to the purpose.

It also seemed the easiest line of approach, at least during the pre-Gandhian phase when the struggle to loosen the British imperialist stranglehold over Indian destiny was waged mostly on the constitutional plane. However, with the emergence—one is tempted to say, eruption—of Gandhi's strange personality on the Indian political scene and at the very apex of Congress leadership, the narrative method, inevitably, has its problems, including the problem of an embarrassment of riches. Even otherwise, as a friend, Victor Kiernan, himself an historian of no mean repute, pointed out to me after reading the previous volume, I was likely to find the scenario as it unfolded itself getting more and more "crowded." So, indeed, it has turned out to be. The result is that while I had intended in the present volume to bring the story up to the end of 1929, actually I have been able to cover only a period of five years from the beginning of 1919 to the end of 1923. That must seem exceedingly slow progress.

But, perhaps, time alone is not an adequate measure to apply to the history of an organisation, or rather movement, like the

Congress. At any rate, during the five-year span traced here the Congress, and with it the country, traversed almost an epoch of evolution and the tide of political awakening—and expectancy—reached a new high watermark. For it is a period marked by fateful events. It witnessed Gandhi's attempt to set up the Satyagraha Sabha, or Sabhas, for a nation-wide agitation against the humiliating iniquity of the Rowlatt Act, the Jallianwala Bagh massacre and the agony of the Punjab under the Martial Law and for some time even after it was technically lifted. It saw for the first time serious and systematic preparation by the Congress under Gandhi's supreme command for a movement of mass non-violent resistance to the Raj and its institutions along a wide front and then the decision by the Mahatma—probably one of the most controversial in his life—to abort it even before it had properly taken off, after the Chauri Chaura incident. This was followed by his arrest, trial and conviction—an episode which reminded some of his contemporaries, not altogether in a spasm of sentimental and fanciful piety, of the trial of Jesus of Nazareth nearly two thousand years earlier.

Moreover, during this relatively brief period of high moral and political drama, the Congress movement not only reached its noontide, but also saw its lowest ebb once the Mahatma had withdrawn the challenge that he had thrown to the Government and he himself was safely locked up in the Yeravda Central Jail. In the climate of disenchantment and even pervasive demoralisation that set in the Congress was to suffer its second split between the "No-changers", or what would now be termed as political fundamentalists, and the Swarajists, or the revisionists. It was not so serious or prolonged as the one it had suffered a decade and a half earlier at Surat. The issue that divided the two factions related more to the means than ends. But all the same it was serious enough for it not to be healed by the compromise formula worked out at the Delhi Special Congress session and ambiguously endorsed at Cocanada.

No doubt one could dehydrate and compress all these poignant and even traumatic developments and accommodate them in the proverbial nutshell. But that would be at the cost of considerable distortion of reality as those who participated in or lived through it experienced it. Consequently, there is no need to be unduly apologetic about telling the story at some length.

As in the previous volume, so in this I have based this narrative largely on the Congress documents and contemporary records rather than the efforts of latter-day scholarship on both sides of the hill. Above all, in the *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (Publications Division, Government of India), edited with exquisite meticulousness and a rare self-effacement by successive editors, I have found the richest quarry of precious evidence and information bearing on much that happened during the period covered in Volume II. It would be rank ingratitude not to acknowledge my debt to them.

Or, for that matter, to the staff of Nehru Memorial Museum and Library for their continued assistance and cooperation even though the term of my fellowship has expired. Unpaid debts, in the nature of things, get compounded, especially when one goes on adding to one's indebtedness. I had already acknowledged how much I am beholden to Dr. N. Balakrishnan, Miss Deepa Bhatnagar, Miss Amrit Varsha Gandhi and Mr. Yog Raj Kapoor. But by an unforgivable lapse of memory, I had failed to thank Mr. A.K. Avasthi, Senior Reprography Officer, who has been infinitely helpful in the choice and preparation of photographs in this as in the previous volume and Mr. T.K. Venkateswaran. I hope they will forgive me for this belated acknowledgement. As always, it remains to add, Professor Ravinder Kumar, Director of the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, has given much encouragement and moral support in my work. As for Dr. Hari Dev Sharma, the Deputy Director, he could not have taken more trouble with the manuscript than if it had been his own. Thanks to him, many an error has been eliminated. Many that remain are my own responsibility.

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August 1988

I.S.

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## CHAPTER I

### THE CUP OF ASTONISHMENT

In a nicely sanitized passage in her *Gandhi's Rise to Power*, Dr. Judith M. Brown sums up the perverse dualism of British policy in India during World War I—though by no means only during the war years. She speaks with characteristic nonchalance of the Rowlatt Bills being “the postscript to the policy of balance between conciliation and repression which the British had evolved during the war.” “Even while the rulers wooed collaborators with reforms,” she goes on to add, “they feared the loss of coercive power against ‘conspiracy and political outrage’ when the Defence of India Act lapsed after the war.”

To what extent the threat of “conspiracy and political outrage” had any real substance or was merely a projection of the overheated imagination of the British Government and its instruments in India engendered by their own subconscious sense of guilt and the gnawing apprehension of a retributive nemesis which often goes with it, must remain a matter for guessing. But what is not in doubt is that the synchronism between the much-trumpeted declaration of policy on the constitutional future of India made on August 20, 1917, by Montagu and the almost *sotto voce* announcement by the Indian Government of the setting up of the Rowlatt Committee was not fortuitous. It was entirely



predictable and a part of the imperialist logic which demanded that while dangling the carrot of reforms the authorities should equip themselves with and brandish a stick to remind Indians that they commanded other means of inducing compliance with their wishes and plans.

Strangely, however, political leadership in India—and for all practical purposes that meant the leadership of the Congress, both moderate and radical, and the Muslim League leadership which was still marching in step with the Congress—seemed to pay little heed to this stern reminder. It was so excited over Montagu's declaration and his subsequent visit to India for consultations with the Viceroy and the bureaucratic establishment and to listen to what the Indian politicians had to say for themselves, that the unheralded arrival of Sidney Rowlatt in Bombay in December 1917 was hardly noticed and few gave any serious thought to the expeditious manner in which he, with his British and Indian colleagues, addressed themselves to the task assigned to them.

It is true, as noted earlier, that at the Calcutta session of the Congress, in the comprehensive resolution on "Internaments" the setting up of the Rowlatt Committee had been duly and formally "condemned" on the self-evident ground that "the avowed object of the appointment is not to give relief but to introduce fresh legislation arming the Executive with additional powers to deal with the alleged revolutionary conspiracy in Bengal." But it seems clear from the text that the worry of the Congress over any further coercive measures which the Rowlatt Committee in its wisdom might recommend was incidental to its concern over the way in which the repressive machinery already at the disposal of the authorities was being used, especially when supplemented with the Defence of India Act brought in during the war and which, unlike the Defence of the Realm Act operative in the United Kingdom, had no mitigating safeguards to lessen its arbitrary rigours.

At the Bombay special session more notice was taken of the Rowlatt Committee which had completed its labours a few days ahead of the completion of the Montagu-Chelmsford Report. As Mr. Justice Rowlatt's undertaking and the Montagu mission had been conceived in the official mind as Siamese twins, the two reports were published within a few days of each

other in July 1918. But with a difference. Interestingly enough the Montagu-Chelmsford Report was published simultaneously in Britain and India. Not so the Rowlatt Committee's handiwork. It was unveiled in India alone at first and the British public had to be content with a cabled summary of it on July 18. When questions were asked in Parliament about this discriminatory treatment, the Government spokesmen tried to explain away the omission on the technical ground that the Rowlatt Committee had been appointed by the Government of India, not the Home Government, which was under no obligation to publish its Report.

This was patently disingenuous and the disingenuousness was only compounded when the first copies made available in London were found to be incomplete, if not Bowdlerised. This in turn was attributed to some mix-up at the printers. Ultimately, under parliamentary pressure, the complete version had to be supplied as Cd 9190 under the title *Report of Committee Appointed to Investigate Revolutionary Conspiracies in India*. The British Government's coyness in the matter might well have been due to two contradictory reasons. On the one hand, it might have been uneasy that the British liberal conscience might be upset and possibly even kick up a fuss that giving an additional turn of the repressive screw was no way to reward India's loyalty to the British cause and all the blood and treasure it had offered during the war. On the other hand, it was probably equally worried that Sidney Rowlatt and his four men, good and true, had, perhaps, painted the danger of "elaborate, persistent and ingenious" revolutionary conspiracies in India in too lurid a colour in order to justify the draconian coercive legislation which they had recommended; that this in turn might well provide diehard Tories like Sydenham and his colleagues in the Indo-British Association with further ammunition in their campaign against the whole notion of constitutional reforms in India.

As far as the Congress was concerned, however, it had had more than six weeks inwardly to digest the Rowlatt Committee Report before the special session in Bombay and concluded that it merited a separate resolution instead of being condemned in a general resolution dealing with common garden machinery of repression. Even so it came very low on the agenda—number

fifteen which was the penultimate resolution. Moreover, its wording was rather mild if not perfunctory, condemning the Rowlatt Committee's recommendation because "if given effect to" they "will interfere with the fundamental rights of the Indian people and impede the healthy growth of public opinion." Presumably, it was preoccupied with analysing the virtues and defects of the Montagu-Chelmsford proposals and how and in what direction they could be improved in order to make them more acceptable to Indian political opinion.

Four months later when the normal annual session of the Congress met at Delhi, the gravity of the issue had begun to communicate itself to the Congress leaders. At least the resolution on the Rowlatt Committee for the first time viewed its recommendations "with alarm" and, while repeating its previous critique of them, added that it would "also prejudicially affect the successful working of constitutional reforms," which required not only the removal from the Statute Book of the Defence of India Act and all other similar "repressive measures curtailing the liberty of the subject," but a general amnesty for all "detenus" and "political prisoners". But the resolution still seemed to suggest that the Congress considered the Rowlatt Committee package as a matter of secondary concern and had not even noticed that, while the British Government was in no great hurry to declare its intentions regarding the Montagu-Chelmsford Report, the Government of India was losing no time in drafting effective legislation along the lines recommended by the Rowlatt Committee.

Nor was there any hint in the resolution of what the Congress proposed to do if, in spite of its repeated warnings and protests, the Government of India went ahead with its plans for fresh enactment which would not only continue the time-tested and war-time curbs on "the liberty of the subject" such as it was, but clamp down fresh instruments of coercion on the Indian people. Evidently the Congress leadership had its mind and eyes focused on the brighter side of the prospect ahead and was sanguine that the high-powered delegation it was planning to send to Britain and the pressure of public opinion would succeed in persuading the British Government to improve upon the Montagu-Chelmsford proposals sufficiently for the Congress to go along with them.

All the same early in the New Year public disquiet over what might be in store for India was beginning to mount as it became known that Bills were already in the pipeline to give effect to the recommendations of the Rowlatt Committee. On February 2, 1919, for instance, a meeting was held at Shantaram's Chawl, Bombay, under the joint sponsorship of Bombay branches of the Home Rule League to protest against the Criminal Law Amendment Bill and the Criminal Law Emergency Powers Bill, the two progenies of the Rowlatt Report. The Congress President, Madan Mohan Malaviya, presided over the meeting at which Jannadas Dwarkadas read out a letter from Gandhi which the latter had addressed to his close associate, Shankerlal Banker, expressing his view on the Rowlatt Bills as they came to be known. In his letter Gandhi had said that there was "not the slightest warrant for the proposed Bills, and that it was their duty to educate public opinion to oppose the Bills with patience and firm determination." "If the Rowlatt Bills," he was quoted as having written, "were passed into law, the Reforms, whatever their value, would be absolutely worthless. It was absurd to find on one side the enlargement of the powers of the public and, on the other, to put unbearable restraints on their powers."

A few days earlier in a letter to O.S. Ghate, he had expressed himself in even stronger terms on the subject of the Bills. He had described them as "damnable" and added that "no stone may be left unturned by us to kill the measure." However, he seemed to think that they would never be put on the Statute Book because of their "severity," and also because "all the Indian members of the Imperial Council" will oppose them. At the same time he saw no reason "for the country not taking up vigorous agitation." He said he was watching the situation and himself preparing to do his "humble share" in opposing the Rowlatt Bills.

This must have ranked among the major political understatements of the year in the light of what was to follow. From the start he had concluded that the Rowlatt Bills constituted an insufferable enormity and he found it hard to believe that a man like Chelmsford would pronounce his blessings on them and allow their enactment. He had a curiously innocent, not to say naive, faith in Chelmsford's honesty and even goodness and trusted him. He even deluded himself into believing that this trust was reciprocated when, in fact, the consideration which Chelmsford

and his entourage showed Gandhi from time to time was mainly a tactical ploy because they considered him useful in mobilising support for the war, if not positively at least negatively by neutralising the influence of leaders like Tilak and even Annie Besant at a certain stage whom they regarded as at best ambivalent towards the British cause. With the war won, the Viceroy and his underlings had little need of Gandhi and the whole balance of relationship between the two sides was to suffer a rapid change.

Gandhi, moreover, was in some difficulty in immediately setting about organising agitation against the Bills. To begin with, he was in no fit condition physically to undertake the effort required. His illness, as we know, had prevented his taking part in the Thirty-third session of the Congress at Delhi. The illness had prolonged itself beyond that session, partly, it may be, because of varying modes of treatment to which he was submitted by his doctors who, knowing his fondness for "experiments with health," did not resist the temptation to treat him as a kind of guinea-pig for their medical theories. We know, for example, that a certain Dr. Kelkar, whom he nicknamed Dr. Ice because of his faith in treatment by ice, made him take nothing but four pounds of "unboiled milk during the day" for almost a week which apparently availed little. At the end of January 1919, he was advised "to take fully three months rest outside India" which he told O.S. Ghate he would "forgo" for the sake of the work in hand. Later there were other complications, like piles.

But apart from physical incapacity, there was also a political problem. He was not the man who believed in starting a number of hares at the same time, but preferred to concentrate on what he regarded as the most important issue, and the issue which for some time had been uppermost in his mind had been to secure the release of Ali Brothers from their internment. He had been in correspondence with the Viceroy over the matter ever since the beginning of 1918 and possibly because of his pleading, although for other reasons of policy, too, the Government had appointed a Committee to investigate the cases of Ali Brothers. It had completed its work and, as he told Ghate at the end of January, "nothing should be done until the Report of that Committee has been presented to the Government",

and added that "if as a result of the inquiry the Brothers are not released, the time for action will have arrived."

He was so anxious, indeed, not to complicate his dealings with the authorities over the Ali Brothers issue that in his letter to William Vincent, Home Member in the Governor-General's Council, written on February 12, he made no reference to the Rowlatt Bills in the drafting of which Vincent had played his part and contented himself with wondering "whether the Government have now arrived at any decision over this case." Even in his letter to Chelmsford's Private Secretary, written about a week later, he merely said: "I feel tempted to write about Rowlatt Bills, but I am checking myself for the moment and awaiting the course of the Bills and the agitation about them in the country. I wish to confine myself today to a matter that specially interests me—the case of the Brothers Ali."

However, he was watching the situation closely as the Bills were being debated in the Imperial Council at Delhi. He was even agitated about them. Thus on February 8 he wrote to Madan Mohan Malaviya who was a member of the Council:

I read all the speeches on the Rowlatt Bills today. I was much distressed. The Viceroy's speech is disappointing. Under the circumstances I at any rate hope that all the Indian members will leave the Select Committee or, if necessary, even the Council, and launch a countrywide agitation. You and other members have said that if the Rowlatt Bills are passed a massive agitation would be launched the like of which has not been seen in India. Mr Lowndes [Law Member] said that the Government were not afraid of the agitation that is going on. He is right. Even if you held a hundred thousand meetings all over India what difference would it make? I am not yet fully decided but I feel that when the Government bring in an obnoxious law the people will be entitled to defy their other laws as well. If we do not now show the strength of the people, even the reforms we are to get will be useless. In my opinion you should all make it clear to the Government that so long as the Rowlatt Bills are there you will pay no taxes and will advise the people also not to pay them. I know that to give such advice is to assume a great responsibility. But unless we do something really big they will not feel any

respect for us. And we cannot hope to get anything from people who do not respect us.

The next day he wrote to V.S. Srinivasa Sastri congratulating him on his "forcible speech on the Rowlatt Bills." If anything, he expressed himself in even stronger terms on the subject than he had done in his letter to Malaviya, partly, it may be, because he knew Sastri, a very clever man but a "Moderate" who had a congenital allergy to anything savouring of extra-constitutional conduct, would not "see eye to eye" with him in the position he wished to take up, as he put it towards the close of his letter. He therefore wanted to state his case against the repressive legislation as clearly and strongly as possible. He told Sastri that strong as his speech was, it was "none too strong". And he went on:

The Bills coupled with the Viceroy's, Sir William Vincent's and Sir George Lowndes' speeches have stirred me to the very depths; and though I have not left my bed still, I feel I can no longer watch the progress of the Bills lying in the bed. To me, the Bills are the aggravated symptoms of the deep-seated disease. They are a striking demonstration of the determination of the Civil Service to retain its grip of our necks. There is not the slightest desire to give up an iota of its unlimited powers and if the Civil Service is to retain its iron rule over us. . . . I feel that the Reforms will not be worth having. I consider the Bills to be an open challenge to us. If we succumb we are done for. If we may prove our word that the Government will see an agitation such as they have never witnessed before, we shall have proved our capacity for resistance to autocracy or tyrannical rule. When petitions [and] resolutions of gigantic mass meetings fail, there are but two courses open—the ordinary rough and ready course is an armed rebellion, and the second is civil disobedience to all the laws of the land or to a selection of them. If the Bills were but a stray example of lapse of righteousness and justice, I should not mind them but when they are clearly an evidence of a determined policy of repression, civil disobedience seems to be a duty imposed upon every lover of personal and public liberty.

He repeated his suggestion, already made to Malaviya, that "all the Indian members or so many of them as would do so" should resign their positions on the Select Committee and even from the Council itself. "If I think," he said, "their resignations will shake the Government's confidence in its ability to disregard public sentiment, and will be an education of great value to the people." As for himself, he added, "if the Bills are to be proceeded with, I feel I can no longer render peaceful obedience to the laws of a power that is capable of such a piece of devilish legislation as these two Bills, and I would not hesitate to invite those who think with me to join me in the struggle." But he assured Sastri that he would do "nothing in haste" and "without giving a previous confidential warning couched in as gentle language as I can command."

In another letter written on the same day as the one to Srinivasa Sastri he told Pragji Khandubhai Desai, an old associate from the days of his South African Satyagraha campaign, how much the Rowlatt Bills were agitating him. "It seems," he added, "I shall have to fight the greatest battle of my life." Whether or not it turned out to be the greatest battle of his life, it certainly was a major turning point in his political life and a watershed in the political struggle of the Indian people even though it may not seem so to the latter-day historians of the Raj who, like Dr. Judith Brown, have recorded their surprise, verging on incredulity, that Gandhi worked himself up into such a state over the Rowlatt Bills. "The Rowlatt Report and the bills which incorporated its recommendations," she writes, "concerned governmental power to deal with sedition and conspiracy—an issue with very limited political appeal, which disturbed the politician but barely impinged on the lives of ordinary people. Few cases could have been further from those for which Gandhi had launched satyagraha in 1917 and 1918, and on the surface it seemed an improbable foundation on which to try to build a broadly-based, continental leadership."

That may well be true. However, Gandhi was not calculating to build "a broadly-based, continental leadership" for himself or anybody else when he decided to give the Government battle if it persisted in enacting the Rowlatt Bills and tried to mobilize popular resistance to them. He was moved to his decision because he regarded the Rowlatt legislation as an outrageous inequity



and attack on human rights just as he had regarded the racist legislation in South Africa against which he had waged a struggle. After all, as Judith Brown acknowledges, "politicians of all shades of opinion" felt the same way about them and she quotes the *Indian Social Reformer*, an organ of distilled moderate opinions, as saying: "If constitutional reforms cannot be had but at such a price, we do not want them. What will it profit India if it have the beginnings of responsible government if the liberties of the Indian people are carefully consigned beforehand to the keeping of the irresponsible part of the Executive?"

What is more, Montagu himself was unhappy about them and sanctioned them, partly because of his own weakness in the Cabinet, and partly because Chelmsford insisted on them, egged on by a reactionary cabal of bureaucratic hierarchs who surrounded him and who hated the whole idea of any devolution of power to Indian hands and were determined to sabotage even minimal constitutional reforms. He had written to Chelmsford as early as October 10, 1918, asking him whether the administration over which he presided could not manage to do without the draconian legislation recommended by the Rowlatt Committee which was virtually all "most repugnant" to him:

I do most awfully want to help you to stamp out rebellion and revolution, but I loathe the suggestion at first sight of preserving the Defence of India Act in peace time to such an extent as Rowlatt and his friends think necessary. Why cannot these things be done by normal, or even exceptional processes of law? (I hate to give the Pentlands of this world or the O'Dwyers the chance of locking a man up without trial).

He was, of course, unable to resist the pressure from Delhi to give his "reluctant sanction" to the Rowlatt legislation. But if Montagu recoiled in repugnance from it, it was scarcely surprising that Indians—and not just Indian politicians as Judith Brown at one point implies, but the common Indian humanity—found the whole thing unjust and iniquitous. After all, they had to live with and suffer it. Far from Gandhi's reaction to the Rowlatt Bills being in any sense atypical or exaggerated, it was an accurate measure of the general public sentiment. However,

unlike some others, he was unwilling to acquiesce in them passively while condemning them verbally. Although hardly able to stir from his sickbed, he lost little time in making preparations for and organising active resistance to what he felt to be an act of wanton arbitrariness and calculated provocation.

Significantly, he seemed to be anxious not to involve the Congress directly in the movement of resistance. There were probably many reasons for this, but at least it is not difficult to guess one which must have weighed considerably with him. Most of political India—not only the Congress leaders, both moderate and radical, but many others as well—were bitterly opposed to the Rowlatt Bills. This was shown dramatically when all the Indian non-official members of the Imperial Council voted against the legislation although the Government was able to steamroller it through because of its built-in official majority. As Dr. Brown acknowledges, "at least one Indian member, Pandit B.D. Shukul, representing landholders from C.P. [by no means a constituency renowned for its radical outlook], resigned his seat in protest because he thought the Indian voice carried no weight in [the] Council."

This was put even more forcefully by another and better known member of the "Imperial Legislative Council" who resigned although Dr. Judith Brown, for some reason, makes no mention of it. Jinnah in his letter of resignation to the Viceroy written on March 28, 1919, protesting against the Government's enacting the Rowlatt legislation in spite of the virtually united opposition of the Indian members of the Council, accused the Government of having "ruthlessly trampled upon the principles for which Great Britain avowedly fought the War." He saw in this act of arbitrary exercise of irresponsible power a clear demonstration that the Imperial Legislative Council was a Legislature but in name and observed:

I feel that under the prevailing conditions I can be of no use to my people in the Council, nor consistently with one's self-respect co-operation is possible with a Government that shows such utter disregard for the opinion of the representatives of the people in the Council Chamber and for the feelings and sentiments of the people outside.

However, Gandhi was aware that while there was nationwide opposition to the Rowlatt Bills, there were even within the Congress differences on how best to oppose them. Tilak was in Britain. During the crucial months of January and February 1919 by when it was manifest that the Government was determined to push through what had come to be known as the "Black Bills" and enact them despite the advice to the contrary of their best Indian friends, he was fully preoccupied with the prosecution of his libel case against Valentine Chirol. It was to turn out to be a luckless and costly affair. It came up before Mr. Justice Darling and a special jury on January 29, Sir John Simon appearing for Tilak and Sir Edward Carson for Chirol. Predictably the jury threw out the case on February 21, after Darling's summing up which was hardly an example of a Daniel come to judgement.

Tilak, therefore, had not been able to give much attention to political developments in India and what to do about the Rowlatt Bills. His close collaborators in India were divided. While N.C. Kelkar whom Judith Brown neatly categorises as "one of Tilak's Chitpavan Brahmin lieutenants" supported the idea of passive resistance to the Bills, G.S. Khaparde had little use for satyagraha and even less for Gandhi. Much more important, Annie Besant, who had never quite seen eye to eye with Gandhi, was in the early months of 1919 in a distinctly refractory, if not negative, mood. She detested the new coercive legislation no less than most of her colleagues in the Congress, the Home Rule Leagues and the Muslim League. But she was not sure that by starting a civil disobedience movement Gandhi would not be providing the Government an excuse for coming down with a heavy hand on the Indian people—for answering "brickbats with bullets" as she was later to argue. Under the circumstances, Gandhi may well have thought it unwise to urge upon the Congress itself to launch satyagraha against the Bills fearing that the initiative might prove divisive when the Congress and the country needed unity.

At any rate some such considerations must have entered into his decision to set up the Satyagraha Sabha—a body of men and women pledged to conduct the struggle against the Black Bills by disobeying certain other similar laws just as he had done in South Africa. Apparently the Pledge was drafted by him in Gujarati at a meeting held at Sabarmati Ashram, Ahmedabad,

on February 24, 1919, and signed by Gandhi himself, Vallabhbhai Patel, C.M. Desai, K.M. Thakore and Anasuyabehn Sarabhai who was secretary of the Women's branch of the Home Rule League in Ahmedabad. Gandhi entrusted the task of English translation of the Satyagraha Pledge to B.G. Horniman who was to join the Sabha with Jamnadas Dwarkadas, Sarojini Naidu and Umar Sobhani. The Pledge read:

Being conscientiously of opinion that the Bills known as the Indian Criminal Law (Amendment) Bill No. I of 1919 and the Criminal Law (Emergency Powers) Bill No. II of 1919 are unjust, subversive of the principle of liberty and justice, and destructive of the elementary rights of individuals on which the safety of the community as a whole and the State itself is based, we solemnly affirm that, in the event of these Bills becoming law and until they are withdrawn, we shall refuse civilly to obey these laws and such other laws as a Committee to be hereafter appointed may think fit and we further affirm that in this struggle we will faithfully follow truth and refrain from violence to life, person or property.

Two days later fairly precise instructions, both "special" and "general", were issued to the satyagraha volunteers by the Committee of the Sabha to be followed strictly when securing signatures to the Pledge, though it appears that it was on March 1, 1919, that the original signatories of the Pledge met at Bombay and appointed an Executive Committee of the Satyagraha Sabha, with Gandhi as its president. It was also only in the first week of March that the text of the Pledge was made public as Gandhi had assured Dinshaw Wacha and other influential political leaders whose "blessings" for the satyagraha campaign he had sought even though he could not have been very sanguine that such approbation would be forthcoming.

The main reason for the delay in the signing of the Pledge and its publication was that he was waiting for a reply from the Viceroy to his despairing plea to Chelmsford to pull back from the brink even at that late hour. On the same day as the Pledge was signed, he had sent a telegram to J.F. Maffey, Chelmsford's Private Secretary, in which he told him how he had been

"considering" his position with regard to the Rowlatt Bills ever since their publication, adding:

IN MY OPINION BAD IN THEMSELVES BILLS ARE BUT SYMPTOM OF DEEP-SEATED DISEASE AMONG THE RULING CLASS. COMING AS THEY DO ON EVE [OF] REFORMS BILLS AUGUR ILL FOR THEIR SUCCESS. THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN ASSOCIATED WITH ME IN PUBLIC WORK AND OTHER FRIENDS... HAVE DECIDED TO OFFER SATYAGRAHA AND COMMIT CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE OF SUCH LAWS AS COMMITTEE TO BE FORMED FROM OURSELVES MAY DECIDE. AFTER SIR GEORGE LOWNDES' SPEECH IT IS NECESSARY TO DEMONSTRATE TO GOVERNMENT THAT EVEN A GOVERNMENT THE MOST AUTOCRATIC FINALLY OWES ITS POWER TO THE WILL OF THE GOVERNED. WITHOUT RECOGNITION OF THIS PRINCIPLE AND CONSEQUENTLY WITHDRAWAL [OF] BILLS MANY OF US CONSIDER REFORMS VALUELESS. I WISH TO MAKE AN HUMBLE BUT STRONG APPEAL TO HIS EXCELLENCY TO RECONSIDER GOVERNMENT'S DECISION TO PROCEED WITH BILLS, AND RELUCTANTLY ADD THAT IN EVENT OF UNFAVOURABLE REPLY THE PLEDGE MUST BE PUBLISHED AND THE SIGNATORIES MUST INVITE ADDITIONS. I AM AWARE OF THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE PROPOSED STEP. IT IS, HOWEVER, MUCH BETTER THAT PEOPLE SAY OPENLY WHAT THEY THINK IN THEIR HEARTS AND WITHOUT FEAR OF CONSEQUENCES ENFORCE THE DICTATES OF THEIR OWN CONSCIENCE....

This was not so much an ultimatum as an act of conscience. He was anxious to avoid a confrontation and wanted to give Chelmsford an opportunity to pause and reflect and alter course at the eleventh hour. "God only knows," he wrote to C.F. Andrews who was with Rabindranath Tagore, "how I felt the need of your presence whilst the soul was in travail. I am now quite at peace with myself. The telegram to the Viceroy eased me considerably. He has the warning. He can stop what bids fare to

become a mighty conflagration. If it comes, and if the satyagrahis remain true to their Pledge, it can but purify the atmosphere and bring in real swaraj...."

In his telegram to Maffey he had requested an "early reply" and it must have been vouchsafed him and could not have been wholly discouraging. For although hardly convalescent, he went to Delhi early in March to see the Viceroy. According to the "Chronology" furnished in volume 15 of his *Collected Works*, the interview with Chelmsford took place on March 6 (the date of the interview given by Judith Brown is March 5). He not only met the Viceroy but also the Home Secretary to the Government of India, a certain James Du Boulay, though this may well have been in connection with the case of the Ali Brothers since he had earlier written to the Home Member, William Vincent, asking what the Government had decided regarding them.

While in Delhi, he was to have spoken at a public meeting on the Rowlatt Bills, but could not do so "owing to weakness." His speech had to be read out by Mahadev Desai. In it he said that it was not necessary to say anything about the Black Bills, but that he would say something about the remedy of the disease of which they were the symptoms. "The remedy," he said, "was the satyagraha movement already launched in Bombay" and he claimed that it was "a harmless, but unfailing remedy," though it "presupposed a superior sort of courage in those who adopted it." At all events, "it was the only weapon with which India could be rid of the Bills."

Despite this fairly categorical statement, however, he still entertained a lingering hope that the Government might still voluntarily withdraw the Bills or at least hold them in abeyance. This is clear from the telegram he sent to Maffey on March 11 on his way to Allahabad and he followed it up with a letter written "in the train" from Lucknow on the same day. In the telegram he pointed out that "whether justified or not" there was strong public opinion against the Rowlatt Bills and that the Government "by expressly bowing to public opinion" will risk nothing but rather "enhance real prestige." The letter to Chelmsford's Man Friday was in a more personal and even flattering vein. He recalled how during the Satyagraha in South Africa he had routed his exchanges with Smuts "through his Private

Secretary, Mr. Lane," and how "as the struggle developed, Mr. Lane veritably became the angel of peace between the Government as represented by Gen. Smuts and aliens as represented by me." He devoutly hoped that Maffey could render him "similar services". "For as in South Africa, so in India, I shall ever have to worry you if the struggle is unfortunately prolonged, and I shall seize every occasion to bring Government and those I may represent, closer together," he wrote.

However, Maffey was not particularly impressed by the complement Gandhi had paid him. Evidently he had no intention of playing the role of a veritable "Angel of peace" between Gandhi and the Government. His reply to Gandhi's letter and telegram was rather cold if not churlish. He asked the Mahatma "not to throw dust into people's eyes", though he also referred to his "magnetic personality" and reminded him that as such "he had responsibility for the stability of the state." On the basis of intelligence reports they had been getting, Chelmsford and his colleagues were sure that "Gandhi was not on firm grounds," as Judith Brown echoes, and that he was just "bluffing". Chelmsford told Montagu as much on March 20, 1919:

I think he is trying to frighten us, and I propose to call his 'bluff'. In any case no other course is open to us. The fact is he has got passive resistance on the brain and cannot suppress it any longer. We can congratulate ourselves that he has not chosen his ground better. I am quite happy in defending my present position.

That is precisely what he and the administration over which he presided did, with results which were disastrous in the short run and carried with them the germ of even bigger disaster in years to come. The "postscript" to the policy of balance between conciliation and repression, was to become a prelude to a new phase of struggle between the Indian National Congress and British imperialism which were henceforth set on a course of progressive alienation leading to a whole series of increasingly sharper, if for the most part inconclusive, collisions. For this display of arrogant unconcern and indifference to Indian opinion and sentiment by the British authorities was to bring about a change in Gandhi's attitude to and understanding of the nature

of British rule in India and lead to the first serious questioning on his part of its legitimacy which, like most Indian political leaders of the moderate school and some even of the radical persuasion, whether within or outside the Congress fold, he had been inclined to accept almost as an article of faith. And this in turn, whatever his relationship with the Congress at any given moment and irrespective of whether he was actually leading it in struggle or seemingly standing aloof from its inner wrangles and controversies, was invariably to communicate itself to the outlook and policies of the Congress movement.

Not that the change came about all of a sudden and, as it were, in a flash of lightning along his own distinctive political Road to Damascus. On the contrary, the seed of doubt as to the bona fides of the British Government was slow to take root and grow in his mind to the point where he began to regard nearly all its works as "Satanic." But it was the Rowlatt Bills and the obstinate determination of the authorities to press ahead with them regardless of the protests and opposition even from their loyalists and well-wishers which fractured his trust in their good intentions and, though he always found it hard to mistrust people, the fracture never quite healed.

The break was to cause him no small degree of pain. This is reflected in most of his letters written between the last week of February 1919 and the end of March to those who were opposed to the whole idea of civil disobedience like Dinshaw Wacha, Srinivasa Sastri, K. Natarajan and Stanley Reed who was then Editor of the *Times of India* and who was regarded highly by him, and even his close friends, like C.F. Andrews whom he had written asking to secure the Poet's benediction for the satyagraha but who seemed to be uncomprehending if not sceptical. It is no less evident in his speeches at public meetings and statements to the Press. Thus, in a letter to the Press enclosing the text of the Satyagraha Pledge, written on February 26 he describes the step he had taken as "probably the most momentous in the history of India", and goes on to offer his assurance that the step had "not been hastily taken." "Personally," he confesses publicly, "I have passed many a sleepless night over it." There is no reason to doubt that he did—and not just on getting the wording of the Satyagraha Pledge right, but as he explains, weighing "the consequences of the act."



Some would have wished that he had given equal time and thought to systematic preparation for sustaining the major challenge that he was about to throw out to a well-entrenched imperialist power in a triumphalist mood and with an elaborate machinery of coercion at its command. But, characteristically and paradoxically, while he agonised a great deal over the consequences of the Satyagraha campaign he had decided to launch, neither he nor those closely associated with him in the still skeletal Satyagraha Sabha, with the most rudimentary organisational network in the country and hardly any chain of command, appear to have given much attention to working out practical and detailed tactical plans for the movement of resistance to the Rowlatt Bills, or, what in the jargon of our own day and season, would be called its logistics.

This may have been, at least partly, due to Gandhi's reluctance to believe that Chelmsford had made up his mind to press ahead with the "Black Bills". His meeting with him early in March had been "extremely cordial and friendly," as he told his son, Devadas Gandhi; and though he admitted that "neither succeeded in convincing the other" and even added that "an Englishman will not be argued into yielding; he yields only under compulsion of events," he still hoped against hope that the Viceroy at the last minute would withhold his assent to the Rowlatt legislation or at least delay it. He was very much mistaken in this. As we know from Chelmsford's communication to Montagu, the Viceroy was determined to lay the ghost of "passive resistance" which, according to him, Gandhi had "on his brain," once and for all by dealing toughly and appropriately with it. And in this determination he had the enthusiastic backing of much of the "steel-frame" and most of the provincial satraps some of whom were only waiting for an opportunity to teach Gandhi—and Indians in general—"a lesson".

There was also, perhaps, another psychologically inhibitive factor at work at the very centre of his resolve to resist the Rowlatt Bills which were on the point of becoming the law of the land with only minor amendments and despite the opposition of virtually all the non-official members of the Imperial Legislative Council. This was his failure to convince some of the leaders of Indian opinion whose judgement he highly valued across all the differences that his decision to initiate satyagraha on the issue

was necessary and right. Not only had he been unable to convince them, but several among them had publicly voiced their disapproval of what he was about to do. These included old Congress veterans, like Dinshaw Wacha and Surendranath Banerjea, and up-and-coming politicians like Srinivasa Sastri, Tej Bahadur Sapru and Mahomed Shafi who had one foot in the moderate nationalist camp and the other extended towards the lush pastures of loyalist politics towards which they were being impelled by the logic of their ambitions and talents. Early in March they had thought fit to sign and publish a "manifesto" stating their position on the Rowlatt Bills and Gandhi's satyagraha against them:

While strongly condemning the Rowlatt Bills as drastic and unnecessary and while we think we must oppose them to the end, we disapprove of the passive resistance movement started as a protest against them and dissociate ourselves from it in the best interests of the country, especially in view of the reforms proposals which are about to be laid before Parliament.

Their act of public disapproval and dissociation had not changed Gandhi's mind or plans of satyagraha. As Sastri was to sigh audibly in a letter to S.G. Vaze a few weeks later, "Poor Gandhi!... He goes on his course unruffled—straight & single-eyed tho' circumspect & cool to a degree." However, it would be idle to pretend that this left him unaffected, especially as he was finding that some of those whose support he had expected, and who were not allergic to the idea of passive resistance, were unwilling to stand up and be counted—not because they lacked courage, but had other commitments. This, for instance, was the case with S. Subramania Iyer who had renounced his knighthood in protest against Annie Besant's detention and even signed a pledge advocating passive resistance against the repressive laws. Declining the vice-presidentship of the Satyagraha Sabha he wrote that Annie Besant looked upon the Sabha as a factional organisation working against her. "My long relation with her," he was at pains to explain to Gandhi, "makes it my duty not to array myself against her in what she takes to be a faction opposed to her."

This, indeed, was how she did see what Gandhi was trying to do. She was in one of her less noble moods and the mild paranoia which some observers had detected earlier in some of her reactions seemed to have returned. Certainly, her attitude to Gandhi and the Satyagraha Sabha reflected it. Beginning with the suspicion that Gandhi was trying to undermine her influence in the Congress and in her Home Rule League, it culminated in her open opposition to the Satyagraha movement against the Rowlatt Bills—and for reasons which were more personal than political. Gandhi took it all in good part and without the least rancour. In his reply to Subramania Iyer's note declining to serve as vice-president of the Sabha, he not only thanked him for his candour and said that he would respect his wishes, but asked him to "tell Mrs. Besant, this movement is not a party movement, and those who belong to particular parties after joining the movement cease to be party men." He also agreed with Subramania Iyer that whatever their differences with her, "no Indian can help feeling grateful to her for her wonderful services to India."

He was obviously so anxious to avoid any misunderstanding of the Satyagraha movement and to win over its critics that, as he told Sastri in a letter before leaving Delhi, it was his desire "to explain my position" fully to the signatories of the "manifesto" by personally waiting on them had he been "in a fit state." But he was not. And this only accentuated his difficulty in giving undivided attention to the preparations for the defiance of the Rowlatt Act which was on the anvil and undertaking a campaign of publicity and persuasion to build up mass support for the Satyagraha movement. Still, considering the state of his health, it was remarkable what he was able to do in a few weeks. Apart from writing letters to the Press, on his way back from Delhi to Bombay, he addressed a public meeting—inevitably by proxy—at Allahabad on March 11 and another at Bombay three days later before undertaking a strenuous tour of the South, speaking (again, partly by proxy) at a series of meetings in Madras, Tanjore, Trichinopoly, Madura, Tuticorin, and Négapatam before returning to Bombay via Secunderabad on April 3.

For someone in his state of health and with a "weak heart", this was hardly an ideal mode of convalescence. The business of attending public meetings, at times more than one a day, even though most of his speeches were read out for him by his devoted

companion and secretary, Mahadev Desai, must have taxed his reserves of physical strength to the breaking point. Added to the effort of his public engagements there was the intolerable strain of constant travelling in the hot season of the year. During a period of about three weeks he was to cover nearly five thousand miles by rail, travelling, as was his custom, Third Class which in the good old days of the Raj was not equipped with electric fans and it was surprising that he was not completely prostrated by the effort.

But, perhaps, he drew strength from the popular response at his meetings. This was heartening, despite Judith Brown's assertion to the contrary—not least among the Muslims. According to a report in the *Hindu* of March 26, 1919, for instance, after his speech at Tanjore two days earlier "about fifty signed the (Satyagraha) Pledge, the larger half of the signatories being some of the Mahomedans, merchants of Rajagiri." This was remarkable not merely because the Muslims constituted a very small proportion of the population of Tanjore, but because in his speech—as, in fact, throughout this campaign—he had not raised any issue of specific interest to the Muslims, like the continued internment of the Ali Brothers over which he was negotiating with the authorities and had met James Du Boulay, Home Secretary, Government of India, in Delhi. As he had written to O.S. Ghate from Trichinopoly, the campaign against the Rowlatt Bills "impliedly includes this question" and further that at a later stage of the struggle he proposed to refer to it, but for the time being he wanted to concentrate on the business in hand and did not want to confuse the issue.

It was during his tour of the South, it seems, that his own ideas on what form the Satyagraha campaign was to take crystallised. His critics, including Annie Besant, had been saying that "civil disobedience...was bound to be artificial, because the Rowlatt Act did not touch the ordinary citizen." They were also asking whether only the Rowlatt Act was to be resisted or other laws also to be broken. He was to answer these obstinate interrogatories in his message to a mass meeting held on March 30 on the Triplicane Beach, Madras, under the chairmanship of K.V. Rangaswami Iyengar and the auspices of the Madras Satyagraha Sabha which he was unable to attend because he

had to leave that evening for Bezwada "to keep my engagement with our Andhra friends" as he explained:

Some friends have said, "We understand your breach of the Rowlatt legislation, but as a satyagrahi there is nothing for you in it to break. How can you however break the other laws which you have hitherto obeyed, and which may also be good." So far as the good laws are concerned, i.e., laws which lay down moral principles, the satyagrahi may not break them, and their breach is not contemplated under the Pledge. But the other laws are neither good nor bad, moral nor immoral. They may be useful, or may even be harmful. These laws one obeys for the supposed good government of the country. Such laws are laws framed for purposes of revenue, or political laws creating statutory offences. These laws enable the Government to continue in power. When therefore a Government goes wrong to the extent of hurting the national fibre itself, as does the Rowlatt legislation, it becomes the right of the subject, indeed it is his duty, to withdraw his obedience to such laws, to the extent it may be required to bend the Government to the national will.

A week earlier in a letter to the Press on the Satyagraha movement, he had defined both its nature and how it should begin. He said it was "essentially a religious movement," "a process of purification and penance" that "seeks to secure reforms or redress of grievances by self-suffering." He therefore suggested that "the second Sunday after the publication of the Viceregal assent to Bill No. 2 of 1919 (i.e., 6th April) may be observed as a day of humiliation and prayer." In keeping with his conception of the movement, he advised two things: first, "a twenty-four hours' fast counting from the last meal on the preceding night... by all adults, unless prevented from so doing by consideration of religion or health"; and secondly, cessation of all work for the day, "except such as may be necessary in the public interest." The fast, he insisted, was not to be regarded as "hunger-strike... to put any pressure upon the Government," but rather "as the necessary discipline to fit them [the Satyagrahis] for civil disobedience" and for others, "as some slight token of the intensity of their wounded feelings."

The idea of a fast to be followed by a day's stoppage of all work and business, except what was considered essential in public interest, as Gandhi was to tell C. Rajagopalachari who was one of his close disciples and later was to succeed Lord Mountbatten as the Governor-General of India after the transfer of power, had come to him in the early hours of the morning "in that twilight condition between sleep and consciousness" one day. But the inspiration seems to have remained incomplete and did not extend to what was to follow the fast and the day's *hartal* and he remained rather vague as to how the Satyagraha movement must develop beyond the day-1. Notes taken by Mahadev Desai on the back of a letter at a meeting held in Madras on March 23 to discuss future work suggest that he was contemplating, to begin with, defiance of certain "political statutes" by "printing and publishing of clean prohibited literature" and issuing of "a written newspaper without licence." He is recorded as saying: "I have deliberately asked the Bombay Committee (not) to put anything more than this before the public. I don't think it is wise to put a complete programme, just yet, without knowing what turn events take. I have other laws as L.R. Law, Salt Act and Revenue Law in my programme."

Thus everything was tentative, depending on events. This applied no less to the organisational instrumentalities of the movement. The best course, he thought, was for "each Province to have its separate independent organisation and for all those different organizations to co-operate." But on one point he was definite: all those who guided the people should be "the first to go" and offer Satyagraha—in other words lead from the front. He conceived the satyagrahis as an "army not of destruction but of construction or if necessary of self-destruction and all the rules that apply to the army apply to our Sabha."

But even an army of construction or self-destruction needs a system of communications that is reliable and effective. Judging from the way he was operating throughout the period leading up to launching of civil disobedience, he was content to rely on the facilities provided by the postal services of the Indian Government which had ample powers to delay or even withhold any letter or telegram of instruction in transmission. Indeed, never in the political history of our times has a movement of open defiance of established and well-armed authority been launched

with so much moral premeditation—of which the signing of the Satyagraha Pledge by the participants was the visible token—but so perfunctory an effort at mobilisation of resources and reserves or such inadequate attention to tactics and operational details.

On the face of things, this was inviting failure or at least general confusion in the conduct of the campaign. And this became evident soon enough—indeed even before the appointed day for the cessation of work and business. There was a mix-up or misunderstanding of instructions, assuming there had been any. Delhi observed the *hartal* on Sunday March 30, a week before it was scheduled to take place. Even according to intelligence reports, the stoppage was quasi-total in the city. Later in the day there was a procession, led among others by Swami Shraddhanand, a respected religious leader who had been prominent in the work of the Arya Samaj but during this phase of his life was drawn by Gandhi and his doctrine of satyagraha.

The procession was largely peaceful, though the story, which Dr. Sitaramayya repeats in his *The History of the Indian National Congress*, that the Swami bared his chest when the British soldiers threatened to shoot may or may not be edifying apocrypha. However, at the Railway Station part of the crowd went into the station premises and, according to the official version, tried to coerce the sweetmeat-sellers into closing their stalls, prevented people from boarding trains and tram-cars, and threw brickbats. Some of them were arrested. Thereupon the whole crowd broke into the Station demanding release of those arrested. The magistrate on duty ordered them to disperse, but the crowd refused. The police and the army, who were heavily deployed, especially in strategic localities, were then ordered to fire. Ten people were killed and many more wounded in the firing.

This version of what had happened at Delhi reached Gandhi first. He read it while travelling from Secunderabad, where he had been delayed for a day because of a missed train connection, and it distressed him. But soon after Swami Shraddhanand's account reached him which put a very different complexion on the happening in Delhi and it carried conviction with Gandhi. Sufficiently, at any rate, for him to send the Swami a telegram saying that he felt proud of his "spirited statement" to the Press,

and adding:

TENDER MY CONGRATULATIONS TO YOU AND PEOPLE OF DELHI FOR EXEMPLARY PATIENCE IN OPPOSING ROWLATT LEGISLATION. WE ARE RESISTING SPIRIT OF TERRORISM LYING BEHIND. NO EASY TASK. WE MAY HAVE TO GIVE MUCH MORE SUCH INNOCENT BLOOD AS DELHI GAVE SUNDAY LAST. FOR SATYAGRAHIS IT IS A FURTHER CALL TO SACRIFICE THEMSELVES TO THE UTTERMOST. PLEASE WIRE IF POSSIBLE EXACT NUMBER HINDU MOHAMMEDAN DEATHS TO DATE AND WOUNDED. IT WILL BE UNNECESSARY FOR DELHI TO FAST AGAIN NEXT SUNDAY.

The telegram was sent from Bombay on April 3, but it was not the only telegram he sent that day. There were others, among them one to Srinivasa Sastri and another to Madan Mohan Malaviya, the Congress President. The telegram to Sastri asked whether the "Delhi tragedy" did not make it incumbent upon him and "other friends" to "speak out [in] no uncertain terms." In any case, he wanted and hoped that "difference of opinion about Satyagraha" did not mean "difference of opinion on methods used by Delhi police." He reiterated that in opposing the Rowlatt legislation they were "fighting spirit [of] terrorism lying behind."

The telegram to Malaviya was much in the same vein, but phrased somewhat differently. The Congress, as noted, was not directly involved in his Satyagraha campaign, but almost any Congressman or Congresswoman worth his or her salt was emotionally with him whether or not signatory of the Pledge. The Mahatma said to Malaviya that "in view of what appears to be slaughter of innocents at Delhi, in my opinion you cannot remain silent on it whether you join the movement or not." He wanted the Congress President and all other leaders "to speak out what you feel in no uncertain terms" and assured him that "the blood of the innocents" had laid "a heavy responsibility upon Satyagrahis" who, he had no doubt, "will give a good account of themselves." He asked Malaviya to share the telegram with Motilal Nehru and other friends.

As the fateful day, April 6 or the "Black Sunday" as Gandhi



himself termed it in a notice announcing two meetings or demonstrations in Bombay to mark the occasion, approached he seemed anxious to mobilize the maximum moral support for the Satyagraha movement. He had already written to C.F. Andrews asking him for a message from Rabindranath Tagore. But C.F. Andrews, who was himself something of a Doubting Thomas as regards Gandhi's prospective Satyagraha against the Rowlatt legislation, had not approached the Poet on the matter, possibly because he did not wish to bother him while he was in indifferent health, or had sensed that Tagore himself shared some of Andrews' doubts. On April 5 Gandhi, therefore, again wrote to Andrews hoping that he had got his previous letter in which he had answered some of his doubts. He also told him how for 24 hours he had been "sad beyond measure" over the Delhi tragedy. But he was "happy beyond measure" now knowing that "the blood spilt at Delhi was innocent." He admitted that it was possible the satyagrahis in Delhi "made mistakes. But on the whole they have covered themselves with glory. There can be no redemption without sacrifice. And it fills me with a glow to find that full measure was given even on the first day and that too at the very seat of the power of Satan [this was probably the earliest use of the term Satan to describe the British Government in India by Gandhi]." He wanted Andrews to share his happiness.

This was, perhaps, too much to expect. At all events, Gandhi concluded by telling Andrews that he had "filed an appeal" against him and "here is a copy thereof. You can do what you like [with] it. But I must have Gurudev's opinion." The appeal was a letter written directly to the Poet. Indeed, it is more than a letter. It is almost in the nature of a *cri de coeur* at a critical and decisive moment in his own political evolution and India's. As such it is a document of immense historical as well as human interest. The same applies to Tagore's reply to him. The latter appears in an appendix to Gandhi's *Collected Works*, Vol. 15. Since neither is well known, they merit full quotation.

As always, Gandhi addresses Tagore as "Dear Gurudev" and goes on:

This is an appeal to you against our mutual friend, Charlie Andrews. I have been pleading with him for a message from you for publication in the *national struggle* [our italics]

which, though in form it is only directed against a single piece of legislation, is in reality a struggle for liberty worthy of a self-respecting nation. I have waited long and patiently. Charlie's description of your illness made me hesitate to write to you personally. Your health is a national treasure and Charlie's devotion to you is superhuman. It is divine and I know that if he could help it he would not allow a single person, whether by writing or his presence, to disturb your quiet and rest. I have respected this lofty desire of his to protect you from all harm. But I find that you are lecturing in Benares. I have, therefore, in the light of this fact corrected Charlie's description of your health which somewhat alarmed me and I venture to ask you for a message from you—a message of hope and inspiration for those who have to go through the fire. I do it because you were good enough to send me your blessings when I embarked upon the struggle. The forces arrayed against me are, as you know, enormous. I do not dread them, for I have an unquenchable belief that they are supporting untruth and that if we have sufficient faith in truth [the original letter has "it"] it will enable us to overpower the former. But all forces work through human agency. I am therefore anxious to gather round this mighty struggle the ennobling assistance of those who approve it. I will not be happy until I have received your considered opinion on this endeavour to purify the political life of the country. If you have seen anything to alter your first opinion of it, I hope you will not hesitate to make it known. I value even adverse opinions from friends, for though they may not make me change my course, they serve the purpose of so many light-houses to give out warnings of dangers lying in the stormy paths of life. Charlie's friendship has been to me on this account an invaluable treasure, because he does not hesitate to share with me even his unconsidered notes of dissent. This I count a great privilege. May I ask you to extend at this critical moment the same privilege that Charlie has?

I hope that you are keeping well and that you have thoroughly recuperated after your fatiguing journey through the Madras Presidency.

It was not the kind of letter that the Poet could ignore. He

replied a week later—on April 12, to be precise, since the date in this case is of some importance. The reply was philosophical and modulated on a critical note, though the critique of pure reason seems at point to verge on the pharisaical. The argument is elliptical, ambiguous, even circumlocutory if not evasive. It was not what Gandhi, perhaps, would have wished—"a message of hope and inspiration for those who have to go through the fire." But it was redeemed by the inclusion in the letter of what Tagore called "a poet's contribution to your noble work"—two poems, the first one of which begins almost in identical words with the first line of the oft-quoted poem: "Where the head is held high and the mind is without fear":

Dear Mahatmaji,

Power in all its forms is irrational,—it is like the horse that drags the carriage blindfolded. The moral element in it is only represented in the man who drives the horse. Passive resistance is a force which is not necessarily moral in itself; it can be used against truth as well as for it. The danger inherent in all force grows stronger when it is likely to gain success, for then it becomes temptation.

I know your teaching is to fight against evil by the help of the good. But such a fight is for heroes and not for men led by impulses of the moment. Evil on one side naturally begets evil on the other, injustice leading to violence and insult to vengefulness. Unfortunately such a force has already been started, and either through panic or through wrath our authorities have shown us the claws whose sure effect is to drive some of us into the secret path of resentment and others into utter demoralization. In this crisis you, as a great leader of men, have stood among us to proclaim your faith in the ideal which you know to be that of India, the ideal which is both against the cowardliness of hidden revenge and the cowed submissiveness of the terror-stricken. You have said, as Lord Buddha has done in his time and for all time to come,—

*Akkodhena jine kodham, asadhum sadhuna jine,—*  
 "Conquer anger by the power of non-anger and evil by the power of good."

This power of good must prove its truth and strength by its

fearlessness, by its refusal to accept any imposition which depends for its success upon its power to produce frightfulness and is not ashamed to use its machines of destruction to terrorize a population completely disarmed. We must know that moral conquest does not consist in success, that failure does not deprive it of its dignity and worth. Those who believe in spiritual life know that to stand against wrong which has overwhelming material power behind it is victory itself,—it is the victory of the active faith in the ideal in the teeth of evident defeat.

I have always felt, and said accordingly, that the great gift of freedom can never come to a people through charity. We must win it before we can own it. And India's opportunity for winning it will come to her when she can prove that she is morally superior to the people who rule her by their right of conquest. She must willingly accept her penance of suffering—the suffering which is the crown of the great. Armed with her utter faith in goodness she must stand unabashed before the arrogance that scoffs at the power of the spirit.

And you have come to your motherland in the time of her need to remind her of her mission, to lead her in the true path of conquest, to purge her present day politics of its feebleness which imagines that it has gained its purpose when it struts in the borrowed feathers of diplomatic dishonesty.

This is why I pray most fervently that nothing that tends to weaken our spiritual freedom may intrude into your marching line, that martyrdom for the cause of truth may never degenerate into fanaticism for mere verbal forms, descending into the self-deception that hides itself behind sacred names.

With these few words for an introduction allow me to offer the following as a poet's contribution to your noble work....

Much of this was profoundly true; throughout it was exquisitely phrased; some of it was even magnificent. So were the two poetic offerings, especially the second one which in a few lines summed up what Gandhi was trying in his life and work to realise and came close to realising—~~closer, indeed, than any~~

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comparable figure of our epoch:

Give me the supreme courage of love, this is my prayer,—the courage to speak, to do, to suffer at thy will, to leave all things or be left alone.

Give me the supreme faith of love, this is my prayer,—the faith of the life in death, of the victory in defeat, of the power hidden in the frailness of beauty, of the dignity of pain that accepts hurt, but disdains to return it.

However, the one brief word of assent and approval that would have communicated heart-warming encouragement seemed somehow to be missing. There were too many implied reservations, justified no doubt; too many qualifying phrases meant to serve as "so many lighthouses to give out warnings of dangers lying ahead" which were real enough as events proved. But there is a time for everything and it was not the time for reservations and qualifying phrases. Gandhi must have looked in vain in Tagore's letter for that word of good cheer for those who were about "to go through the fire" and for which he could hardly help wishing in his heart of hearts. Whether Tagore would have written quite in same vein if he had written his letter twenty-four hours or forty-eight hours later when he, together with the rest of India, had to partake of the same bitter cup of agony must remain a matter for everlasting conjecture....

## CHAPTER II

### "THE BIG SHOW"

By any rational and objective reckoning the popular response to Gandhi's call for non-violent resistance to and protest against the Rowlatt Act to which Chelmsford had hastened to give his assent was large enough to be considered nationwide and any leader of the Satyagraha movement would have had ample reason during the first week of April 1919 to feel gratified, even perhaps elated, by it. Admittedly, the intensity of the response varied from province to province. It could hardly be expected to be uniform everywhere considering the continental proportions of undivided India, the vastness of its population, and the absence of any organised cadres to conduct the campaign. But barring a few regions, like the Central Provinces, for instance, where for reasons not necessarily all political, the response had been relatively lukewarm, in most towns and cities of India, ranging from the North-West to the deep South, the hartal was widely observed, very little moved and there were large public meetings. What the authorities regarded as singularly sinister were scenes of amity among all communities, especially Hindus and Muslims.

This was altogether a new phenomenon on the Indian scene—and the more remarkable for two reasons. To begin with, it was the first occasion on which the people had been called upon

collectively to demonstrate their sentiment of rejection of an act of the Government which an editorial in the *Bombay Chronicle*, probably written by B.G. Horniman himself, had described as "the Mark of Cain" on India's forehead which she "cannot and will not accept." It is all very well for Ms. Judith M. Brown to cast around for every other explanation except the simple and straightforward one, and argue that all manner of tinder had accumulated during the war years because of economic and other grievances, and that those who responded to Gandhi's call for Satyagraha knew very little, if anything, about the Rowlatt legislation. Even if her argument were to be accepted—and one would have to hold common humanity in exceeding contempt to accept it—what she says could be said of all historically known and recorded situations which have led to revolutionary upsurge. Indeed, the true significance of Gandhi's Satyagraha campaign in 1919 lies precisely in the fact that it succeeded in bringing to a sharp focus the various strands of discontent upon an issue which transcended all narrow, sectarian, sectional or regional concerns and egotisms, and directly connected with something infinitely bigger and more significant—the issue of national and human dignity and, as he was to tell Rabindranath Tagore, "a struggle for liberty worthy of a self-respecting nation."

What made the dimension of response to his call even more impressive and important was that Gandhi had made no systematic preparation for the campaign before giving the signal for Satyagraha which, it is true, was to be carried out only by the chosen few who had actually taken the solemn Pledge but which the people at large were urged to support by fasting, cessation of work for a day, and taking part in processions and meetings to demonstrate their identification with the opposition to the Rowlatt Act. All this, moreover, had been undertaken without any organisational infrastructure beyond the still embryonic Satyagraha Sabhas where they had been formed at all and through individuals whom Gandhi knew personally in various parts of the country and whom Dr. Judith Brown amiably chooses to describe, perhaps not entirely without a subtle intention to belittle if not denigrate, as Gandhi's "henchmen" and "sub-contractors."

Gandhi's own initial reaction to the way people had responded in their hundreds of thousands, as we know from his

letter to C.F. Andrews, was, indeed, one of happiness "beyond measure" after he had convinced himself on the basis of testimony on which he could place some credence that though the *hartal* observed in Delhi had been premature, the crowds had on the whole conducted themselves in a disciplined non-violent way. Had he but known it, further to the North-West, in Amritsar, where through the same misunderstanding a *hartal* was observed prematurely on March 30, it had passed off without any untoward incident. Nor had he any reason to complain of the way in which the citizens of Bombay observed the "Black Sunday"—April 6—and of which he had been an eye-witness and the chief protagonist. "Bombay," reported the *Bombay Chronicle*, "presented the sight of a city, in mourning on the occasion of the day of national humiliation, prayers and sorrow at the passing of the Rowlatt Bills." The report goes on:

From an early hour in the morning, people had come to Chowpatty to bathe in the sea. . . . It was a Black Sunday. . . . Mr. M.K. Gandhi was one of the first arrivals at Chowpatty with several volunteers, and by 6.30 a.m., or earlier he had taken his seat on one of the stone benches with about a hundred satyagrahis around him. . . . As the day advanced people kept pouring in on the seashore. . . the crowd swelled and swelled until it became one huge mass of people. . . . It was a splendid sight at this time, for the whole Sandhurst Bridge swarmed with people and there must have been approximately one-and-a-half lakhs of people. . . . All communities were represented there—Mahomedans, Hindus, Parsis, etc., and one Englishman. . . . At exactly eight o'clock, Mr. Gandhi made his speech. . . .

Gandhi actually did not speak. He was still too ill and weak for the effort. His speech was read out for him by Jamnadas Dwarkadas who, together with Sarojini Naidu and Horniman (probably the sole "Englishman" mentioned in the *Bombay Chronicle* report) had accompanied him to Chowpatty, despite Annie Besant's attempt to wean him away from Satyagraha. It was not a long speech and more than half of it was devoted to giving an account of the events in Delhi the previous Sunday. He related that according to a telegram he had received



from Swami Shraddhanand "four Mahomedan and five Hindu Corpses have up to now been traced...and that about 20 are believed to be missing and 14 badly wounded..." "No country," he said, "has ever risen, no nation has ever been made without sacrifice, and we are trying an experiment of building up ourselves by self-sacrifice without resorting to violence in any shape or form." At the end of his speech he appealed for funds to help the families of the bereaved in Delhi and said he was sure "the rich people of Bombay will not fail ... to put their hands into their pockets."

At the meeting at Chowpatty two resolutions were passed. The first one congratulated the people of Delhi on their "exemplary self-restraint under the most trying circumstances" and Swami Shraddhanand and Hakim Ajmal Khan "for their admirable leadership", and contained a message of condolence to the families of the innocent victims of firing by the authorities. The second one urged the Secretary of State for India "to advise H.M. the King Emperor to veto the Anarchical and Revolutionary Crimes Act of 1919." It also requested the Viceroy to withdraw the Criminal Law Amendment Bill No. 1 of 1919.

Before the meeting ended Gandhi announced that they would "form a procession and go over to the Madhav Baugh Temple and offer their prayers there." Sarojini Naidu, however, was not well and he, apparently, wanted her to return home in a car. But she must have refused. For she is mentioned in the *Bombay Chronicle* report of the prayers at the temple at which she was present. The plan was for the crowd to disperse after the prayers. But Jamnadas Dwarkadas announced at the temple that their Muslim "brethren were holding a meeting at Grant Road" and he wanted those present "to proceed there to show their friendship towards their great sister community." The meeting was being held in an open space before the mosque and some five thousand Muslims were present. They got up "and cordially received their Hindu brethren... Mahatma Gandhi, Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, Mr. Jamnadas Dwarkadas and other leaders were taken to the balcony of the Mosque and accommodated there amid scenes of utmost enthusiasm." Gandhi addressed the meeting. His theme, inevitably, was Hindu-Muslim unity and he urged the Muslims "to join the Satyagraha movement in large

numbers" and described Satyagraha as "a banyan tree, the roots and branches of which went deep into the ground...."

There was another meeting in the evening at China Baug near the French Bridge. But it was meant for women, with Mrs. Jayakar presiding. Gandhi, from the beginning of his political career in South Africa, had been determined that women should take part in the struggle equally with men. As early as February 25 he had written to C.F. Andrews that he would not wonder "if I tell you that the women at the Ashram have all voluntarily signed the Pledge...." Addressing the Women's meeting at China Baug briefly—he had to leave because there had been "some untoward incident" at the Crawford Market where the police had assaulted "some members" of a mixed Hindu-Muslim procession and they sustained injuries—he appealed to the Indian women "to co-operate with the men in the constitutional fight which they were waging against the Rowlatt legislation." "Indian body," he said, "would not be able to do its work properly if one half of it, namely, the women, remained inactive...."

Thus the "Black Sunday" had passed off peacefully in Bombay. The incident at the Crawford Market, as he wrote to Ibrahim Rahimtoola (a member of the Governor's Executive Council in Bombay) after investigating it, "was nothing serious" and "no one in the procession was at fault." Indeed, as Judith M. Brown writes, "the police admitted that the whole effect was a strategic success for Gandhi, even though fear of damage rather than adherence to satyagraha probably prompted some of the shopkeepers." Probably, or probably not, though one would hardly expect professional writers of police reports not to qualify acknowledgement of any strategic success for Gandhi and not to insinuate that, after all, it may have been fear for their property rather than any sense of solidarity with the Mahatma and satyagraha that induced the owners of shops and businesses in Bombay to respond to his call for protest against the Rowlatt Act.

However, it was not only in Bombay that the first day of the Satyagraha marked "a strategic success" for Gandhi. Shops and businesses had closed and public meetings and demonstration were held in most parts of India and they had been disciplined and peaceful. Even in the Punjab, where over forty towns and cities observed the *hartal*, as we learn from the official Report

"no disorder had followed." This was no less true of Amritsar—and in spite of the ostentatious and provocative display of muscle by the police and military because their nerves were very much on edge. One incident of a minor clash was reported to Gandhi from Calcutta and he had immediately wired C.R. Das:

NEWSPAPERS REPORT SUNDAY DEMONSTRATORS AFTER SOME PROVOCATION RUSHED TOWARDS BRISTOL HOTEL THREW STONES SMASHED WINDOWPANES, TOWARDS EVENING KOMTOOLA MOB RESCUED ORIYA ACCUSED FROM CUSTODY CONSTABLES, SEVERELY ASSAULTED POLICE. PLEASE WIRE EXACT SITUATION. NEED HARDLY POINT OUT IN SATYAGRAHA THERE NEVER IS DANGER FROM OUTSIDE, DANGER ALWAYS FROM WITHIN. SATYAGRAHA ADMITS OF NO COMPROMISE WITH ITSELF. PRAY REPLY EXPRESS.

To this C.R. Das had replied that newspaper reports were "misleading"; that Sunday's demonstration had passed off quietly and peacefully; that *hartal* had been total and, after prayer and fasting, there was a public meeting in the Maidan which 200,000 people had attended; that processions were orderly and the crowds dispersed peacefully. As for the Bristol Hotel affair, it was grossly exaggerated, he said. What happened, in fact, was that when "a *sankirtan* party" was returning home, some Europeans threw "refuse matters and brick pieces" and some people got "excited" but were restrained by others. Regarding the incident about the rescue of an accused from police custody, Das maintained that it was "unauthenticated and unconnected with our demonstration."

The wire to Das was sent on April 8. The previous day Gandhi had spent happily attending to a variety of necessary chores connected with the Satyagraha campaign. He issued the first Satyagraha news-sheet. It was priced one pice, with instructions to prospective readers to "read, copy and circulate" the paper. It did not contain much news, but the Editor's name and address were prominently printed: "Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, Laburnum Road, Gamdevi, Bombay." A copy of the bulletin was sent to F.C. Griffith, Police Commissioner, with a brief

note saying, "May I send you a copy of the unregistered newspaper issued today by me as its Editor?" This was meant to draw the Police Commissioner's attention to the fact that by issuing an unregistered newspaper he had violated the Press laws.

Another statement issued by him as President of the Satyagraha Sabha related to Laws for Civil Disobedience. It was also signed by the Secretaries of the Sabha—D.D. Sathye, Umar Sobhani, and Shankerlal Banker. Apparently, the Sabha considered that the laws relating to prohibited literature and unregistered newspapers were the ones which "may be civilly disobeyed" for the time being. It also drew up a list of the prohibited works which should be disseminated to this end. The list makes interesting reading:

1. *Hind Swaraj* by M.K. Gandhi
2. *Sarvodaya or Universal Dawn* by M.K. Gandhi (being a paraphrase of *Unto This Last*).
3. *The Story of a Satyagrahi* by M.K. Gandhi (being a paraphrase of the *Defence and Death of Socrates* by Plato.)
4. *The Life and Address of Mustafa Kamal Pasha* (printed at the International Printing Press).

Other documents which he drafted on April 7 included *Instructions to Satyagrahis*, *The Vow of Hindu-Muslim Unity*, and the *Swadeshi Vow I and II*. The later text read: "With God as my witness, I solemnly declare that from today I shall confine myself, for my personal requirements, to the use of cloth, manufactured in India from Indian cotton, silk and wool; and I shall altogether abstain from using foreign cloth, and I shall destroy all foreign cloth in my possession." The final clause of this vow was latter to lead to a controversy between Gandhi and Tagore, the latter having protested against the destruction of foreign cloth.

His own future programme, as he told C.R. Das in his telegram, was not definite and was "dependent on external circumstances." But he was intending to leave for Delhi by the Punjab Mail on April 8. This much is known from the telegrams he sent on April 7 and 8 to Dr. Satyapal (who, he thought for some reason, was in Delhi and not Amritsar), Prof. S.K. Rudra of St. Stephen's

College, Swami Shraddhanand and to Rajendra Prasad who was in Patna. Judging from the latter telegram he intended to make his further programme while in Delhi, though he had told C.R. Das that he would try to be in Calcutta on April 15.

In his telegram to Swami Shraddhanand he had begged that his arrival in Delhi on Wednesday evening should be kept strictly private because he could "bear no public demonstration." But unfortunately for him, while he could propose, it was the Government that disposed. He seemed to have no premonition when he left Bombay for Delhi on that Tuesday of what they intended doing about him, if anything. As it happened they had decided that he was not going to arrive in Delhi at all and his non-arrival could hardly be kept altogether private. On April 9, at a wayside station not far from Delhi, Kosi, the Punjab Mail made an unscheduled stop to enable a police officer to get into the train and serve Gandhi with an order not to enter the Punjab, not to enter Delhi and restrict himself to Bombay. The order was signed by a certain Ashgar Ali, "Additional Secretary", acting on behalf of "His Honour the Lieutenant-Governor of the Punjab"—none other than that "pugnacious" Ulsterman, Sir Michael O'Dwyer. The reason stated in the order was that "there are reasonable grounds for believing that Mohandas Gandhi, son of...has acted in a manner prejudicial to the public safety...."

The whole operation was carried out with complete decorum as we learn from the report that appeared in the *Leader* of Allahabad on April 12, based on what Mahadev Desai, Gandhi's Secretary, had written: "The officer serving the order treated him most politely assuring him that it would be his painful duty to arrest him if he elected to disobey, but that there would be no ill will between them. Mr. Gandhi smilingly said, he must elect to disobey as it was his duty [indeed, he wrote this on the back of the order with which he was served] and that the officer ought also to do what was his duty." Gandhi then dictated a message to his "countrymen" in the few minutes that were left to him. In it he expressed his "satisfaction" at what had happened, adding:

...I was bound in virtue of my pledge to disregard it [the order] which I have done and I shall presently find myself a free man, my body being taken by them into their custody.

It was galling to me to remain free whilst the Rowlatt legislation disfigured the Statute-book. My arrest makes me free. It now remains for you to do your duty which is clearly stated in the Satyagraha Pledge. Follow it and you will find it will be your Kamadhenu [the mythical cow yielding whatever is wished for].

He hoped there would be no resentment at his arrest. He had received what he was seeking—"either withdrawal of the Rowlatt legislation or imprisonment." He wanted them not to depart from truth and non-violence even "by a hair's breadth". He stressed the need for Hindu-Muslim unity. "The responsibility of the Hindus in the matter," he insisted not for the first or last time, "is greater than that of the Mahomedans, they being in minority...." He paid what must have been considered rather a backhanded compliment to the English who, he said, "are a great nation, but the weaker also go to the wall if they come in contact with them....There is a fundamental difference between their civilization and ours. They believe in the doctrine of violence or brute force as the final arbiter. My reading of our civilization is that we are expected to believe in soul-force or moral force as the final arbiter and this is satyagraha." The statement concluded with the hope that all communities—Hindus, Mahomedans, Sikhs, Parsees, Christians, Jews who are born in India or have made India their land of adoption—and especially women "will fully participate" in satyagraha.

The statement, which appeared in the *Hindu* the next day, was altogether magnificent. But it was too magnificent to connect with the reality of the situation. It was clearly reflective of the perfectionist mood in which he had launched his campaign. Possibly, he was still far too much psychologically involved in his South African experience—as, indeed, he was to remain almost till the end of his days—fully to realise that it is one thing to conduct a satyagraha campaign with a small body of fairly disciplined people drawn from a relatively small community and quite another to conduct such a campaign amidst a vast population a substantial body of which was seething with discontents that had been welling up for years.

The British were aware of this element of precariousness, if not flaw, in his strategic conception of a 24-carat non-violent

movement of civil disobedience and which must lead to its failure. Chelmsford may or may not have had this in mind when he wrote to Montagu on the 9th day of April which was to turn out to be the cruelest month of all in India for many a year: "Dear me, what a d...d nuisance these saintly fanatics are! Gandhi is incapable of hurting a fly and is as honest as the day, but he enters quite lightheartedly on a course of action which is the negation of all government and may lead to much hardship to people who are ignorant and easily led astray." But to any dispassionate observer of the situation and the way the official mind was working, it must have been equally clear as the day that the bureaucratic cabals which ruled the roost in Delhi and many of the provincial capitals and right down the administrative ladder, were determined not to allow Gandhi to get away with it and wage his "soul-force" campaign in the way which he fondly imagined he could. They had made up their mind to impose upon him their own terms and weapons of combat.

At least it is not easy to explain why not only the Government of India (to give it its courtesy title) sanctioned O'Dwyer's decision to ban Gandhi's entry into the Punjab, but improved upon it by ordering him not to enter Delhi either and to "reside within the limits of the Bombay Presidency". O'Dwyer was a man who believed his own delirious fantasies. But few of those who constituted the Council of the Governor-General—least of all Chelmsford as the passage quoted above proves—could have believed that Gandhi was an incendiary who was hell-bent on setting India ablaze and enjoying the spectacle. They knew that if there was a man whose presence anywhere in India could soothe the populace then that man was Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. And even if they did not know, the reports from Bombay ought to have persuaded them of this.

However, a peaceful Satyagraha obviously did not suit whatever design they had worked out. That would have won Gandhi much sympathy in Britain itself and world at large. On the other hand, eruption of violence would provide them not only justification for the Black Act which they had been in such hurry to rush through the "legislature", but come down with a heavy hand on the satyagrahis and to intimidate the population. And the best way of provoking violence was to "arrest" Gandhi, prevent him from going to Delhi or the Punjab and send him

back under custody to Bombay. For that way they could not only be sure that the news of his arrest would spread all over the country long before his own message reached the people in which he had urged them to remain calm and bear no ill will towards the authorities who had arrested him. They could also make certain that all manner of rumours, some of them planted by those *dieux ex machina* of all oppressive regimes down the ages, the *agents provocateurs*, would be able to run wild. As B.G. Horniman, Editor of the *Bombay Chronicle* who was himself soon to be unceremoniously deported from India, wrote in his *Amritsar and Our Duty to India* published in London in 1920, Gandhi's "disappearance in custody for a day" was bound to lead "the people to suppose that, like Dr. Satyapal and Dr. Kitchlew, he had been taken away for internment."

This was exactly what happened. While Gandhi was being brought back to Bombay "under arrest" and feeling, as he wrote to Esther Faering, who had visited his Ashram in Sabarmati before going on to work with the Danish Missionary Society in South India, "perhaps the happiest man on earth today," the people's cup of bitterness, full already, was to overflow and there were protest demonstrations in many parts of India, some leading to clashes with the forces of "law and order". In Bombay itself the day he arrived back and was set free, April 11, there was a complete closure of shops and businesses; public transport was disrupted; and cavalry was called in to charge the crowds to disperse them.

But people in Bombay, of course, could see that nothing had happened to Gandhi. Soon after his return to Bombay he had addressed a meeting on the Chowpatty beach. It was obvious that he was no longer the "happiest man on earth," but in considerable distress. He said he could not "understand so much excitement and disturbance" following his arrest. "It is not satyagraha. It is worse than *duragraha* [opposite of satyagraha]," he lamented. He pleaded with them to remain non-violent and told them that the essence of satyagraha was capacity "to undergo intelligent suffering." He had nothing but words of praise for the Governor of Bombay and the police for refraining from use of firearms. He issued instructions to the satyagrahis that they should not organise processions or demonstrations and should obey police orders implicitly. The public meetings, he insisted,



were not only to be orderly, but nobody was to applaud the speakers as a mark of approval or cry out "shame" to show disapproval. There were to be no cheers, no hand-clappings and complete stillness was to be observed.

This code of discipline was not of the earth and certainly not India. It would appear that in the mood of unqualified perfectionism in which he had embarked on his first satyagraha campaign on a nationwide scale in India, he not only expected all those who had taken the Satyagraha Pledge to conduct themselves as saints, but even the lay supporters of the movement to act as saints when he should have known, none better, that even saints find it hard to be saintly all the time. This was a tragic if not "Himalayan" miscalculation, but it also accounted for that touch of the *opera bouffe* which the *Times* described as an inalienable feature of Indian politics while reporting that Gandhi had claimed (in the first issue of the *Satyagrahi*) that "owing to the ceaseless efforts of satyagrahis the mill-hands celebrated the National Day [April 6] by working in their respective mills as they were unable to get permission of their employers [to stop work]."

*Opera bouffe* or not, his presence in Bombay undoubtedly ensured that there were no serious incidents in Bombay proper. But obviously he could not be everywhere and when news of the eruption of violence in many towns and cities of India reached him, he was greatly dismayed especially so because in the Bombay Presidency some of the worst incidents had taken place in Nadiad, Viramgam and Ahmedabad on the outskirts of which Gandhi had his Sabarmati Ashram. The incidents at Ahmedabad were the most serious though, living as we do in an age of violence when a football ground can become a field of carnage, they may seem relatively minor today. The authorities had resorted to Martial Law. Gandhi had been pondering over the pros and cons of trying to go to Delhi in defiance of the prohibitory order, but events in Ahmedabad made him give up the idea and instead he decided to go to Ahmedabad with Anasuya Sarabhai, sister of Ambalal Sarabhai, an extraordinary woman by any standard who had sided with the millworkers in their recent strike even though theoretical radical trade-unionists always remained suspicious of her approach to trade union work and her sympathy with the workers' cause.

He arrived there on the morning of April 13 and issued

a "Message to People of Ahmedabad" soon after his arrival. It was a brief message, partly intended to reassure the people that he had "suffered no kind of trouble" while he was under custody, though this was not strictly correct as his long letter to Stanley Reed of the *Times of India* setting down the exact version of his "arrest" and the way he was treated by the "sepoys" (not the English officers), shows. Partly the message was meant to tell the people that until he heard of what had happened at Ahmedabad which made him (and Anasuya Sarabhai) "exceedingly ashamed," he "was enjoying heavenly happiness". He told them also that like them he wished the martial law to be lifted. But that, he said, "is in our own hands. . . I want to show the key with which this can be done." To this end he would be holding a mass meeting at his Ashram at four in the afternoon the next day and he instructed them how to get there and behave while in the Ashram. He ended by making a claim which hostile critics could interpret as extremely disingenuous while friendly ones would regard as extraordinarily ingenuous. "I am so sure about satyagraha," he said, "that, if the mistakes which have been committed here and at other places had not been committed, the Rowlatt Bills would have been cancelled today."

He probably believed this implicitly. But it bore little relation to political realities. He held the mass meeting at Sabarmati Ashram duly the next afternoon and made what was for him a long speech in which he warned them against believing rumours and again exhorted them about the need for strict non-violence. In some degree he sounded on the defensive. "It is alleged," he said, "that I have, without proper consideration, persuaded thousands to join the movement. That allegation is, I admit, true to a certain extent, but to a certain extent only. It is open to anybody to say that but for the satyagraha campaign, there would not have been this violence." He had already done "a penance" which to him was "unendurable"—postponed his visit to Delhi "to seek re-arrest." But this penance, and the imposing of certain restrictions on satyagraha, was not enough and he was going to fast for three days, adding, whether ironically or not is anybody's guess, that he believed "a seventy two hours' fast" was easier for him "than a twenty four hours' fast for you." He asked all who had captured any weapons to surrender them and further that everybody should contribute "not less than eight annas

towards helping the families of those who have been killed by *our* [emphasis added] acts."

The use of the word "our" in the context only underlines that he felt personally culpable. He had also decided that the families of any British person or persons who had been killed should receive some token payment from the fund to which he was asking people to contribute. This is clear from a letter he wrote to Chatfield, Collector of Ahmedabad, the next day requesting him for "the name and address of the sergeant who was murdered during the tragic occurrences. "I understand," he wrote, "that there was only one English death. If there are any other English casualties, I should like to know them and the names and addresses of their families."

It is not known whether G.E. Chatfield furnished Gandhi the information for which he had asked. Just then the British officials were not feeling particularly favourably disposed towards the Mahatma and he was aware of this as may be judged from his letters to both Chatfield, and his superior, F.G. Pratt, Commissioner of the Northern Division, Bombay Presidency, on April 16. "Though the Government, if I understood Mr. Pratt rightly," he wrote to the Collector of Ahmedabad, "neither invite my services nor desire it [sic.] even if rendered uninvited, as I said to Mr. Pratt, I must continue to render to the State what service I can according to my lights."

During the five days he spent in Ahmedabad—he left for Bombay on April 17—he devoted a good deal of his time to writing letters, two of them to Chelmsford's Private Secretary, Maffey. One of them was a long one and the other a very brief note enclosing copies of his speeches in Bombay and Ahmedabad. "both translations from the vernacular" either done by him or by others under his supervision. The longer letter to Maffey was written on the morrow of his arrival in Ahmedabad and reveals how deeply he felt his own responsibility regarding the violent incidents which followed his "arrest". It strikes a note of contrition verging almost on masochistic self-inculpation.

Gandhi begins by thanking Maffey for his letter which, he says, "I have treasured . . . as worthy of you and the friendship that I hope will ever exist between us." Presumably, Maffey's letter was the one which Judith M. Brown describes as "friendly and at times teasing" because in a postscript to it he tells Gandhi:

"Don't do too much fasting! You are not strong enough yet and I am sure yours is an influence which we shall all want at full horse-power." This only served to heighten Gandhi's distress and unhappiness at what had happened in Ahmedabad. He speaks of it as "utter lawlessness bordering almost on Bolshevism"—a description which suggests that the Mahatma had not remained unaffected by the anti-Soviet propaganda in the Western and Anglo-Indian Press which was already in full spate. But that apart, having pitched his expectations of a non-violent satyagraha campaign too high, he seemed excessively shocked—or as he put it "humiliated"—to find that the satyagrahis were human, all too human, and failed to live up to the strict code of discipline that he had laid down. His letter to Maffey reflects his sense of dismay and anguish:

I see that I over-calculated the measure of permeation of satyagraha amongst the people. I underrated the power of hatred and ill will. My faith in satyagraha remains undiminished, but I am only a poor creature just as liable to err as any other. I am correcting the error. I have somewhat retraced my steps for the time being. Until I feel convinced that my co-workers can regulate and restrain crowds, and keep them peaceful, I promise to refrain from seeking to enter Delhi or the other parts of the Punjab. My satyagraha, therefore, will, at the present moment, be directed against my own countrymen.

This was an extraordinary statement to make and undertaking to give in the midst of a political struggle aimed at securing the withdrawal of the Rowlatt Act. But he combined it with taking the authorities to task for their "grievous blunder" to have prohibited him from going to Delhi and the Punjab. Surely, he tells Maffey, the Government of India knew him well enough to know that he was not out to "create any disturbance":

I was going to Delhi, Lahore and Amritsar—to the latter places, if certain conditions of mine had been fulfilled—for the purpose of insuring peace. . . . I feel sure that had I been able to proceed to these places, the awful occurrences could have been avoided, and I think there would be perfect agreement

with me when I say that the mad incendiarism that has taken place in Ahmedabad would have never occurred, if the orders had not been served upon me. I venture to suggest therefore that the orders may be withdrawn. Rightly or wrongly, I seem to command, at the present moment, in an excessive degree the respect and affection of the people all over India. The non-withdrawal of the orders would be resented by them.

He was not being boastful, but telling the plain truth. To underline that he was most anxious to calm people down rather than excite their passions, he remarks, "I have even refrained from describing them and the manner in which they [the orders] were served. I have even not corrected the inaccuracies that have appeared in the Press—inaccuracies which are designed to make light of my arrest." While about it, he took the opportunity to warn Maffey:

The ferment among the Mahomedans is too great to be checked for ever. It may burst like a torrent at any moment and behind the present disturbances are to be traced the results of extreme dissatisfaction. It is not confined to classes, but it most decidedly permeates the masses. I venture to submit that it will be a most disastrous thing if the questions affecting Islam are not settled by the League of Nations in accordance with enlightened Mahomedan opinion, and I suggest that the Brothers Ali may be invited to give their opinion. You cannot do better than having the Brothers in London to give the Home Government the benefit of their advice.

The chances of his suggestion being accepted by Delhi were about as real as the prospect of his appeal to Maffey to persuade the Government of "the desirability" of withdrawing the Rowlatt legislation being heeded. There seemed to be a curious air of unreality not only about the suggestions he put forward in his letter to Maffey, but even about the long letter which he wrote to Swami Shraddhanand before he left Ahmedabad for Bombay on April 17, and in which he set out to answer five questions about satyagraha and whether or not its rules of discipline

applied also to "non-satyagrahis who join satyagraha demonstrations." How far at the time he knew in any detail the tragedy that was being enacted in the Land of Five Rivers?

The answer must be that he could not have known it. Certainly, in *Satyagrahi*: II, dated April 14, there is a brief item headed "Punjab Deportations" and saying: "Serious disturbances have occurred at Lahore and Amritsar owing to the deportation of Drs. Kitchlew and Satyapal." But there is nothing in this bald report, even allowing for Gandhi's resolve to play the whole situation exceedingly cool, to suggest that he himself had any inkling of what was happening in the Punjab. Three days later, in his letter to Swami Shraddhanand, he returns to the theme of the Punjab but only to shrug off his own and the Satyagraha movement's responsibility for the events:

I acquit ourselves of all blame so far as the happenings in the Punjab outside Delhi are concerned. They would have taken place without satyagraha, if Drs. Satyapal and Kitchlew had been arrested on any other occasion. . . .

He admits, however, "that the events in the Punjab give us an indication as to our future course." He meant, of course, the abandonment of the campaign, at least temporarily, though he puts it in a rather round-about way which comes close to a somewhat Jesuitical mode of reasoning. While maintaining that "the movement can never be abandoned in the sense you have understood it," he declares in the next breath: "But our satyagraha may have to take, as it has already taken in Ahmedabad, such a turn that in popular language it will mean an abandonment." Indeed, this is exactly what he announced the next morning on arrival in Bombay. Not only did he send a telegram to G.A. Natesan in Madras telling him that he had decided "to suspend civil disobedience temporarily," but issued a press statement to the same effect:

It is not without sorrow that I feel compelled to advise the temporary suspension of civil disobedience. I give this advice not because I have less faith now in its efficacy, but because

I have, if possible, greater faith than before. It is my perception of the law of satyagraha which impels me to suggest suspension. I am sorry, when I embarked upon a mass movement, I underrated the forces of evil and I must now pause and consider how best to meet the situation.

But the "situation" he had in mind was the tragedy at Ahmedabad and Viramgam, not at Lahore, Amritsar, Kasur or Gujranwala. For there is not even a passing reference to the agony of the Punjab. He must have been aware, no doubt, that Martial Law had been promulgated in the Punjab, but the only experience of Martial Law that he had was of what he had seen being enforced in Ahmedabad which was a relatively mild affair compared to the reign of terror that had been let loose in the Punjab even in anticipation of the official promulgation of the Martial Law as it happened.

Gandhi could not have guessed, much less accurately known, the scenario for a real life Grand Guignol that was unfolding in the Punjab. And for the good reason that an iron curtain had descended over the Province, and especially the neuralgic epicentre of turbulence, the Lahore Division, through which it was impossible for any reliable news of what was happening to percolate for several weeks. The order given by the Lt. Governor of the Punjab to turn back Gandhi at Kosi on April 9 was not just a whimsical decision of a man who had an allergy to nationalist leaders and did not want them poking their noses into the affairs of his jealously guarded preserve. It was a calculated act and part of a design to ensure that there was no reliable witness anywhere near the scene of the crime whose testimony might carry some conviction with the world at large. Whether or not Chelmsford was privy to the design of the O'Dwyer regime, by agreeing to keep Gandhi out of the Punjab and even Delhi where he had only lately visited him, and imposing the strictest censorship of news, he certainly proclaimed his complicity in precipitating the gruesome tragedy and then prolonging it.

It is true that in London Edwin Montagu made some virtue of disingenuousness by passing on for publication the telegrams he was receiving from the Viceroy daily. *India* published them more or less verbatim as also the despatches by Reuter and the

*Times'* man in Bombay. But all these were carefully doctored at the source; they were laconic in the extreme, and though they spoke of riots and casualties, nobody reading them could possibly gauge the horror which the terse and weasel phrases were meant to conceal rather than reveal. Indeed, after a few days they tended to become soporific, giving the impression that all or nearly all was quiet on the Punjab front. Probably, the Secretary of State had access to fuller facts as has been suggested by some of the latter-day writers on the subject. But if so he kept them to himself and did not even share them with his parliamentary colleagues for reasons which may or may not have all been honourable. At any rate, it was not until the first week of June 1919 that, as Tagore was to put it in his letter to the Viceroy renouncing his knighthood as a gesture of protest, "the accounts of insults and sufferings undergone" by the people of the Punjab "have trickled through the gagged silence, reaching every corner of India."

The news of how the Martial Law was being operated in the Punjab, of course, could not altogether be prevented from trickling through to the rest of India, despite the rigorous censorship and restrictions on the movement of persons across the border which had been clamped down in order to insulate the Province. As B.G. Horniman has related in his book *Amritsar and Our Duty to India*, the *Bombay Chronicle* was able to publish an account of events in Lahore, written by "a highly respected citizen" of the capital of the Punjab who had managed to get to Bombay by way of Karachi within a few days. It was an act of defiance which probably finally decided George Lloyd, Governor of Bombay, a relatively sober if dour man as the provincial satraps of the day went, not only to arrest the writer of the account under the Defence of India Act, but also to serve a deportation order on Horniman himself and put him aboard the *S.S. Takada* at the end of April.

However, Indian leaders—from Gandhi downwards—appear to have been inclined not merely to suspend judgement on what the authorities were doing, but reluctant to believe the stories of horror that were being brought to them. Otherwise it is hard to understand why Gandhi went through the somewhat fatuous ritual of sending a telegram to Chelmsford's Private Secretary on April 21, saying that he had just read an Associated Press report that "persons arrested for disobeying orders issued



under Martial Law were "being whipped in public streets" and hoping that there was "some explanation that would remove all cause for anxiety," and asking for assurance that the General Officer Commanding had not been given authority "to whip people publicly or privately." He could scarcely have expected a straightforward answer from Maffey to this agonised plea for assurance.

For the Congress in any case the whole situation was both an embarrassment and a distraction. It had not wanted Gandhi to embark on his satyagraha adventure at all and was not officially prepared to shoulder the responsibility for it. At the same time, however, it could not close its eyes and ears to the way the Martial Law authorities were running amok in the Punjab. The All-India Congress Committee was, therefore, duty bound to take some cognizance of what was happening when it met in Bombay for two days on April 20-21. Gandhi was present at the meeting at which the political situation after the enactment of the Rowlatt legislation and, in particular, the happenings in Delhi, Bombay and the Punjab were considered though the report of the General Secretaries is not very forthcoming as to what part the Mahatma played in drafting the resolution or the work of the Sub-Committee which was appointed to prepare a statement in reply to the Communique issued by the Government of India a week earlier justifying the Black Act and condemning the agitation against it. The statement, as it had become customary by now, was duly cabled to the British Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for India, the Under-Secretary of State and wired to the Viceroy.

Both the resolution, which protested against the passing of the Rowlatt Act "by official votes against unanimous protest of all non-official Indian members and in face of unparalleled opposition throughout the country," and the statement were rather flaccidly worded. On the one hand, they drew attention to certain acts of the authorities "which seemed obviously objectionable, such as the dropping of bombs from aeroplanes, use of machine-gun and whipping"; on the other hand, they condemned "the acts of violence against person and property committed at Amritsar and other places by excited mobs." They attributed these excesses, at least in part, to "the unwarranted action taken against a man of such saintly character

as Mr. Gandhi" and wanted the Government of India "to withdraw its own [order] and to ask the Punjab and Delhi authorities to cancel their orders passed on Mr. Gandhi."

This was an exercise in equidistance if not quite a judgement of Solomon. But the A.I.C.C.'s mind was as much on N.C. Kelkar's report regarding the progress made so far in selecting the members of the Deputation to be sent to England as on the massacre at Amritsar or bombing of unarmed civilian population in and around Gujranwala. For, according to the General Secretaries' report, "in view of the seriousness of the then political situation" some gentlemen, it was felt, "should be asked at once to proceed to England, whereupon one of the General Secretaries, the Hon'ble Mr. V.J. Patel and Mr. N.C. Kelkar offered to sail by the next steamer." They actually did so on April 29, though the report is silent about the name of the boat. But apparently it was not the *S.S. Takada* aboard which the distinguished Editor of the *Bombay Chronicle* had been offered a free if enforced passage to England.

There seemed to be little sense of urgency among the Congress leadership except, perhaps, regarding the intentions of the British Government concerning the Montagu-Chelmsford proposals on constitutional reforms. The All-India Congress Committee did not meet for over six weeks after its meeting in Bombay. It met on June 8 at Anand Bhawan—the residence of Motilal Nehru where so many historic meetings of the A.I.C.C. were to be held in the years to come—at Allahabad. Much water had flowed down the Ganga and the Yamuna since its previous session. As the Congress General Secretaries' report rather dryly puts it:

The promulgation of Martial Law in the Punjab, the ordinance of the Governor-General, dated the 21st April, delegating powers to the Punjab Government whereby any offence committed on or after the 30th March could be transferred for trial to Martial Law Tribunals, the prohibitory order against Mr. C.F. Andrews, the chosen representative of the Indian Press [the leading Indian owned newspapers had appointed him as their special correspondent to report on the situation in the Punjab thinking that being a European the authorities may find it difficult to ban his entry

into the Province], and the denial of the prisoners' right to choose their own counsel—these events necessitated another meeting of the All-India Congress Committee....

This was rather an understatement. There were other compulsions at work for the A.I.C.C. to meet and review the political situation in the country. By now it was in possession of fairly detailed information of what had happened and was happening under the Martial Law dispensation in the Punjab. The Martial Law Tribunals were dispensing rough and ready "justice" and liberally dishing out sentences of death and transportation for life, not just on humble and unknown persons whom the security forces had rounded up, but some of the leading men in the political and social life of the Province. Added to the massacre of the innocents at Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar—exact number of casualties were still not known, though everybody knew that within less than a quarter of an hour hundreds had been mown down—these further acts of insolent authority had moved Rabindranath Tagore, who, as we know, had reservations concerning Gandhi's Satyagraha movement to address a letter to the Viceroy on June 1, 1919, asking him to relieve him of his title of knighthood which had been conferred on him by the King. In a language not only charged with dignified emotion, but which had upon it the stamp of "heroic truth", he had written:

Knowing that our appeals have been in vain, and that the passion of vengeance is blinding the noble vision of statesmanship in our Government...the very least I can do for my country is to take all consequences upon myself in giving voice to the protest of the millions of my countrymen, surprised into a dumb anguish of terror. The time has come when badges of honour make our shame glaring in the incongruous context of humiliation, and I for my part wish to stand shorn of all special distinctions, by the side of those of my countrymen who for their so called insignificance are liable to suffer a degradation not fit for human beings....

This was a gesture of dissociation from the Raj and all its

works, and the tawdry distinctions with which it bought loyalty, almost unique. There had been only one other case—that of S. Subramania Iyer—of somebody renouncing his title of knighthood to register his political protest. But the impact of the Poet's renunciation was bound to be much greater and even reach beyond the shores of India. As the *Manchester Guardian* commented a month later when the text of Tagore's letter reached it:

It is a painful document, and, though it contains no details, it makes general statements so extreme and so disquieting as to the methods of repression recently adopted in India, that we can only hope they are exaggerated and are coloured by the deep and generous indignation of a man who feels that it is for him, as the most distinguished member of his race, to make their cause his own... To find him...denouncing the measures of our Government in India with a vehemence obviously as sincere as it is wounding, is to be compelled to question our conscience and our conduct, or the conduct of those for whom this country is responsible. Obviously, the matter cannot rest there. There must be an enquiry, and very independent and searching enquiry.

The hope of the leader-writer of the *Manchester Guardian* that the Poet had perhaps exaggerated was misplaced. Tagore had not exaggerated and by withholding details he had merely intended, like Gandhi, to avoid inflaming public anger while drawing the attention of the world to what Mr. Justice Rankin of the Calcutta High Court, who served on the Hunter Committee, while questioning one of the principal perpetrators of terror against unarmed civilians, was to describe as "resort to 'frightfulness'." Coming on the eve of the A.I.C.C. meeting, Tagore's letter could not but place the Congress leaders in some difficulty and even perhaps put them on their mettle.

At all events the resolutions the A.I.C.C. passed at its Allahabad meeting were more strongly worded than those at the Bombay session. Indeed, the refrain that ran through the main resolution—a long one whose clauses and sub-clauses exhausted almost half of the letters of the alphabet, was one of protest and condemnation, with particular emphasis on the

acts of the Martial Law administration in the Punjab. Only at one point did the Committee strike a note of approval. It said:

The Committee note with satisfaction that the Viceroy and Mr. Montagu have recognised the necessity of an enquiry into the causes of unrest and into the complaints against the authorities of the use of excessive and unlawful force in relation to the recent occurrences in the Punjab; but in view of the fact that the policy of the Government of India and the Government of the Punjab is inseparably connected with such unrest and complaint and must form the subject of investigation, the Committee earnestly request His Majesty's Government to constitute a Parliamentary Committee....

It also wanted the enquiry to include in the scope of the enquiry "the policy of the Government of India and the Government of the Punjab in dealing with the recent disturbances; Sir Michael O'Dwyer's regime in the Punjab, with special reference to the methods of recruitment for the Indian Army and the Labour Corps, the raising of the War Loan, the administration of Martial Law and the complaints of excessive and unlawful force by the authorities." It urged in "the interests of justice and good government" that the enquiry should begin at an early date. While about it, it pressed for a number of other things—the withdrawal of the Rowlatt Act, the deportation order on Horniman and the orders barring Gandhi's entry into Delhi and the Punjab. As usual, the President, Madan Mohan Malaviya, was authorised to cable these resolutions to the British Prime Minister, the Secretary and the Under-Secretary of State for India and also ask them to suspend the "execution of all sentences passed by the Martial Law Commissioners pending the proposed enquiry" and transfer all cases of persons convicted by or under trial before Martial Law Commissions to ordinary courts.

But by the time the A.I.C.C. met again—this time in Calcutta on July 19-20—primarily to decide on the venue of the next annual session of the Congress, it had not been vouchsafed satisfaction on any of the demands it had made. On the contrary, there was no indication that the Government was in a

hurry to announce its intentions as to the kind of enquiry it had in mind and who were to conduct it. Montagu had been deliberately vague and ambiguous, if not devious, when, speaking on the Indian Budget (for the sixth time, as he reminded the Commons, and devoutly hoping that it would be the last) on May 22, 1919, he had envisaged an enquiry into the disturbances. He had remarked: "The Viceroy has always contemplated an enquiry. You cannot have disturbances of this kind and of this magnitude without an enquiry into the causes of and the measures taken to cope with these disturbances."

But having whetted hope and expectancy, he was quick to administer a cold douche. "But no announcement has been made of any enquiry up to this moment," he had added, "for this reason—let us talk of an enquiry when we have put the fire out. The only message which we send from this House today to India is a message of confidence in and sympathy with those upon whom the great responsibility has fallen to restore the situation. Then will come the time to hold an enquiry, not only to help us to remove the causes, but in order to dispose once for all of some of the libellous charges which have been made against British troops and those upon whom the unpleasant duties in connection with these riots have fallen."

This was an extraordinary statement, the kind which even a Tory Secretary of State might have blushed to make. But by now Montagu was not only on the defensive, but hurrying on downhill even though Indian politicians, including Gandhi, were unable or unwilling to recognise this. The dilatoriness in announcing the enquiry, its scope and its personnel, was due, as soon became evident, to the anxiety of the administration over which he presided to protect the real fire-raisers, the O'Dwyers and the Dyers, when eventually the enormities they had perpetrated or had been responsible for became public knowledge.

For it was not until September 3 that Chelmsford in a speech to the Imperial Legislative Council announced the appointment of a Commission or Committee of Enquiry into the Punjab troubles. But before it was properly constituted on October 14, the bureaucratic cabal in Delhi had hastened to place on the statute book an Indemnity Act. The Viceroy had given assent

to it on September 25, well ahead of the sittings of the Committee of Enquiry under Lord Hunter, a former Solicitor-General of Scotland. To quote Judith M. Brown, "the Indemnity legislation provided that nobody could sue an official for acts done under martial law, provided that the official had acted in good faith and with a reasonable belief that his actions were necessary for maintaining law and order; nor could anyone imprisoned under martial law sue for wrongful imprisonment or gain release by *habeas corpus* proceedings."

This was very much like making sure of eating one's cake and having it, too. True, Gandhi was willing to suspend judgement on the indemnity legislation for rather involved reasons. He might well have thought that truth about what had been done under the Martial Law was more likely to come out if the officials who had administered rough justice were assured they were not incriminating themselves by the evidence they gave. He certainly at the time had a touching faith in British justice or rather believed (as he said in an article in *Young India* of September 10, 1919) that "where Englishmen have not formed preconceived notions or where they have not gone, as all of us sometimes do go, mad over some things, they dispense fearless justice and expose wrong even though the perpetrators may be their own people." But not many even of his friends took quite the same view. Indeed, even the liberal and radical opinion in Britain thought the indemnity legislation a shabby trick and certainly "un-British". As the *Daily News* commented: "The Composition of the Commission [of Enquiry] taken together with the threatened Act of Indemnity, is the provision for a complete whitewashing of the official policy in the Punjab. By such British tactics the British name in India is besmirched." This surmise turned out to be largely true.

The All-India Congress Committee meeting at Calcutta, the last to be held before the annual session, had not taken up the matter of the Congress venue but merely "expressed the hope that it would still be possible to hold the next Congress at Amritsar." At the end of July, this seemed rather a bold hope. For although the Martial Law was withdrawn on June 10, except for the railway property, conditions in the Punjab and especially in Amritsar seemed hardly propitious for holding a Congress session. For instance, orders banning Gandhi's entry

into the Punjab were still operative; most of the Punjab Congress leaders were still under lock and key, sentenced by the Martial Law tribunals to transportation for life—and some even to death; the Press was muzzled and some of its distinguished editors—Kalinath Roy of the *Tribune* who had made his paper a name to conjure with in Indian journalism, for one—were in prison.

Gandhi himself had not attended either the A.I.C.C. meeting at Calcutta or the one held at Allahabad six weeks earlier. He was otherwise preoccupied although some of his activities and decisions throughout the summer months could not but have caused bewilderment to his followers and provided much useful ammunition to his critics and detractors, the principal among them being Annie Besant and some of Tilak's supporters like G.S. Khaparde, who felt that whatever his claims to saintliness he was too erratic to be trusted with political leadership. Thus having suspended civil disobedience only a fortnight after launching it because it had led to acts of violence, before people had time to digest the implication of this retreat, in the Satyagraha Leaflet No. 15 published on May 5 he had decided that Sunday, May 11, should be a day of *hartal* or cessation of work and business accompanied by 24 hours' fast and "private religious devotion in every home." This was intended to show people's feeling of grief at the deportation of B.G. Horniman. This decision at least was intelligible because it related to a specific act of gross injustice to an individual, the Editor of a leading journal, whose only sin was that he had identified himself with the aspirations of the Indian people.

But even before the calling of *hartal* as a gesture of protest against and solidarity with Horniman, in Satyagraha Leaflet No. 12, he had remarked that many had been asking him, "When is satyagraha going to be resumed?" He said he had two answers to the question: "One is that Satyagraha has not at all ceased. As long as we practice truth, and ask others to do so, so long satyagraha can never be said to have ceased." The second answer seemed almost supererogatory and he merely said that "if the Rowlatt legislation is not withdrawn in the meantime, we may resume civil disobedience by the beginning of July next." But July came and there was no indication that Civil Disobedience campaign was going to be resumed. On the



contrary on July 21 he wrote a letter to the Press saying, "The Government of India have given me, through His Excellency the Governor of Bombay, grave warning that resumption of Civil Disobedience is likely to be attended with serious consequences to the public security. This warning has been reinforced by His Excellency the Governor himself at interviews to which I was summoned. In response to this warning and to the urgent desire publicly expressed by Dewan Bahadur Govinda Raghava Iyer, Sir Narayan Chandavarkar and several editors, I have, after deep consideration, decided not to resume Civil Resistance for the time being."

On the face of it, this scarcely added up to a cogent and convincing argument for not resuming the Satyagraha campaign over the Rowlatt Act. After all, before he had launched the campaign there had been no dearth of warnings from the Government as well as well-meaning moderate politicians, including some for whom Gandhi had the highest regard, about the threat to public security and peace which civil disobedience might pose. It is true, no doubt, that after the outbreak of violence in Ahmedabad, Delhi and the Punjab in the first few days of Satyagraha there was need for greater caution and heeding the warnings. But the outbreak of violence had been partly due to the provocative acts of the authorities to which the Viceroy had been a party, among them his "arrest" and orders banning his entry into Delhi and the Punjab. Indeed, he had himself implied as much in his letter to Maffey, Chelmsford's Private Secretary.

What is more, when he had announced the possibility of resuming the Civil Disobedience campaign in the Satyagraha Leaflet No. 12 early in May and indicated that it might be in July, he could not have been unaware of the attendant risks. But in spite of that as late as July 1, he had informed the Bombay Police Commissioner that he would break the orders restraining him within the Bombay Presidency unless the Government gave some intimation of change in its stand on the Rowlatt legislation. It is hardly to be wondered that many satyagrahis could not understand why he had changed his mind and some two hundred of them met him in Bombay on July 26 and questioned him about his decision to abandon the idea of a second

Civil Disobedience campaign and were by no means wholly convinced by the explanations he gave them.

However, puzzling though it was, the retreat from the Civil Disobedience campaign could at least be justified on tactical and pragmatic grounds. What was even more puzzling was Gandhi's position—or lack of it—on the atrocities that had been committed in the Punjab. He was perfectly willing almost from the word go to take up individual cases of those who, he felt, had been convicted and sentenced wrongly. He had begun to campaign against the sentence of two years' rigorous imprisonment passed under section 124A of the Indian Penal Code, which covers sedition, by the Martial Law Commission on Kalinath Roy, Editor of the *Tribune*, both through the two new papers he had acquired—*Young India* and *Navajivan* [New Life]—and also by organising petitions and memorials to the Viceroy and himself pleading with the authorities to have the sentence set aside or reduced, in which he was eventually successful as, indeed, the case of the Editor of *Pratap*, an Urdu daily of Lahore, Radha Krishna.

Towards the end of July, he was obviously upset by judgements given by the Martial Law Tribunals at Lahore and Amritsar involving some of the leading political figures in the Punjab—Harkishen Lal, Dunichand, Chaudhry Rambhuj Dutt (all lawyers) and Dr. Kitchlew (also a Barrister) and Dr. Satyapal (a medical practitioner) of Amritsar, not to mention less well known persons, like Allah Din, Mota Singh and Jagannath. They were charged under Section 121 and 121A of the Indian Penal Code which concerned the waging of war or attempting to wage war "against the Queen". All of them had been sentenced to transportation for life and forfeiture of property. He felt so strongly about the sentences that he actually published the judgement given by the Martial Law Tribunal at Lahore, running to 27 foolscap pages, in the columns of *Young India* so that readers could read it and judge for themselves that the men had been wrongly sentenced and the judgement was politically biased.

This made it even more surprising that while even Srinivasa Sastri had no hesitation in describing some of the things done under the Martial Law as "barbarous", Gandhi refused to comment, on the ground, as Judith Brown remarks rightly, "that he

had inadequate evidence." Indeed, he seemed almost to take some pride in refraining to say anything about the happenings in the Punjab. As he wrote to Maffey on May 16, "I have said not a word about the events in the Punjab, not because I have up to now not thought or felt over them, but because I have not known what to believe and what not to believe." It could be that his restraint in this matter was actuated by the hope that the Government would be more willing to concede his pleas on specific cases of flagrant miscarriage of justice.

If so, it was a delusive notion. The Government, especially Chelmsford and the Governor of Bombay, George Lloyd, while determined to deal firmly with him if he became too obstreperous, saw some advantage in keeping him in good humour if it could be done by small gestures of seemingly sincere courtesy towards him. This is clear from a letter Maffey wrote to him on May 7, 1919, after the outbreak of hostilities with Afghanistan:

The Afghan news will surprise you. Excited by grossly exaggerated stories of disorders in India, the hot-headed, inexperienced Amanullah has decided that 'the Afghan sword shall shine in India'. It is a new complication. Militarily it is not a serious proposition for us and we are doing our best to act with all restraint towards this young man in his midsummer madness. . . . Can we look to you for help? I believe you could be of immense assistance in stabilizing Indian opinion. I am writing this of my own initiative though I shall show it to the Viceroy. . . .

This was not the first time Maffey had written to Gandhi on his "own initiative" but shown what he had written, to Chelmsford—an excellent way of conveying the approval of his chief without involving him in any responsibility. Anyhow Gandhi at this stage was always more than willing to help the Government in awkward situation. "I had before the receipt of your letter," he replied to Maffey, "already begun to move in my own way in the direction of securing a peaceful atmosphere within our own border. . . . I need hardly assure you that the whole of my weight will be thrown absolutely on the side of

preserving internal peace." But he pointed out, rather ingenuously, "But my weight will be absolutely nothing if I receive no support from the Government. The support I need is a satisfactory declaration on the Mahomedan question and withdrawal of the Rowlatt legislation. If it is possible to give this support, I feel that you could have without a shadow of a doubt a contented India. I hope, I do not irritate by mentioning these two matters."

But the Viceroy was not interested in having a contented India at that price. It was Chelmsford, as we know, who had insisted on an unwilling Secretary of State for India giving the all clear to the Rowlatt legislation. As for Afghanistan, the trouble proved to be a passing cloud and the British were able to claim a military victory though, as *India* was to comment (the comment was written by Horniman), it was young Amanullah who was to claim that he had won the political laurels. In return for waiving his claim to the subsidies that the British paid him, out of Indian revenue, to keep the tribals in order, he asserted his right to be his own master in Afghanistan's foreign relations—a right which he was soon to exercise by signing a treaty with the young Soviet State and setting about modernizing his kingdom, much to the chagrin and annoyance of the British Government which had its revenge on him by encouraging a tribal revolt against him leading to his downfall some years later.

Altogether Gandhi's silence over the enormities which had been committed in the Punjab, whatever its logic or rationale deriving from his ethics of satyagraha, could not but baffle and even pain those who had been at the receiving end of the Martial Law dispensation. His excess of caution in making up his mind over the responsibility for the Punjab tragedy was reflected in his somewhat eccentric reaction to Tagore's letter to the Viceroy asking to be relieved of his knighthood. Before launching the Satyagraha Campaign he had been very keen to get the Poet's blessing for it, but that, as we know, had not been forthcoming; and one must assume that somewhere deep down in his heart Gandhi had felt a sense of disappointment, though he never admitted it—not even to himself. One might have expected him to welcome Tagore's gesture. But not so. Of course, he published the text of the letter in *Young India* of

June 7. But the only comment he made on it of which there is record is in his letter to Srinivasa Sastri written a day earlier. "The Punjab horrors," he wrote "have produced a burning letter from the Poet. I personally think it is premature. But he cannot be blamed for it." It must have been Tagore's turn to be disappointed, though, again, there is nothing to suggest that he ever voiced it.

Other examples of Gandhi Laodiceanism over the Punjab happenings during the summer months of 1919 can be recalled. But that is not the point. The point is that in accepting Gandhi's leadership—and he was the only leader who was to effect the transition from the politics of submission to the politics of active resistance—the people of India had to accept his apparent eccentricities and learn to live with them as eventually they did. It was part of his strange way of functioning that while he was withholding comment on "the Punjab horrors", he was trying to persuade the Governor of Bombay, Chelmsford and, it seems, even Montagu to take the Swadeshi vows. What they really made of it is anybody's guess.

However, there is a time for everything and the moment of truth on what had happened in the Punjab under the Martial Law came in the autumn of 1919, though it was not till December that the veil was lifted for the British public, or at least that part of it which had attention to spare for the affairs of the Jewel in the Crown, to see what had been done in their name. On September 3, 1919, the Viceroy announced that a Commission was being appointed to go into the question of the Punjab troubles. The announcement did not evoke much enthusiasm either among the Indian members of the Imperial Legislative Council where it was made or the country at large. Indian opinion, moderate or otherwise, had wanted either a Parliamentary Committee or a Royal Commission to enquire into the events in the Punjab and elsewhere. But the Hunter Committee was the creation of the Indian Government which was a party in the litigation. Indian leaders, whether moderates or "Extremists", wanted nobody connected with the Indian administration to sit on the investigating body. The names announced by the Viceroy included W.F. Rice, Additional Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department, as well as Sir George Barrow, Officer Commanding the Peshawar Division. Thus both the

Department of the Administration directly connected with authorising the imposition of Martial Law and the Army which implemented it would be acting as judges in a case in which they were also the party on trial. To make security doubly secure, an Indemnity Bill was rushed through before the Committee of enquiry began its investigation. The composition of the Committee further made certain that it should divide on racial lines. It had five European members and three Indian. This was also to ensure that it should be largely a whitewashing as well as a toothless body.

The only Indian leader willing to give it the benefit of the doubt was the Mahatma. But even his indulgence seemed to be exhausted when he and the Congress President, Madan Mohan Malaviya, pleaded in vain with the Lt. Governor of the Punjab—Edward Maclagan had replaced O'Dwyer at the end of May, despite the O'Dwyer lobby's desperate attempt to have his term extended—to allow at least some of the Punjab leaders who had been sentenced to heavy terms of imprisonment to attend and sit in the Committee room "even as prisoners under custody to assist and instruct Counsel in the same manner as the Government Counsel was instructed by the officials whose conduct was under investigation of the Disorders Inquiry Committee." A similar request to the chairman of the Committee, Lord Hunter, by Madan Mohan Malaviya was also turned down. He, therefore, agreed that the Sub-Committee of the Congress set up at the A.I.C.C. meeting at Allahabad to which he had been co-opted should itself appoint a Committee to conduct its own investigation into the Punjab disorders and submit a Report. It was probably the first time that the Congress had taken it upon itself to carry out a parallel investigation on a matter of public importance having failed to get any satisfaction from the Government.

However, for all its transparent limitations and packed though it was with men whom the Government considered safe and reliable enough to turn out an anodyne Report at the end of the day, the proceedings of the Hunter Committee developed a curious logic and momentum of their own as Gandhi had perhaps intuitively guessed they might. Enough dirty—indeed blood-soaked—linen was to come out in the wash and exposed

to the public view as to prove highly damaging to the Raj and its self-esteem. The shock of recognition of its Caliban image was all the greater because of what looked like a systematic conspiracy of concealment in which both Delhi and Whitehall were involved in almost equal degree. *India* may have been exaggerating when it wrote on December 19:

Great Britain has never been so stunned about the condition of India since the days of the Mutiny as she has been this week. At last the veil of official and parliamentary evasions has been rent and ghastly details of the massacres of reprisals are coming to the light of the day. It is difficult to find a parallel for it in history unless it be the massacres of St. Bartholomew or of Glencoe with which it will take a sinister place in history.

It was all the same an exaggeration close enough to truth to be permissible.

Surprisingly, even after incriminating evidence began to come out at the public hearings by the Hunter Committee—and all but three of the witnesses were heard in public, the three exceptions being Michael O'Dwyer, the Lt. Governor of the Punjab at the relevant time, General Havelock Hudson, the Adjutant-General of the Indian Army, and an ultra loyalist of the Raj Umar Hayat Khan Tiwana, whose evidence was given *in camera*—there was a naive attempt to soften the impact by doctoring the reports of the evidence heard by the Hunter Committee, especially those meant for foreign consumption. This explains why it took nearly six weeks even after the Committee had begun its work for the shattering facts to become public property in Britain—and that, too, only because one British newspaper, incredibly, the *Daily Express*, was able to publish more or less verbatim the evidence given by the man whose name came to be associated directly with the responsibility for the Jallianwalla Bagh massacre—Brigadier-General R.E.H. Dyer.

The responsibility, of course, was very widely shared though Dyer's was the word of command which within ten minutes did to death—a phrase which he is reported to have used in his evidence though his admiring biographers claim that he denied having ever descended to such "*babu* English"—at a conservative

estimate 379 persons and left another 1200 wounded, on the field of carnage, young and old, men and women and children alike, to fend for themselves. But reconstruction of what happened in the Punjab and why during the first fine frenzy of the Martial Law rule does not come within the scope of this work. In any case, a considerable body of literature of various kinds—academic, journalistic and apologetic—written both by Indians and the British on the subject already exists even though much of it leaves one with a sense of frustration because it fails singularly to evoke the human tragedy buried under the administrative technicalities and statistical data. But then to do that any writer on the theme would have to possess something of the imaginative and narrative reach of a Tolstoy and the psychological insights of a Dostoevsky which is a very tall order.

For our present purpose it suffices to say that a rare, almost lethal conjuncture and combination of the psychopathologies of individuals in power at the various levels and the built-in conceits and callosities of the system of government not only produced the catastrophe but magnified it. The Punjab was one of the last regions of India to be annexed by the British. It was, moreover, seen as a sensitive border region which had to be specially guarded. The system of "bureaucratic despotism" in other parts of India may have got mellowed in the course of time. But not so in the Punjab. No liberal impulse was ever allowed to taint the so-called Punjab tradition of paternalistic rule. Kipling, who did his journalistic stint in Lahore on the *Civil and Military Gazette*, was the literary hero of the Punjab Commission and his conception of the "native" as "half devil and half child" was believed implicitly by the British officials of the Punjab cadre, with but rare exceptions. In the early months of 1919 they were convinced "the devil" was about to run loose, thanks to the molly-coddling policies of liberal politicians at home, headed by that "crooked Jew", Edwin Montagu. The devil had to be exorcised and the Martial Law regime offered an excellent opportunity for doing so.

The misfortune of the Punjab was compounded by the fortuitous presence in key positions—from the top downwards—of men who verged on being psychiatric cases. It was not just that O'Dwyer was "a pugnacious Ulsterman", as Montagu described him, though that explained something, but a man who had never



entertained a generous thought about India and had contempt for the educated classes because they dared ask for democratic rights and institutions. As he told Montagu when he appeared before the Joint Select Committee of the two Houses of Parliament on October 7, he wanted "autocracy, pure and simple" and "accepted the August 20, 1917, statement only as a Government servant." Indeed, it would not be difficult to marshal incontrovertible evidence to prove that he and others of his kidney had made up their minds to seize any opportunity that came their way, or create one, to sabotage the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms trivial though they were. But at this distance in time that is hardly worth the effort.

The team that he had working under him could not have been improved upon if the intention was to set the Punjab aflame. There was, for instance, Lt. Col. Frank Johnson, D.S.O., who was put in charge of the Martial Law administration in Lahore where, as the official report embodied in the White Paper presented to Parliament in Britain acknowledged, the turning of the screw was "more intensive" than elsewhere. He had some experience to help him do this. He had worked for some years in South Africa—in the protectorate of Bechuanaland to be exact—and applied Martial Law among the Africans, sjambok *et al.* As he proudly told the Hunter Committee, he had "been longing for an opportunity to show the people of the Punjab the might of Martial Law." And he did. Even his entry into the city was characteristic of him, "at the head of a column of troops, with aeroplanes preceding it at low altitudes with orders to drop bombs on the unarmed civilian population the moment signal was given by the firing of the troops." But as it happened "no targets in the shape of meetings or crowds presented themselves."

But at Gujranwala Col. O'Brien who was the Martial Law authority made good use of the aeroplanes which O'Dwyer had thoughtfully despatched as soon as he heard of troubles there. Major Carberry of the RAF, who was in charge of the operation, however, dropped bombs not on any rioters at Gujranwala. He did so over a village outside the town on a large party of people "believing" as the official report helpfully put it, that they were "rioters going or coming from the city." Not content with dropping two bombs, he opened up at them with the

machine-gun, firing 255 rounds as they were fleeing. He was flying at a height of about 200 feet so that quite a few of the machine-gun bullets must have struck home. He added to the day's good deeds by dropping two bombs on another village, though, it seems, only one of them exploded.

Ingenious forms of punishment were designed and inflicted on the innocent and the guilty alike with exemplary impartiality. The man who dispensed Martial Law in the three districts of Gujarat, Gujranwala and Lyallpur issued an order "compelling schoolboys to parade three times a day to salute the flag. The order applied to the infant classes and children of five and six years of age were included." In some cases this drill included a curious exercise in perverted *Couéism*. The children were asked to repent even for sins they had not committed. They were made to repent, "*I have committed no offence. I will not commit any offence. I repent, I repent, I repent.*" Little wonder that a certain Bosworth-Smith, a civilian officer in command, at Sheikhpura, thought that what was sauce for children in ethical conditioning should be sauce for grown-ups, too. He admitted in his evidence that he had suggested that "a House of Repentence" should be erected at Sangla (Hill). And doubtless it would have been erected if Martial Law had lasted long enough.

Even without the sadism released by the Martial Law, the Punjab administration prided itself on its toughness. Michael O'Dwyer had boasted that his fief had provided more than a third of the recruits during the war. He did not go into the amiable techniques of recruitment. Undoubtedly, many young Punjabis had gone into the armed forces under economic compulsions. Others were lured into military service by contractors in cannon-fodder who were duly rewarded for services rendered with grants of land and titles. But towards the close of the war methods indistinguishable from those of the press-gangs were used.

Martial Law had freed the administrators from any lingering inhibitions dictated by the human heart. This was not only revealed by the enormities committed in moments of panic, but in the generally cool and thoughtless reflexive brutality of response. Thus J.E. Keough, an Extra Assistant Commissioner, who had been free with orders of flogging in public, when asked by the Hunter Committee whether he had ascertained from

those whom he had sentenced to whipping if they would prefer, the option of paying fines, replied nonchalantly: "I was not out to see their preferences. I was carrying out my duty."

"Duty", Wordsworth could hardly have imagined what crimes were going to be perpetrated in the name of what he conceived to be "the stern daughter of the voice of God." For the word was readily to spring to the lips of the man who came to epitomize for India, and to some extent the wider world, what Mr. Justice Rankin, who served on the Hunter Committee, was, politely and almost apologetically, to suggest might be called "frightfulness"—Brigadier-General R.E.H. Dyer, or Rex as he was known to his intimates. In his day and season, and for some years after his death in the summer of 1927, Dyer was at the centre of an acute political controversy which divided British opinion. Liberal Britain saw in him and his deeds the embodiment of that "Prussianism" which the First World War was supposed to have been fought to extirpate once for all. This, *New Statesman* pointed out was too facile an alibi and salve for the liberal conscience. It wrote in mid-December 1919 when eight months after the event its full horror became known in Britain:

Everybody, it appears, is inexpressibly shocked by the story of the Amritsar Massacre. To treat the incident as a unique outrage due to the accidental presence on the spot, and in temporarily superior authority, of a peculiarly brutal type of soldier, is to overlook its real significance. But what General Dyer did is probably no more than what nine officers out of ten would have done under the circumstances, provided they had his courage.

We have set out the facts in this manner not in order to defend General Dyer's action or minimize the horror of the massacre, but rather as a protest against the idea that the British public can escape its responsibility in the matter by denouncing the particular officer as cruel and demanding his punishment. Fundamentally, the Amritsar Massacre was the necessary corollary of the condition of British rule in India. If General Dyer had not been there to fire upon the crowd, some other soldier would have done it. Another man might have been content to kill fewer people and might

have concerned himself with the subsequent care of the wounded, but almost certainly in the circumstances he would have shot and shot to kill. The truth which cannot and must not be ignored or evaded, is that we hold India by the sword and rule her by fear. Having admitted it—inevitably—as the foundation of our rule in India we cannot evade responsibility for the consequences by making scapegoat of General Dyer....

Not that every body in Britain was happy over making Dyer the scapegoat. On the contrary, the Right generally not merely its lunatic fringe, lionized Dyer and saw in him the "saviour" not just of the Punjab, but the "Empire" in India. It raised twenty-six thousand pounds, quite a fortune at the time, by public subscription to compensate him for having been wrongly hounded out of the army prematurely and as token of appreciation of his good work. Nor has he lacked literary admirers and apologists among whom is to be found so unlikely a person as Edward Thompson, Tagore's friend and biographer, who in his *A Letter from India* worked hard to cast around and discover some extenuating reason or circumstance for his act. This is understandable.

What is less understandable is that no Indian, to the best of the present writer's knowledge, has taken the trouble to study in any depth the man who was able to mow down hundreds of unarmed men, women and even children within a few minutes and issued the infamous "crawling order" to anybody entering a' lane—Kucha Kaurianwala—in Amritsar where a Miss Marcella Sherwood, the Superintendent of the City Mission School, had been brutally attacked by a "mob" two days before Dyer took over from the civilian authorities. Not that he personified evil in the humankind on a grand scale. Even Ian Colvin in his biography of the man could not quite succeed in blowing him up and his deeds to heroic proportions. Indeed, the terrible paradox is that but for this one episode in his career, Dyer would hardly have merited a footnote in small print in the history of India though no doubt he would have been remembered in the catalogue of the British Library by his solitary literary effort—

*The Raiders of the Sarhad.* But, unhappily, utterly banal, footling and even pathetic individuals can inflict, or be instrumental in inflicting suffering beyond all measures on other human beings as Dyer was able to during the few days in April 1919 when he was lord and master of Amritsar and its environs.

It has been suggested by way of an explanation and almost an excuse of "his action at the Jallianwala Bagh, and the conflicting reasons he gave for it"—actually they were not conflicting at all but of a piece with his character—that he was already suffering from "arterial sclerosis" and Rupert Furneaux in his *Massacre at Amritsar* invokes the case of *R. v. Kemp*, where Mr. Justice Devlin (now Lord Devlin) in 1957 ruled that the M'Naughton Rules of diminished responsibility due to insanity applied to a man who suffered from arteriosclerosis. The M'Naughton Rules probably did apply to Dyer, not so much because of his medical history, as his psychological history and multiple layers of an inferiority complex which in moments of stress reached a paranoid intensity.

Born and bred in India, youngest of the five sons in a large family of nine children, Dyer could not quite claim the *pukka* sahib background. His father, Edward, was in the brewery business and had "prospered catering for the raging thirsts of Hindustan" or at least of the British establishment. He was also, we learn, "a second generation Anglo Indian," in the old sense of the term which did not necessarily imply a mixed or mixed-up genealogy. Nor did Reginald Dyer enjoy the benefit, if a benefit it was, of education in one of the public schools in England. This deficit rankled with him. For he felt that despite his capacity for hard work—a few months before the Indian National Congress was founded he had passed out of Sandhurst with "proficiency in Military Law and Tactics"—and his aptitude for learning Indian languages, he had made only slow progress up the military ladder when with the right social connections and help of the Old School Tie network he could have gone much further, much faster as he believed he deserved to. After all, he had been a contemporary of Douglas Haig and Allenby at the Staff College at Camberley and did not regard himself as inferior to them in any way. Rather the reverse.

There was another psychological problem with him. In his boyhood he suffered from an impediment in his speech.

This, apparently, caused "a mild amusement" among the Irish when, together with one of his brothers, he was sent to school at Middleton, County Cork, in Southern Ireland. Dyer was not amused. He was determined to overcome the impediment. "He spent long hours alone in the woods," writes Arthur Swinson in his *Six Minutes To Sunset*, "doing special exercises" until no trace of the stutter remained. But his horror of being laughed at was not so easy to get rid of. It remained with him and it is not fanciful to suggest played some part in the decision he took on that fateful afternoon of April 13 when he marched his mixed force to the Jallianwala Bagh, positioned them at the only possible entrance to and exit from the site, and without warning or ordering the crowd to disperse, commanded the soldiers to open fire on the meeting and go on shooting till their ammunition was virtually exhausted.

This is abundantly clear from the evidence he was to give before the Hunter Committee with a certain air of braggadocio. Questioned by Lord Hunter himself whether he had any reason "to suppose that if you had ordered the assembly to leave the Bagh, they would not have done so without the necessity of your firing, continued firing for a length of time," his answer was quite simple and straightforward. "Yes;" he said, "I think it quite possible that I could have dispersed them even without firing." Lord Hunter persisted and asked him why he had not adopted that course. Dyer replied, "I could not disperse them for some time." But evidently economy in time was not his only or even main concern. For he went on to add: "Then they would all come back and *laugh at me* [our emphasis], and I considered I would be making myself a fool."

That he could not bear. It had been bad enough to have been a figure of fun to the locals in Middleton, County Cork, who looked upon the young Dyer and his brother as "the Wild Indians." But to be laughed at when dressed up in the full uniform of a Brigadier-General and in the presence of the men he commanded and who looked up to him, was clearly a fate worse than death. In any case, he did not take much time to decide which option to take. As he told the Hunter Committee, "I had made up my mind that I would do all men to death if they were going to continue the meeting"—a remark, writes Rupert Furneaux in *Massacre at Amritsar*, "that so astonished

General Sir George Barrow, a member of the Committee, that it remained in his memory and he recalled it in his *Life of General Sir Charles Monro*, 1931."

To be fair to Dyer, he was not responsible for creating the situation which he was called upon to handle and which, it could have been predicted, he was temperamentally likely to turn into a tragic catastrophe. It was the "men on the spot" who had created an avoidable mess, not least the head of the civilian authority in the district. Miles Irving, the Deputy Commissioner of Amritsar, Miles Irving was one of those know-alls in which the Covenanted Service abounded who believed he knew everything there was to know about India and Indians. Everything had been peaceful in the city; not only the *hartal* on March 30, had been peaceful, but even the one on April 6 had passed off without any incident. Indeed, as late as April 9, the Hindu festival of *Ram Naumi*, nothing untoward had happened though Miles Irving and others read very sinister meaning into the extraordinary scenes of fraternization between Hindus and Muslims which had been reported to them by their army of informers and which Irving had witnessed himself while watching "the procession unguarded from the verandah of the Allahabad Bank." He was even surprised that "every car in the procession stopped in front of him and the accompanying band played *God Save the King*." Hardly, a gesture of defiance and rebellion even though it has been suggested that the intention of the bands playing the British national anthem might have been subtle mockery which is rather unlikely.

Not only was Amritsar calm up to April 9, but most of the Punjab was at peace, despite the provocative display of police and military muscle by the administration. But this did not suit the authorities. It was on the basis of a report which Miles Irving had sent to Lahore that the Provincial Government not only agreed to send more troops to Amritsar, but gave him the all clear for the act which lit the fuse—namely, the deportation of two highly esteemed and popular public figures in the city, Dr. Satyapal and Dr. Saif-ud-Din Kitchlew. They had already been muzzled one after the other and ordered not to address any public meeting. But they did not have to speak in public to exercise control over the population and keep it peaceful.

Miles Irving, however, was persuaded they were both dangerous men, "local agents of very much bigger men." In particular, he considered Kitchlew to be a very sinister man and deep in the conspiracy to overthrow the Raj. One of the reasons for this notion was that Kitchlew had studied in Germany and had a degree from the University of Munster, though as a know-all Irving should have known that another alumnus of an even more famous German university, Munich, Mohammed Iqbal, still a *persona grata* with the Government and soon to be knighted, had been asked by the Lieutenant-Governor, Michael O'Dwyer, to write an ode to the Allied victory and had obliged.

Order had already been issued to deport the two men who could have kept the peace in Amritsar. Not only to deport Dr. Kitchlew and Dr. Satyapal, but to carry out the operation in a cloak and dagger manner so as to provoke the population and allow the wildest rumours to circulate. At a conference at his bungalow on the evening of April 9 attended by all the British officials—no Indians could be trusted—it was decided by Irving to "invite" Drs. Satyapal and Kitchlew to the Deputy Commissioner's bungalow next morning at ten, arrest them, and drive them away to their place of deportation—Dharmasala in Kangra district, then part of the Punjab but now in Himachal Pradesh. Whether the two men had any inkling of what Miles Irving had in store for them must be a matter for conjecture. Probably they had none. For, strangely enough, a belief had grown up in India that the British officials, whatever other vices or defects they had, were all gentlemen and did not resort to dirty tricks. At any rate, both Dr. Satyapal and Dr. Kitchlew duly presented themselves at the Deputy Commissioner's residence around 10 a.m., accompanied by some of their friends and co-workers.

They had to wait in a tent in the compound of the bungalow before being called in. Apart from Miles Irving, there were two other British officials in the room into which they were taken—Rehill, the Superintendent of Police, and Beckett, the Assistant Commissioner. They were immediately served with the orders issued by the Government under the Defence of India Act. The invitation had been an invitation to arrest and deportation. They were taken out by the back entrance, put in separate motor cars, and driven off "at high speed" to their place



of deportation, a military escort being provided part of the way. The friends and supporters who had come with them were allowed to return to the city, but only about an hour later "to give the cortege a good start" as Rupert Furneaux tells us.

The news of the arrest and deportation to some secret place spread through the city like the proverbial bush fire. Shops closed; all business ceased; and a large crowd gathered in Hall Bazar, at the time the main shopping centre, and began to move towards the so-called Civil Lines. To do that they had to go over the Hall Gate Bridge over the railway line. There they faced mounted soldiers, only a few, but they were backed by some British infantry men armed with rifles who had placed themselves on the ironwork of the bridge. There are conflicting versions of what followed this confrontation. The crowd wanted to see the Deputy Commissioner and ask him where the arrested leaders were and urge their release. This is what a reliable witness, Dr. Mohammed Abdullah Fauq, said in his evidence, adding that the people wanted to tell Irving that if he would not release Drs. Satyapal and Kitchlew, he should "take them to the same place".

This is a perfectly credible account. For at this stage the crowd though excited and protesting was not in a homicidal mood. For instance, it had seen a certain Jarman, the European Municipal Commissioner, while moving towards the bridge but had not molested him. It is at least a tenable hypothesis that had the crowd been allowed to go to the Deputy Commissioner's house or office to make its protests, or alternatively if the authorities had allowed a representative deputation from the people to go instead and voice the general sense of outrage at the deportation of two highly respected citizens of Amritsar the whole sequence of bloody events that followed, not in Amritsar alone but in many parts of the Punjab, especially in its sensitive Lahore division, might have been avoided. One cannot prove this; nor can one disprove it. But we do know to what the alternative course that was pursued led.

The authorities, especially the British officials, seem to have been in something of a panic. Certainly, they did not display that *sang froid* which is traditionally associated with them. On the Hall Gate bridge, according to all accounts, the confusion was incredible with some of the officers in charge galloping away

in all directions and shouting for reinforcements to be sent. Indeed, it is not very clear if there was any explicit order given to fire at the crowd. According to Rupert Furneaux:

Mr. F.A. Connor, an Extra Assistant Commissioner, reached the scene of the disturbance soon after 1 p.m., encountering a mounted picket which was trotting back from the bridge at a very fast pace, being stoned by a large and very dense crowd. Its commander, Lieutenant Dickie, seeing Connor, called out, "For God's sake send some reinforcements." Realising that Dickie and his men were in very serious peril, Connor called out that it was up to him to fire on the mob as it was his duty to protect the Civil Lines. Dickie, who said he was glad to have the order, dismounted two of his men who, taking cover behind some culverts, fired five or six shots which brought the crowd to a dead standstill.

The firing did not just bring the crowd to a dead standstill. It also wounded several people and killed some. It was all very well for the Hunter Committee to rule that the firing was completely justified. But the first act of violence came, not from the crowd, but from the side of the British soldiers and the forces of law and order. All the acts of violence that followed that afternoon—the killing of the manager and the Assistant Manager of the National Bank, Stewart and Scott, and that of the Manager of the Alliance Bank, the ransacking of the banks and burning and looting—were the acts of a crowd whose cup of anger was already full and overflowed when it saw several of those taking part in the protest demonstration fall to the bullets.

While the cauldron was beginning to bubble over, thanks largely to the fire lit under it by the "men on the spot", Dyer was not on the scene. He was fifty odd miles away from Amritsar—at Jalandhar cantonment. The first inkling he had of something brewing at Amritsar was not until four in the afternoon of April 10 when he received a coded message that "troops, guns and an aeroplane were needed urgently" there. An hour or so later this was confirmed when the Divisional Commander, General Sir William Beynon, asked him to send "a hundred

*British* and a hundred *Muslim* [our emphasis] troops to Amritsar". He complied by adding for good measure another hundred Indian troops to the number requested by the Divisional Commander in Lahore. "The relief force," Rupert Furneaux tells us, "consisting of a hundred British soldiers of the 1-25th London Regiment and two hundred Indians... left Jalandhar in a special train at 1 a.m." The train must have crawled. For it did not reach Amritsar, a little over fifty miles away, till 5 a.m. on the 11th. At two in the afternoon he was ordered by General Beynon to go himself to Amritsar. This he did, leaving Jalandhar around six in the evening, but not without making arrangements for the protection of his family and telling his son Capt. Dyer, who was also posted in Jalandhar, "There is a big show coming." This was to prove prophetic.

It took Dyer three hours to reach Amritsar by road. The day had been peaceful though tense in the city. The dead in the previous day's firing had been buried and cremated in the afternoon and there was much resentment that, because of the prohibitory orders, only small groups were allowed to follow the bodies to "the burial and burning grounds." He found the Deputy Commissioner, ostensibly still in charge, at the end of his tether. There was still no Martial Law. Indeed, it was not proclaimed till three days later—on April 14. But Miles Irving is said to have told Dyer that things were beyond "civil control" and that he "should take matters in hand." Dyer interpreted this as meaning there was "*ipso facto* Martial Law" and he had no need to consult "the civil authority of the district."

He quite relished the situation. As his biographer Ian Colvin nicely puts it, "To await events was not the General's way". He wanted to get at the rebels at once. But how? For, when after midnight, he marched at the head of a small force to the Kotwali, or the Police station, around which some of the ghastly scenes of arson, looting and killing had been enacted on the afternoon of April 10, he encountered no hostile "mob". The streets were deserted and all was quiet though, it appears, "fires were still burning in several looted buildings." The next day was also without any incident. Indeed, an aircraft sent on a reconnaissance mission from Lahore thirty-two miles away reported no sign of any disturbance, much less preparations for

a rebellion. Dyer was able to spend the day doing his military sums, counting the forces he could muster, making arrangements for them to be deployed to advantage, and playing his little war games in his head and on the ground.

Thus Dyer, presumably to impress and intimidate the populace, marched through the city with 125 British troops and 310 Indian soldiers and two armoured cars. "Finding insolent crowds, who shouted slogans and spat on the ground," Rupert Furneaux has it, "assembled at the Sultanwind Gate," he dispersed them with some difficulty. On his own evidence before the Hunter Committee, he had "considered the advisability of opening fire." But he thought better of it because he had not yet made any proclamation personally forbidding public assemblies. Perhaps, he also thought the locale unsuitable for making an effective demonstration of his military muscle.

The proclamation was duly issued through the police that "the inhabitants of Amritsar are hereby warned that if they will cause damage to any property or will commit any acts of violence in the environments of Amritsar, it will be taken for granted that such acts have been committed in Amritsar City itself and the offenders will be punished according to military law. All meetings and gatherings are hereby prohibited and will be dispersed at once under military law." The next day, Sunday, April 13, which also began peacefully enough, two separate proclamations were read out in due and proper form. The first was largely a repetition of the previous day's fiat. The second was, however, more drastic. It prohibited any inhabitant of Amritsar to leave the city without previously obtaining a pass from the authorities; it imposed a curfew from 8 p.m.; and it warned that any procession or gathering "in any part of the city or at any place outside the city...will be considered illegal, and will be dealt with accordingly, and, if necessary, will be dispersed by means of arms."

Dyer staged a march through Amritsar in which he himself took part, accompanied by the Deputy Commissioner and the Superintendent of Police, and led "by Inspector [of Police] Ashraf Khan, riding a white horse, who was followed by a bamboo cart in which sat the drummer and Malik Fateh Khan" whom Miles Irving described as "a sort of unofficial public orator, a man who had great natural charm of oratory, much in

demand on ceremonial occasions." Certainly it was a "ceremonial occasion," or rather, prelude to one. At nineteen different places in the city the proclamation, or rather its translation in Urdu, was read out by the "unofficial public orator" at the beat of the drum and its gist explained in Punjabi. It must have been an impressive sight, reminiscent of the Middle Ages.

At the Hunter Committee hearings officials, including Dyer, were asked whether this ceremonial reading out of the proclamation was enough to alert a population of over 150,000 to the danger they ran in attending any public meeting, especially as it being the day of the harvest festival *Baisakhi Day*—many people from the countryside around, probably unaware of what was happening in Amritsar, were likely to come to the city. But the argument is irrelevant and trivial. The fact is that the politically aroused section of the public in Amritsar was as determined to hold a meeting of protest as General Dyer was to teach them—and the rest of the Punjab—a lesson as he made abundantly clear in his evidence.

After the ceremonials connected with the proclamation were over, Dyer waited with some impatience. "He could not remain on the defensive," his biographer Ian Colvin tells us. At four in the afternoon he learnt that the meeting was definitely on and at the inquiry he was asked why he made no attempt to prevent people from gathering for the meeting at Jallianwala Bagh. His answer was that he had other matters to attend to and think of. But his biographer has another explanation, though it may be doubted whether Dyer thought of the "Cromwell at Dunbar" parallel:

But this unexpected gift of fortune, this un hoped for defiance, this concentration of the rebels in an open space—it gave him such an opportunity as he could not have devised. It separated the guilty from the innocent [sic] it placed them where he would have wished them to be within reach of his sword. The enemy had committed such another mistake as prompted Cromwell to explain at Dunbar, 'the Lord hath delivered them into my hands'.

So having left "a strong guard at his headquarters", he set out with 200 men—a hundred of whom he stationed as pickets

along the route—for the Jallianwala Bagh though the name "Bagh", meaning garden, was at the time largely a courtesy title for what was just open space with only a few trees to provide shade or cover, surrounded by houses and a brick wall about five feet high in between the houses, and a well situated on the left of the main and, indeed, almost the only negotiable entrance and exit. Dyer was not taking any chances and took two armoured cars with him. In one of them he rode himself with his staff-major Briggs. The other carried Rehill, the Superintendent of Police, and his understudy, Plomer, presumably representing the civilian authority since there was as yet no *de jure* Martial Law. The Deputy Commissioner or a "First Class" magistrate should have accompanied the Military. But Miles Irving, as he told the Hunter Committee, had "excused himself" and gone to the Fort instead which he "regretted" as he had "no idea" of the action that was going to be taken and had assumed that the Military would disperse the meeting with the same "forbearance" as they had done previously.

Unfortunately, however, his assumptions had a way of being often at a variance with reality. He had, for instance, assumed that there would be no meeting at all, having been assured of this by "the better people." But the trouble was that "the better people," or rather those whom the British so regarded, were either themselves out of touch with reality or just told their patrons what they thought would please them. In any case, the decisive factor in the equation was the way Dyer's mind was working and they could not possibly have known how it was working. His "forbearance" the previous days had been dictated by tactical consideration, not humanity. This emerged during his hearing by the Hunter Committee at Lahore on November 19, 1919, and even before. Thus in the despatch which he sent to his Divisional Commander, Beynon, on April 14, he wrote:

I entered the Jallianwala Bagh by a very narrow lane which necessitated my leaving my armoured cars behind.

On entering I saw a dense crowd estimated at about 5,000, a man on a raised platform addressing the audience and making gesticulations with his hands.

I realized my force was small and to hesitate might induce attack. I immediately opened fire and dispersed the crowd. I estimate that between 200 and 300 of the crowd were killed. My party fired 1,650 rounds.

His estimate of fatal casualties was rather modest. The number of killed, according to a very careful and conservative count, was closer to four hundred and those wounded, most of them seriously, exceeded twelve hundred. This was hardly surprising. Dyer had deployed his men inside the Bagh on a high ground close to the entrance—and exit. As he told the Hunter Committee, the nearest man in the crowd at the meeting was not more than nine yards away. He had himself directed the fire and seen to it that the soldiers did not fire over the heads of the crowd. There was no volley firing at all. He wanted his men to fire well and fire to kill. In his youth he had shown keen amateur interest in mathematics—and optics. Indeed, we learn from his biographers that he had actually designed an improved type of range-finder, though he and his men did not need any range-finders to hit their human targets. For they commanded an excellent and uninterrupted field of fire. The people at the meeting could find no cover—except the well. Almost every bullet of the 1650 rounds that were fired homed in and there was no wastage.

However, whether the dead numbered three hundred or four hundred is the kind of number game which is hardly relevant in the ghastly context. By any standard, it was “the Big Show” Dyer expected and almost looked forward to when he left Jalandhar two days earlier. It might have been even a bigger show had he been able to squeeze in his armoured cars through the lane and the entrance into the Jallianwala Bagh. He could then have opened up on the meeting with machine-guns. This is not doing him an injustice. He himself told Lord Hunter and his colleagues that he would “probably” have used them. Even without them, it was not a bad performance. And having done his good deed of the day, he lost no time in marching his men back to the cool shade of the Ram Bagh which was really a garden and not just a more or less desolate enclosed space. He gave no thought to the dead or dying or the wounded. As he said in his evidence, “that was a medical question”, though

he added, wryly, he would have helped "if they had asked for help."

Throughout his hearing by the Hunter Committee he gave not the slightest hint that he felt any regret, much less remorse, at what he had done. Miles Irving told Edward Thompson later that he had no doubt that "Dyer was trailing his coat." That may well be true and a high degree of bravado was consistent with his character. Nor was there any need for him to regret his action or feel any sense of remorse over it even if he had been temperamentally open to such feelings or self-doubt. If he spent any sleepless nights after his Jallianwala Bagh exploit, as he is supposed to have told F.G. Puckle, another member of the Covenanted Service, the insomnia must have been largely cured by the approbation he received from his superiors on the very morrow of his act. On the basis of the report he had received from Dyer, the Divisional Commander, Beynon, decided to send him a message: "Your Action Correct." Indeed, more. Beynon rang up O'Dwyer to ask whether he could add the Lieutenant-Governor's approval. After momentary "hesitation", O'Dwyer agreed to add: "Lieutenant-Governor Approves."

In addition to these messages of approval, came the decision to appoint Dyer the Martial Law administrator when Martial Law was proclaimed in due and proper form for Amritsar and the surrounding areas so that he could continue the good work he had begun. This he did for the next three weeks or more till he was called to the North-West Frontier on May 8—and with relish. It was he who provided the inspiration to other Martial Law administrators, in so far as they needed any inspiration, by setting up triangles in public places to flog people irrespective of whether they had been tried and convicted for any offences. Again, it was he who had the ingenuity to invent the refinement of punishment by issuing an order that anybody entering or leaving the lane where Marcella Sherwood had been assaulted must do so only on all fours—the notorious "Crawling Order" which even O'Dwyer, not exactly a squeamish man, had to ask him to withdraw and which the Majority Report, in a masterly understatement, characterised as "highly improper".

For the next several months Dyer was for the British establishment in India, both civilian and military, the "Hero of the Hour" to quote Rupert Furneaux, who had "saved



Amritsar, the Punjab and all India." If there were any Doubting Thomases among it, they did not stand up and allow themselves to be counted. This could not but reinforce his inflated ego or as Rupert Furneaux rather felicitously puts it, he saw himself occupying "a self-created pedestal which as time went on became to him firmer and loftier. A pedestal like a musical stool, which rose higher and higher as Dyer plunged himself deeper and deeper into the miasma of self-delusion". This self-delusion accounted for his disregard of the advice of some of his friends who knew of his "excitability" and warned him "to be careful in his statements...and not to start talking." Otherwise he might have been less jaunty in relating his version of what happened and how on that Black Sunday in the Jallianwala Bagh before the Hunter Committee at Lahore on November 19, 1919. But, then, he was still fully persuaded, as he was to tell the *Daily Mail* in an interview he gave six months later, that every Englishman and Englishwoman, official or non-official, approved of his act. That this triumphalist mood persisted with him for many months after his famous exploit at Amritsar is confirmed by Jawaharlal Nehru who, entirely by chance, found himself in the same railway compartment as Dyer one night towards the end of 1919. He recounts in his autobiography :

Towards the end of that year (1919) I travelled from Amritsar to Delhi by the night train. The compartment I entered was almost full and all the berths, except one upper one, were occupied by sleeping passengers. I took the vacant upper berth. In the morning I discovered that all my fellow-passengers were military officers. They conversed with each other in loud voices which I could not help overhearing. One of them was holding forth in an aggressive and triumphant tone and soon I discovered that he was Dyer, the hero of Jallianwala Bagh, and he was describing his Amritsar experiences. He pointed out how he had the whole town at his mercy and he had felt like reducing the rebellious city to a heap of ashes, but he took pity on it and refrained. He was evidently coming back from Lahore after giving his evidence before the Hunter Committee of Inquiry. I was greatly shocked to hear his conversation and to observe his callous manner. He descended

at Delhi station in pyjamas with bright pink stripes and a dressing gown.

Rupert Furneaux who quotes the passage in his *Massacre at Amritsar*, remarks that "perhaps Mr. Nehru was a prejudiced observer." Perhaps he was, but there is corroborative evidence that Dyer had bragged about plans to bombard Amritsar and reduce it to rubble. According to the statement made before the Congress Committee of Enquiry by a witness—Dr. Balmukund, Sub-Assistant Surgeon at the Amritsar Civil Hospital—Col. Smith, the Civil Surgeon, who was certainly privy to the talk that went on among the civilian and military top brass at Amritsar as well as to the contingency plans Dyer had worked out, had drawn diagrams and "showed how the city was to be shelled and how it would be razed to the ground in half-an-hour." It may all have been intimidatory braggadocio, but it seems consistent with Dyer's character. Indeed, Col. Smith took it seriously. For when the Sub-Assistant Surgeon ruefully told Col. Smith that he lived in the city and what was to become of him, the latter said to him that the only thing for him to do was to make arrangements for him—and presumably his family—to move out and live in the hospital. The idea of bombarding the city must, therefore, have been talked about at some stage.

### CHAPTER III

## BETWEEN FRIGHTFULNESS AND "REFORMS"

In an interview he gave to *India* in June 1920, Commander Kenworthy, a rather unusual naval person and for a time Labour MP during the inter-war years who distinguished himself by his sympathetic interest in the Congress and our struggle for freedom, argued that General Dyer was being used by the British Government of the day as a convenient "scapegoat" and that, in fact, he was just a "typical soldier" who represented "the opinion of the majority of the officers' messes in India and elsewhere—that the only remedy for dissatisfaction is force." He for his part very much feared that if this attitude persisted "India ...will become Ireland with guerrilla warfare and passive resistance making all government impossible."

That, indeed, might well have been expected. But fortunately for the British nothing remotely like that happened. The Indian reaction to the Jallianwala Bagh massacre and other Martial Law atrocities in the Punjab—the setting up of human cages and concentration camps, the public floggings and other humiliating forms of punishment, the bombing and machine-gunning from the air of villages around Gujranwala, acts of terror and intimidation—was singularly muted. There was no mass uprising or even large-scale and countrywide movement

of protest. It is a sobering and even humbling thought that the impact of the horrifying things done under the Martial Law dispensation, when the news at last reached Britain, on the British liberal opinion would seem to have been greater and more intense than could be discerned among even radical political circles in India.

The Dyers and the O'Dwyers among the British civilian and military establishment in India naturally crowed that by dishing out a bit of what Mr. Justice Rankin, rather diffidently, dubbed as "frightfulness", they had succeeded in bringing the rebellious spirit of the Punjab—and India—quickly to heel. This was a crude simplification and reflected the innate vulgarity of the imperialist mind. But there was an element of truth in it. After all, Tagore in his letter renouncing his knighthood had spoken of his people being "surprised into the dumb anguish of terror." However, the reasons for the relative tameness of response to the Martial Law enormities were more complex.

For one thing, as we know, the draconian censorship of the Press in the days when, such as it was, it was the sole medium of mass communications and there was no other source of news, coupled with the most strict control of movement of persons into or out of the Punjab, had more or less effectively cut it off from the rest of India and practically turned it into a kind of political isolation ward. People in other parts of India, therefore, had only a hazy notion of the agony through which the Punjab was going. Indeed, even the people living outside the heartland of the Punjab—principally the Lahore division—only knew of what had happened at Amritsar, Lahore, Kasur, Sheikhupura and Gujranwala through rumours and hearsay and what they could guess from the demonstrative movement of troops and impedimenta intended to impress upon them, to quote "The Physician" from Bechuanaland, Lt. Col. Frank Johnson, D.S.O., "the might of Martial Law" and no doubt also the Raj.

However, want of accurate information was not the only factor that inhibited the build-up of a nationwide movement of protest against the horrors of Martial Law in the Punjab. Perhaps an even more crucial factor was the absence of any clear political lead from those from whom it might have been expected. The "Moderates", predictably, looked the other way. They had been opposed to any satyagraha against the Rowlatt legislation and

had warned that the slightest deviation from constitutional agitation would attract instant and massive retaliation from the Government. Their attitude, understandably, was now one of "We told you so" even though few of them were so insensitive to the public mood as actually to say so.

In the nature of things, people looked to the Congress as the tribune of the nation to say what should be done. However, despite the hysterical state of mind among the diehard bureaucratic circles in Delhi and a section of the Tory establishment in Britain which made them see in the Congress an "extremist" organisation fomenting rebellion, the trouble with the Congress was that it found it impossible to outgrow its congenital constitutional reflexes. It had never wanted Gandhi to embark on civil disobedience. That was one of the major considerations which had led him to set up the Satyagraha Sabha to conduct his campaign. This might have fired Jawaharlal Nehru with enthusiasm as he tells us in his autobiography, adding, "I... wanted to join the Satyagraha Sabha immediately. I hardly thought of the consequences—law-breaking, gaol-going, etc. and if I thought of them I did not care."

However, his enthusiasm for satyagraha as "a way out of the tangle" and "a method of action which was straight and open and possibly effective," was not shared by the elder statesmen of the Congress as he soon discovered when he made known his intentions to his father. For he goes on to say :

...Suddenly my ardour was damped and I realised that all was not plain sailing. My father was dead against this new idea. He was not in the habit of being swept away by new proposals; he thought carefully of the consequences before he took any fresh step. And the more he thought of the Satyagraha Sabha and its programme, the less he liked it. What good would the gaol-going of a number of individuals do, what pressure could it bring on the Government? Apart from these general considerations, what really moved him was the personal issue. It seemed to him preposterous that I should go to prison....

Other veteran Congress and Home Rule League leaders may or may not have had such surpassing love for their sons as

Motilal Nehru had for Jawaharlal that they could not bear the thought of their going to prison even in a noble cause. But Motilal Nehru was by no means unique in entertaining serious political reservations about the efficacy of satyagraha as a mode of action for advancing the cause of civil liberties and India's self-determination. This accounts largely for the extreme caution with which they moved in taking any decisive stand on the satyagraha issue and its direct or indirect consequences. It is true, no doubt, that when the All-India Congress Committee had met at Bombay on April 20-21 and Gandhi was present, it did not have much precise information about the state of terror in the Punjab under the Martial Law. In the circumstances, it could not but talk vaguely about "the grave and deplorable state of things" and had to content itself with demanding "a public enquiry into the events that had happened in Delhi, the Punjab, Bombay and Calcutta" and calling for the cancellation of the orders served on Gandhi barring his entry into Delhi and the Punjab.

But by the time of the A.I.C.C. meeting at Allahabad early in June which Gandhi did not attend, it was almost certainly in possession of enough information about what had been done in the Punjab under what was called with bitter humour "Dyerarchy." Yet the resolutions, though somewhat more specific, went no further than registering "the country's sorrow and indignation at the repressive policy pursued by the Government and identifying certain crucial questions which it wanted to be included within the scope of the enquiry" to be conducted by "a Parliamentary Committee." Yet having been more than a third of a century in the business of passing resolutions, it must have known that paper resolutions however "earnestly" and persuasively worded, unless they were backed by a strong popular agitation on the ground, were unlikely to make any dent either on the British bureaucratic mind in India or the British Government at Westminster.

About six weeks later when the A.I.C.C. met again at Calcutta, the Martial Law had been technically lifted and a kind of normalcy prevailed in the Punjab. The story of what had happened during the reign of government by terror was by now no secret to its members. Indeed, Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya tells us in his history of the Congress that at one of its meetings at the

Law Association chambers, they heard the details of "the Amritsar tragedy...with bated breath and in whispering tones." But they chose not to broadcast them and they were instructed that what had been reported to them "should be kept strictly confidential." Under the circumstances the Congress could scarcely be expected to take the lead in building up a mass movement of protest against the Punjab atrocities.

The one man who could have done so and might reasonably have been expected to give a clarion call to this effect was Gandhi. But during these months he seems to have been going through a strange and acute mood of uncertainty, not to say Hamletian hesitancy, untypical of him. This was shown in his off-on-off announcements about the satyagraha campaign which baffled his friends and irritated many people. He was still unwilling to admit Chelmsford's complicity in what had happened since the Rowlatt Act was passed; he thought it just possible that he could be persuaded to withdraw it; and he had tried to keep his lines of communication with him open to this end. As for the Punjab and its torments, he felt them, but remained in a rather ambivalent frame of mind about them though he took up individual cases of what he regarded as injustice and iniquity.

There were several reasons for the tame posture of the Congress over the Punjab tragedy. In part it was dictated by tactical prudence. The Congress leadership was anxious not to encourage, much less lead, any protest campaign which might result in confrontation of a disarmed population with an empire, dizzy with its recent military triumph, and armed with the instruments of terror and repression which it had shown no hesitation in deploying and using in the Punjab. But the prudence also connected with its own deep-rooted reflexes which governed its political approach and which it was always to find difficult wholly to outgrow almost till the very end.

The bureaucratic hierarchy in Delhi and the provincial capitals, to say nothing of the diehard Tory establishment in London, may have convinced themselves that the Congress had been hijacked by the "Extremists" though they had never had much use for the "Moderates" either. But in this belief they were victims of their own propaganda. The trouble with the Congress leadership of the day was exactly the reverse: the trouble was that over the years through force of habit it had got so enmeshed in the

toils of purely constitutional forms of agitation that even after their ineffectiveness had become patent, it gave little serious thought to any alternative strategy of struggle and remained allergic to the idea of building up the pressure of a mass movement behind its demands. That was almost certainly the main reason why Gandhi had chosen to improvise his Satyagraha Sabha to carry out the first national civil disobedience campaign instead of trying to enlist the Congress organisation as a vehicle for the purpose.

There was another major inhibiting factor inclining the Congress leaders towards extreme restraint which verged on pusillanimity. The Moderates, who had felt uneasy ever since Tilak's triumphal return to the Congress fold at Lucknow, had been looking for a tactically advantageous moment to part company with it and pitch their separate tent on politically comfortable ground of their own choosing. They were eager to represent the critical stand taken by the Congress on the Montagu-Chelmsford Report as outright rejection. But this was a calculated misrepresentation. The resolution adopted by the Congress at its special session at Bombay and reaffirmed at Delhi had undoubtedly expressed "disappointment" at the Montagu-Chelmsford proposals and described them as "unsatisfactory". But it had not said that it was rejecting them. On the contrary, it had suggested "modifications" which would bring them sufficiently close to the Congress-League scheme to be acceptable to India. It was thus seeking accommodation and offering the ground for a compromise rather than closing any doors.

This was an unenviable posture to maintain although the Congress in the years to come appeared often to manoeuvre itself into a similar predicament and in consequence, managed to make the worst of every possible world. For one thing, its attitude of neither a clear-cut rejection nor whole-hearted acceptance of the Montagu-Chelmsford proposals, although perfectly justified and consistent with any rational and critical assessment of their merits, not only reflected but accentuated its ambivalence, if not schizophrenia. Combined with other considerations it accounted for its hesitancy in going all out to muster a mass movement of protest against the Martial Law atrocities in the Punjab. For another, it diverted its attention and energies from the political tasks at home to what was happening in London where soon the



constitutional future of the country as envisaged by Montagu and Chelmsford was going to come up before the British Parliament.

By falling more or less unreservedly for the Montagu-Chelmsford scheme the Moderates had dissociated themselves from the national political consensus embodied in the Congress-League proposals. Some of them were already in London basking in the good opinion of the British Government which found them highly serviceable for the purpose of discrediting the Congress and scoring debating points against it. They had, moreover, unexpected accession of strength to their ranks—Annie Besant. Her wayward and imperious conduct had weakened her influence not only over the Congress but even in her own Home Rule League. What was more, she was allergic to Gandhi and his idea of satyagraha which she was soon to denounce in a publication she edited with an oversize title: *Gandhian Non-Cooperation; or Shall India Commit Suicide? A Vade Mecum against Non-Cooperation for all Indian Patriots*. When the Montagu-Chelmsford Report had been first published she had found it wanting in all respects. But she had evidently had a change of heart and began soon to claim that it offered a substantial advance on the road to self-government. This dramatic *volte face* had not only endeared her to the Moderates, but to the Indian Government so that Willingdon, who had taken over from Pentland as Governor of the Madras Presidency, wrote to Chelmsford in the last week of April 1919 that she “seems to have become violently pro-Government and I shall (figuratively?) be soon taking her to my bosom.”

The Congress was anxious for its case not to go unrepresented in England especially at a time when vital decisions affecting the future of India were about to be taken by the British Government and Parliament. How anxious was underlined at its Thirty-third session held at Delhi when the Congress not only reiterated the decision taken at its special Bombay session to send a high-powered deputation to London to press its demands on what it described as “British Democracy,” but considerably enlarged the committee set up to select the team to be sent to Britain for the purpose and appointed N.C. Kelkar as the convener of the expanded committee. Even the intensified repression throughout the country and promulgation of Martial Law in the Punjab,

seemed not to discourage it from sending an advance party of the deputation, consisting of one of its general secretaries, V.J. Patel, and N.C. Kelkar, to England barely a fortnight after the Jallianwala Bagh vespers when it might have been thought that they were more needed nearer home. Over the next few months they were to be joined by a number of other prominent Congress leaders, among them Hasan Imam who had presided over the special session at Bombay, and V.P. Madhva Rao, a former Dewan of the Mysore State.

Tilak was already in London with his lieutenant Joseph Baptista in connection with the libel suit against the *Times* Correspondent Extraordinary and distinguished publicist of British imperialism—Valentine Chirol. The case, predictably, was lost at the end of February 1919. This was a severe psychological blow to Tilak, to say nothing of the financial liability it entailed amounting to over £14,000 which was no small sum in those days. But with that stoicism which he had learnt to cultivate, Tilak had not allowed his private distress to obtrude on or be reflected in his public life. It in no way deflected him from his work for the Indian cause. Indeed, throughout the spring and summer of 1919 and until he left for India in the first week of November, despite his indifferent health, he presided over or took part in a whole series of meetings in London and in the Provinces to advance the argument for Indian self-government.

This was not all. With some help from Baptista, he prepared a memorandum on India's right to self-determination for the Peace Conference in Paris. He wanted to present it personally to Georges Clemenceau, Prime Minister of France and President of the Conference. However, the British Government was not going to allow any such impertinence although Tilak, as a matter of courtesy, had sent a copy of his memorandum to India Office which the latter returned to him. He was refused the passport endorsement to go to France. All the same, his representation, apparently, did reach Clemenceau. Edgar Wallace who, surprisingly enough, was one of the few Fleet Street journalists to support Tilak at a time when most of the British Press was engaged in a systematic campaign of vilification against him, told him so when he returned from Paris. Indeed, Tilak had taken the precaution of sending a similar letter to President Wilson whose Secretary formally acknowledged it, unlike the

*non-recevoir* vouchsafed him by the India Office, even though the reply was non-committal and merely said that the issue of Indian self-determination would be taken up in due season and in the appropriate forum.

The memorandum which Tilak and Baptista drafted is of some historical significance. It is the first document presented to an international conference stating clearly the case for India's right to self-determination. Not only that, but it embodies, even if in a germinal form, India's perception of her peace-keeping role in international politics and which the Congress later was to develop as the basis of India's foreign policy, largely under Jawaharlal Nehru's guidance and inspiration. "India," it argues, "is self-contained, harbours no design upon the integrity of other States and has no ambitions outside [India]. With her vast area, enormous resources and prodigious populations, she may well aspire to be a leading power in Asia, if not the world. She could therefore be a powerful steward of the League of Nations in the East for maintaining the peace of the world." Perhaps for tactical reasons and in an attempt to woo the British Government, Tilak offers India's services as the watch-dog of British imperial interests, maintaining "the stability of the British Empire against all aggressors and disturbers of peace, whether in Asia or elsewhere."

However, the British Government was not impressed by this offer contained in Tilak's memorandum. On the contrary, having won over the Moderates, it felt it could be tough with the Congress as the Congress deputation in London was soon to discover while trying to present India's case in Britain. The British Government, believing that it had won over the Moderates and thus succeeded in fracturing the national consensus which had crystallised around the Congress-League scheme, was in no mood to seek a compromise by modifying the Montagu-Chelmsford proposals along the lines suggested by the Congress or even seriously to consider this. As for the British Press, with the exception of the still small voice of Liberal organs like the *Manchester Guardian* and the even smaller voice of Labour journals like Lansbury's weekly *Herald*, it was congenitally hostile to the Congress. It not only kept up a sustained barrage of ridicule and denigration of the policies of the Congress, but on occasions even refused to carry publicity material put out by its deputation in England by way of paid advertisement.

These handicaps and obstacles were formidable enough. But they had recently been further compounded by another factor. The small journal of the British Committee of the Indian National Congress—the weekly *India*—had for almost three decades been something of a David battling against the Fleet Street Goliaths and had steadfastly and intelligently presented news of and comments on Indian affairs in Britain broadly from the Congress standpoint. Indeed, to this day it remains the best source of information on Indian developments and evolution of Indo-British relations during that period which no serious historian or chronicler can possibly ignore. However, after the death of William Wedderburn at the beginning of 1918 the British Committee was itself left rudderless and, with no mature organising intelligence to guide it, the editorial policy of *India* lost its sense of direction and finely balanced judgement.

The process of disorientation was accelerated by political developments in India. The Moderates had broken away from the mainstream Congress over the attitude to be adopted towards the Montagu-Chelmsford scheme. The British Committee of the Congress, largely drawn from the radical wing of the Liberal Party which itself had emerged badly mawled and demoralised from the "Khaki" election in December 1918, understandably found itself much more in tune with the moderate Indian leaders and was inclined to overestimate the weight they carried in Indian politics much as the India Office did or pretended. Editorially, *India* tended to lean increasingly on the side of the Moderates who had set up a separate organisation of their own and began to show marked reluctance even to publish the full and unexpurgated texts of the resolutions passed by the Congress.

This was a most unnatural situation. It could not but strain the relations between the parent organisation in India and its offshoot in Britain and the weekly *India* which carried on its masthead the legend proclaiming itself to be the organ of the British Committee of the Congress. The situation was the more unacceptable because it was the Congress which largely financed the activities of the British Committee and its weekly organ by earmarking half the delegation fee for the purpose while it seemed that the Moderates, who had set up a separate organisation of their own, were still calling the tune. Ever since Tilak's re-entry into the Congress, there had been muted criticism of

the line being plugged by the British Committee of the Congress as being too timid. Tilak himself was rightly persuaded that this timidity was due to the preponderant influence of the British Liberal Party over the Committee. He was more inclined to pin his hope on the emergent Labour Party and the Trade Union movement, partly, it may be added, through the over-enthusiastic reports he had received while still in India from his lieutenant Joseph Baptista who had discerned much stronger support for Indian right to self-government in the Labour movement than in the Liberal Party, which was not only hopelessly split between the Lloyd George and Asquith factions but already in decline.

The Congress itself was a little less enthusiastic about the Labour Party's policy on India than Tilak—who was to make a financial contribution to it while in England—and Baptista. But, as already noted, it had invited a fraternal delegate from the Labour Party to the Congress session at Delhi but the invitation had reached too late for the Labour Party Conference to take it up as we learn from the letter written by the Labour Party Secretary, John Scurr, to his Congress counterpart on July 19, 1918. At its annual session in Delhi the Congress also passed a resolution—number 20 on the agenda—which was a mild rebuke to the British Committee. It said :

Resolved (a) that in the opinion of this Congress, the Congress Constitution should be so amended as to bring the work of the British Congress Committee into co-ordination with that of the other component parts of the Congress organization.

(b) That in the opinion of this Congress it is necessary to make the newspaper *India* more attractive and to associate an Indian or Indians in its editorial management.

(c) That in the opinion of this Congress half the delegation fee which is now earmarked for the British Congress Committee be set apart to be utilized generally for propagandist work in England.

(d) That in the opinion of this Congress the deputation which will proceed to England in connection with Constitutional Reforms be authorized to enter into negotiations with the authorities of the British Congress Committee to make the necessary arrangements on the lines suggested above.

This resolution did not remain a mere paper resolve. The Congress was in earnest about straightening up its relations with its British branch and making it clear to the British Committee that in policy matters the Congress must be the judge of what was best for India and that the Committee could not put out publicity material which was not concordant with the Congress policies. This was underscored by the fact that immediately after his arrival in London, V.J. Patel, wrote to the Chairman of the British Congress Committee, Dr. G.B. Clark, from 10 Howley Place, Maida Vale, W.2, where, presumably, he was staying with N.C. Kelkar, asking for an early appointment so that both he and Kelkar could talk matters over with Dr. Clark and the other members of the Committee.

Patel received a reply by return of post from Helena Norman-ton who was acting as Secretary of the British Committee inviting the Congress deputation to meet Dr. Clark and the Committee the following Monday, June 1, 1919, at four in the afternoon at the Committee's office at 14 Henrietta Street, Covent Garden, W.C.2,—by a strange coincidence the same address which in the 1930s housed the offices of the firm of Victor Gollancz, the Publisher associated with the publication of Left Book Club series, including Palme Dutt's classic *India Today*. The meeting must have taken place, but seems to have been inconclusive. Otherwise, it is hard to understand, why Vithalbhai Patel wrote another letter to Dr. Clark the very next day when the details could have been settled at their meeting face to face.

Patel's letter seems rather cold and formal. After telling the Chairman of the British Committee something which he must have known—that the Indian National Congress had sent a Deputation to England the advance party of which was already in London—he wrote:

The work in connection with the Reforms must be commenced immediately as the Bill dealing with them will be introduced into the Parliament next Thursday. As the agency organisation of the National Congress on the spot in London, the members of deputation will appreciate your assistance and co-operation to carry out the mandate of the Congress which is to advocate and press the demands of the Congress as

contained in the resolutions passed at its Delhi Session in December last.

Patel went on to outline a seven-point programme which he and his colleagues considered necessary to carry out. This included preparation of a memo of evidence to be submitted to the Parliamentary Joint Committee which, it was expected, would be set up for the purpose; drafting of amendments to the Bill; interviewing the Secretary of State and other officials; interviewing Members of Parliament; holding public meetings all over the country, if possible; and issuing literature on the subject matter of the Bill. He wanted to know "without delay" how and in what manner the Committee could and would help the deputation in carrying out its mission. He further asked for the use of the office of the Committee "for day to day work" of the deputation.

Two days later, on June 4, 1919, Patel sent an article under his signature to be published in the next issue of *India*, adding in a brief note that an editorial endorsement of the piece contributed by him might be inserted. All these suggestions were perfectly reasonable. But, it seems, the British Congress Committee, or at least some of its members, were reluctant to accept them. No reply was sent to either of V.J. Patel's letters nor was an editorial note supporting his article inserted in *India*. Patel apparently again wrote to the Chairman of the British Committee on June 22 raising the question of how far the Committee was willing to cooperate in the task the Congress Deputation had been entrusted with. It was not until July 5 that a reply was sent to him, not by the Chairman of the British Committee, Dr. Clark, but W. Douglas Hall. It did not refer to any of the issues raised by Patel in his various letters but merely informed him that the Committee had resolved at its meeting the day before "that each of the five Indian delegations now in this country should be asked to select one of their members, who might be invited to attend the ordinary meeting of this Committee as visiting members, without voting powers." Douglas Hall asked Patel to let him have the name of the member selected by the delegation of which he was the leader.

This was an extraordinary demand coming from a body which purported to be a branch of the Indian National Congress in Britain and depended on it for its finances. The most bizarre part

of it was the suggestion by Douglas Hall that the member whom the Congress Deputation selected would have no voting right at the meeting of the British Committee and would be treated exactly as the "visiting members" selected by the four other Indian delegations which had come to England. It was obviously resented by Patel, Kelkar and other members of the Congress Deputation and it was decided to send a strongly-worded letter to the Chairman of the British Committee calling it to order. The letter, written by Patel on July 8, expressed surprise that the British Committee had "decided to recognise other deputations besides the Congress Deputation and to ask each one of them to return one member to sit on your Committee." After pointing out that those "Moderates" who had seceded from the Congress and actually formed a separate organisation of their own were "no longer Congressmen" it said:

The Deputation would therefore request the Committee to reconsider the question in that light and if the Committee could not see its way to accept this view, the deputation suggests that the dissenting members ought to form a separate and independent Association entirely unconnected with the Congress and the remaining may continue as British Committee of the Indian National Congress.

The letter went on to protest against the stipulation in the letter written by Douglas Hall that the member of their deputation whom they chose to take part in the meetings of the British Committee would not be entitled to vote. "The Deputation," wrote V.J. Patel, "says that the claim of all the members of the Deputation to vote on the Congress Committee is obvious and regrets it cannot, therefore, see its way to return any member as desired by your committee." He asked the Chairman of the British Committee to "convene an urgent meeting ... to consider this letter" and let him know their decision at an early date. Three days later, he followed up with another even firmer letter asking the Committee for a clear and "unambiguous" answer without further delay to the question whether it was "prepared to cooperate" with his deputation "in carrying out the mandate of the Congress, which is to advocate and press the demands



of the Congress as contained in the resolutions passed at its Delhi Session in December last."

Patel and his colleagues on the Congress Deputation must have known that the British Committee was itself split on much the same lines as the Congress and the Moderates in India. Indeed in his second letter—the one written on July 10—he referred to it quite explicitly. "The Deputation" he wrote, "is, no doubt, aware that there are difficulties in your way owing to the unfortunate split amongst your members in connection with this question but at the same time it is strongly of opinion that no purpose would be served by any further delay which, instead of improving matters in any way, merely goes to handicap us in our work." He, therefore, repeated the suggestion that he had made in his letter two days earlier:

The Deputation feels that those members of your Committee who are not prepared to accept the position taken up by the Congress should, in fairness to the Congress and in order to enable us to carry out the mandate of the Congress in cooperation with your Committee, sever their connection with Committee and organise, if they chose to do so, a separate committee with quite an independent programme entirely unconnected [with] the Congress.

This was a perfectly reasonable suggestion and Patel the next day wrote a letter to the Chairman of the Board of Directors of *India* a copy of which was forwarded to the British Congress Committee. He again complained that *India* was still not advocating the policy of the Indian National Congress and added that to "avoid any further difficulty" they were "ready and willing from now to take over and be responsible for the paper financially and otherwise." He asked for an immediate answer to this proposal. The reply came a week later offering to meet Patel and his colleagues and further saying that the Committee had adopted a resolution approving the decision taken by the Board of Directors of *India* almost a fortnight earlier and intimated to the Congress Deputation that "the Editor [of *India*] should be instructed to support...the policy of the Congress held at Delhi last Christmas."

There was clearly no option for the British Committee but

to fall in line with the suggestions made by the Congress Deputation. A few days later Patel wrote to its Chairman requesting him to appoint a sub-committee for the purpose of drawing up "the necessary constitution" for the Committee "in consultation with the Hon'ble Messrs. Khaparde and Patel" and to submit it to the Committee. This was duly done and a new constitution was adopted by the Committee which explicitly stated that the object of the Committee shall be to act as the Executive in the United Kingdom of the Indian National Congress and that its membership, while unlimited, shall be open to only those "who accept the objects as defined in Article 1 of the Congress Constitution and the Resolutions passed by the Congress." The Executive Committee, to be elected annually, was to consist of no more than 12 members of the General Committee; and Article 6 of the new constitution also laid down that "the President and Ex-Presidents of the Congress, who still cooperate with it, *and are not in the Government service* [our emphasis], and all delegates sent by the Congress to this country shall, Ex-Officio, be members of the Executive Committee." Of course, under Article 7 of the Constitution the expenses of the Committee were to be "defrayed" by the Annual Session of the Congress itself.

It is well to stress the importance of the seemingly parenthetical clause "and are not in the Government Service" in Article 6. For it was a hint of the shape of things to come. Hitherto it had been perfectly permissible to be at once a part of the Government and hold high office in the Congress organisation. This was the first indication that it was no longer possible to have a foot in each camp and serve two masters, namely the alien establishment which governed India and the Indian National Congress which represented the Indian nation. Obviously, some sort of parting of the ways of which V.J. Patel had spoken at the Bombay special session seemed to be imminent.

Thus the contretemps which had been bedevilling the relations between the parent organisation and the British Committee and threatened to make the task of the Congress Deputation in presenting India's case to "British democracy" even more difficult, was resolved. Inevitably, it led to some resignations of members who felt the Committee was becoming too radical. Those who resigned included Lord Clywdd and Mr. Swinney. But Drs. Rutherford and Clark stayed within the Committee—

at any rate for a time. Could the split in the Committee have been avoided? Helena Normanton, a teacher of history who commanded a very virile pen and took over the editorship of *India* from H.S.L. Polak, apparently regarded as too moderate or at least ambivalent by the Congress Deputation, suggests as much in her preface to *India in England*—a collection of her editorial and other writings in the weekly *India*. The change in the statute, she writes, "turned out to be eventually more a matter of language than of substance," and, in her view, "effected nothing very memorable really," except "a much greater predominance upon the Committee of some of the Indians long resident in London."

There is something in this view and it would undoubtedly have been highly desirable if the resignations of some of the members who had served on it over the years and made valuable contribution to the Indian cause according to their lights, could have been avoided. But, for the Congress, there was a real problem which had sooner or later to be faced. The problem was that the British Congress Committee, or at least a section of it, had not been altogether able to keep pace with the evolution of opinion in the Congress in India and was inclined to attach excessive importance to the views of the Moderates who had parted company with the Congress over its critical attitude towards the Montagu-Chelmsford scheme of reforms.

What is more, it was an anomalous, if not absurd, situation that a committee which claimed to be a branch of the Indian National Congress in Britain was going on plugging a political line at variance with what the Congress had decided at its annual session. The Congress could not be expected to allow this anomaly to persist. Indeed, it is arguable that the difficulty it had with the British Committee was eventually to influence the Congress leadership's thinking on the question of whether or not it should have branches outside India over which it could exercise no direct control and which might go off at all kinds of political tangents. It was also probably one of the considerations which weighed with it when it decided soon after its Nagpur session in December 1920 to wind up the British Congress Committee and cease publication of its weekly organ, *India*, which for three decades had presented the Indian case with admirable clarity and loyalty. But we are anticipating.

The immediate effect of the departure of certain members of the British Committee who thought that the Congress policy had taken far too radical a turn of which they could not approve, was to reinvigorate it. This was partly because of the presence in London of a number of dynamic Congress personalities—V.J. Patel, N.C. Kelkar, Sarojini Naidu to say nothing of Tilak who remained in London till the beginning of November 1919 and Horniman who had been deported from India and was continuing his work as a fearless publicist for Indian self-government. He contributed regularly to *India* which also commanded the talents of N.C. Kelkar as a visiting editor and, under Helena Norman-ton's editorial direction (she had taken over from Polak in June 1919 "in view of the change of policy" though her appointment was not confirmed until six months later), had undergone something of a sea change. From being a staid journal of record and patient persuasion on matters concerning India, it was to become for the brief life-span that remained an active campaigning vehicle whose editorial comment and other articles struck a strident and even militant note and tended to be particularly harsh on Edwin Montagu, already under heavy fire from the Tory Right and very much on the defensive.

The change was, perhaps, necessary and timely. For conditions in India were not at all propitious for any effective campaigning. Although the Martial Law in the Punjab was lifted in June 1919, the climate of repression had been only fractionally mitigated, if at all. The authorities had a whole armoury of draconian laws and regulations accumulated over the years and used them without compunction to intimidate and gag the nationalist Press and stifle public protest. The deportation of Horniman, Editor of the *Bombay Chronicle*, and the sentencing of Kalinath Roy, Editor of the *Tribune*, to two years' rigorous imprisonment, later changed to simple imprisonment on grounds of his health, were meant to discourage others.

True, as the full horror of the massacre of Amritsar and the insensate brutalities committed in the Punjab became known throughout India, there was a wave of revulsion against the Government and its minions. But it was not easy to organise public agitation against the ambient repression. Public protest surfaced only in the form of dramatic gestures of dissociation such as Tagore's renunciation of his knighthood and, a few

days later, the resignation of Sir Sankaran Nair from his membership of the Viceroy's Executive Council. There was also another reason for the relatively muted protest against Government misdeeds and policies. The Congress itself was passing through one of its periodic phases of perplexity and indecision following the withdrawal of Gandhi's Satyagraha and his decision not to revive it. The Congress, of course, was not directly involved in the Satyagraha venture and had not officially pronounced its benediction over it. However, already a peculiar relationship had grown up between Gandhi and the Congress and anything he did or failed to do tended to set up pervasive ripples of elation or despondency and bewilderment throughout the movement.

Under the circumstances, it was fortunate that there was a journal like *India* right in the very capital of the Empire which was not afraid of presenting the point of view of the Congress unapologetically and at the same time provided a certain amount of accurate information on what was happening in India when most of the British Press, not for the first nor the last time, was either virtually exercising a blackout of Indian news or merely contenting itself with purveying official disinformation as was revealed towards the end of 1919. But apart from its role as the interpreter of the viewpoint of the Indian National Congress and as a source of undoctored information, *India* became a rallying point for all those, whether Indian or British, who supported India's claim to self-determination.

These by now included most of the progressive and radical body of opinion in Britain—Left-wing Labour and Trade Union groups, the pacifists, the women's liberation movement of the day and others. Indeed, in retrospect, its files of fading print read like a long roll of honour, recording names which may not mean much to the younger generation of today but which lighted many of our yesterdays. For *India* faithfully reported every meeting or demonstration held not only in London, but throughout the British Isles and which were addressed by leading Indian personalities who were in Britain in some strength during that crucial summer and autumn when the effort to put forward the Indian case reached an intensity which was not to be equalled till the late 1930s when Jawaharlal Nehru's two visits to England gave a new impetus to the work of the India League and other organisations advocating Indian freedom. It was a major lever

in building up that effort and, although it had only a relatively small circulation, its impact was far wider than its readership. What appeared in it was not only duly noted in Whitehall, but found echoes at the Palace of Westminster.

This was important. For after administering a heavy dose of "frightfulness," the Government in London, partly to keep the good opinion of the American President, was going through the motions of applying the analgesic balm of hope of reforms. On May 29, 1919, it had tabled the Indian Reforms Bill based on the Montagu-Chelmsford Report in the House of Commons, and by no less a person than Edwin Montagu. After its Second Reading it was agreed to set up a Joint Committee to hammer it into shape. The Bill was finally passed by the Commons on December 5, just in time for the Upper House to consider it and give its seal of approval which it did without much ado. On Christmas Eve and three days before the opening of the Thirty-fourth session of the Congress at Amritsar, the Bill was given the Royal assent. The whole legislative process, it seemed, had been accelerated in order that it should be completed before what Bonar Law was to describe as this "big meeting" which the Government was anxious to pacify. Pacify, however, without making any improvements to make it more palatable to the Congress and without enlarging the area of democratic control and Indian responsibility as the Congress leadership and even some others were urging both in India and Britain.

*India* was to hammer this point in a lapidary editorial on December 12, probably written by Helena Normanton herself when the Bill, after the committee stage had been duly negotiated, was given its Third Reading and sent to the House of Lords. "Unaltered by a single word, unimproved by a solitary concession in the direction of democracy," it wrote scathingly, "the Government of India Bill has now passed through the House of Commons. The manner of its passing has been the means of showing that parliamentary institutions as our freedom-loving forefathers understood them, are on their death-bed in this country."

The editorial was particularly unsparing of and harsh and uncharitable on Montagu. At one point he was compared to "a French monarch" ordering "the old Parliament of Paris" to register a Royal decree. He was said to have shown himself

"utterly foreign to the spirit of Constitution in England." It went on to pour ridicule on him by saying: "For the moment we will leave Mr. Montagu to rejoice in his personal glory, a figure not unreminiscent of the immortal Tartarin de Tarascon who, after apostrophising himself thus : '*Tartarin, couvre toi de gloire*' (Tartarin, cover yourself with glory)', remembered the dangers, and then adjusted himself, '*Tartarin, couvre toi de flanelle*' (Tartarin, cover yourself with flannel)."

This was unkind in the extreme. Yet there was a sufficient element of truth in this polemical judgement on Montagu who, as we know, wanted to do something "really big" by India but somehow could not muster the courage to do it or die, politically speaking, in the attempt. *India* did not venture to "predict what the Congress may decide to do." But it was sure, for its part, that "the real patriots and democrats will get on with the work, for India must be free, not in 15 years, not in 10 years, but rapidly, for her own sake and that of England's honour."

This was fine and rousing rhetoric. It could even be argued that the stand taken by *India* on the Reforms Bill had validity in the long-term perspective of history. One must also assume that it was written with the tacit, if not explicit, approval of the leaders of the Congress deputation which was visiting England. N.C. Kelkar, who had been acting as honorary Editor of the journal, had left for home with Tilak and was back in India by the end of November. But V.J. Patel and several other Congress personalities had stayed behind for a time and must have been consulted before *India* pronounced its negative verdict on what had been described as "Mr. Montagu's changeling child." It had also other grounds for believing that it was truly interpreting the Congress mind on the subject in rejecting it.

For throughout the summer and autumn of that year all the news indicated that the Congress found the Bill which Montagu was piloting through the Commons unacceptable in all essentials and would not rise to the bait unless it was radically amended. Even Gandhi who had seemed to think that the reforms should not be turned down summarily had begun to be more critical of them. As late as October 26—the New Year's day according to the Vikram Era—in a piece headed "Ring out the Old, Ring in the New" which appeared in two parts in his *Navajivan*, he observed : "Here in India we are faced with despair

everywhere. It was confidently hoped that, at the close of the War, India would get something substantial, but the hope turned out to be false. For aught we know the reforms may not come. Even if they do, they will be worthless. The Congress-League Scheme, then the Delhi Congress Scheme and subsequent schemes are now airy nothings...."

Even the lifting of the Martial Law had failed to uplift his heart. It is true that he remained psychologically on the defensive because of what he called "an eclipse" of the sun in the Punjab and Ahmedabad, meaning the violence that for him had taken the shine out of "the sun of satyagraha." This was why while willing to take up individual cases of manifest injustice, he had been guarded in his statements on what was happening in the Punjab even after Sir Michael O'Dwyer had been replaced by a relatively milder man, Sir Edward Maclagan, and avoided any sweeping condemnation of the authorities in the Land of Five Rivers. However, he was not deceived and wrote in *Young India* on August 6 that "though Sir Michael is no longer in India in body, he is certainly in our midst in spirit. Witness the many Punjab cases that have been discussed in these columns."

Soon he was to see with his own eyes and hear with his own ears what the "O'Dwyerean spirit" really meant in terms of human suffering. In mid-October the order prohibiting his entry into the Punjab was at long last lifted and he lost no time in undertaking a visit to the unhappy Province. He reached Lahore on October 24 and was accorded a tumultuous welcome so that it took "40 minutes to go from the station to the car." He stayed with Saraladevi Chaudhurani, wife of the Punjab Congress leader Pandit Rambhuj Dutt who was still in prison. For the next ten weeks or more he was to remain in the Punjab, except for two brief trips to Delhi, one of them to preside over the Khilafat Conference towards the last week of November. For the Khilafat issue by now had become a major preoccupation with him and was very much on the Congress agenda.

The prolongation of his stay in the Punjab had been made necessary by a significant development. The Congress as a body had taken a far less complacent view than Gandhi himself about the nature and composition of the Committee under Lord Hunter appointed by the Government of India to inquire into the operation of Martial Law in India generally but with its



main focus on the Punjab. It was particularly indignant that simultaneously with the announcement of the appointment of the Committee the Government decided to rush through legislation indemnifying officials, whether civilian or belonging to the army, who had been culpable of excesses. Even so, possibly because of Gandhi's attitude and for tactical reasons, the Congress had declared its willingness to cooperate with the Hunter Committee, but on certain conditions. These conditions were minimal, but the Government of India rejected them. The Congress Sub-Committee on the Punjab then refused to cooperate with the Hunter Committee and decided to set up a Committee to conduct a parallel enquiry and engaged the services of Messrs Neville and Captain, Solicitors of London and Bombay respectively, to assist with the work of the Committee.

Gandhi, who had been co-opted on the Punjab Sub-Committee of the Congress, was also chosen to serve on the Committee of enquiry. Other members were Motilal Nehru, C.R. Das, Fazlul Haq and Abbas Tyabji, with K. Santanam as Secretary. However, Motilal Nehru had to resign when he was elected as President of the Congress session at Amritsar and his place was taken by M.R. Jayakar. Fazlul Haq, too, hardly served on the Committee before he had to leave because of private and professional commitments. It was Gandhi, therefore, who did the lion's share of the work in recording evidence of the people who had borne the brunt of the Martial Law. He and his colleagues travelled extensively through the districts most affected, visiting not only Amritsar and Gujranwala, but also Kasur, Wazirabad, Sheikhpura and even smaller towns and villages like Hafizabad, Sangla Hill, Chuharkana, Akalgarh and Ramnagar.

The tales of woe he had to hear were heartrending. He had been deeply perturbed by the stories that had been brought to him before he could come to the Punjab. But what he saw and heard convinced him that a dreadful tragedy had been enacted in the Punjab. At the end of August he had written to Dr. Satyapal, "It is no joke for me to be outside the prison walls when so many leaders of the Punjab are suffering imprisonment for no fault save that of daring to serve their country to the best of their ability." By now he must have felt that against the backdrop of the enormities visited on the people of the Punjab, the reforms

offered by the British Government were something of a sick joke.

Especially so because the Government had done little in the six months after the lifting of the Martial Law to assuage the hurt and create a favourable climate for the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms. On the contrary, Montagu had dug in his heels over the Rowlatt Act even though events in the Punjab had proved that the authorities could do nicely without having recourse to this supererogatory instrument of repression. However, or the Congress, least of all Gandhi, had not become reconciled to it. Indeed, in the last week of June, Gandhi had sent a personal cable to Montagu informing him that he intended to resume civil disobedience in early July "unless circumstances alter situation." The principal alteration he wanted was the withdrawal of the Rowlatt Act. Montagu's reply was not only a categorical but insolent negative. A confidential cable conveyed to Gandhi by the Governor of Bombay warned him that "if it was a mistake for me to have embarked upon it [civil resistance], it would be a crime to resume it." This pained him as he was to write to Charles Roberts', a former Under-Secretary of State for India, whom he had known for many years:

What however pained me most was Mr. Montagu's message that I must know that Rowlatt Act was not going to be repealed. I know nothing of this absoluteness about the non-repeal of the Act. I know that I shall give all I have towards securing its repeal. It was conceived in unworthy distrust of the people; it was brought forth amid the universal opposition of Indian opinion and it was nurtured in repression. This is enough to condemn it. Does Mr. Montagu propose to inaugurate reforms in the midst of a people whose pride has been deeply wounded, whose opinion flouted and many of whom have been wrong[ly] tried and convicted? Is that a fit prelude to liberal reforms? ...I would therefore like to paraphrase Mr. Montagu's warning and say that, if it was folly to have passed the Rowlatt Act in the face of Indian opposition, it is a crime to continue it, notwithstanding the persistence of such opposition....

It is true that he had not renewed satyagraha, but there

were other reasons besides Montagu's warning for that decision. In the meanwhile the impasse, if anything, had become more impacted as it were because of a whole series of provocative acts by the authorities in India and Montagu's willingness, whatever his private thoughts, to pronounce his benediction over them. *India*, therefore, could be forgiven for denouncing the Government of India Bill which the House of Commons had passed and thinking that it would find few buyers in India and certainly not in the Indian National Congress. However, this surmise was belied by events. Something happened in the interval between the writing of the editorial in *India* and the Congress session in the martyred city of Amritsar in the post-Christmas week of 1919 which seemed radically to alter the co-ordinates of the political situation in India. But what?

The answer, perhaps, is that simultaneously with the announcement of the Royal assent to the Reforms Bill a Royal Proclamation announced clemency for political prisoners in India. It was ambiguously worded and clemency was conditional on the prisoners not having been culpable of violent acts which left a large area of discretionary arbitrariness within executive decision. But it was nevertheless a contribution to the season of peace on earth and goodwill among men. Coming on the Christmas Eve, it was seen by the Congress as offering of an olive branch by the Government. At least it held out the hope of an early opening of the prison gates—even if selectively....

## CHAPTER IV

### THE WATERSHED

Bonar Law, anticipating a little, had called it this "big meeting". And big it certainly was, at least in numbers. More than seven thousand—7,031 to be exact—delegates attended the Thirty-fourth session of the Indian National Congress held in the Aitchison Park opposite the railway lines in Amritsar between December 27-30, 1919. This was twice the number attending the previous session held at Calcutta, a metropolitan city which at the time had nearly ten times the population of Amritsar and could provide the facilities and amenities for such a big show. But then, it is well to recall, the Thirty-fourth session of the Congress was no ordinary session. It was the first plenary gathering of the Congress after the trauma of the Martial Law in the Punjab. Between it and all that had gone before there had flowed, in no mere metaphorical sense, what Gandhi described as "a river of blood, the holy blood of innocent people."

The dead, of course, had long since been buried or cremated, and eight months after the reign of terror the wounds of grief and humiliation of those who had lived through it and suffered, although by no means healed, were invisible. But some of the city's physical scars were still visible to the naked eye. In any case, for those who needed reminder, there was the Jallianwala

Bagh, the scene of the massacre of unarmed civilians by General Dyer and his men which *India* in an editorial a week before the Congress session had compared to "the massacre of St. Bartholomew or of Glencoe"; which reminded the President of the Amritsar Congress session of the atrocities committed by the Kaiser's Reich against humanity during the First World War at "Louvain, Dinant and Termonde"; but which, in hindsight, would seem to have foreshadowed things to come—Guernica, Lidice and Oradour Sur Glane.

Gandhi had visited the Jallianwala Bagh a few days before accompanied by Madan Mohan Malaviya and the London solicitor Neville. In a "Punjab Letter" for his readers in *Navajivan* he had evoked the scene in a few simple, stark phrases. "The name Bagh [garden]," he had written, "is a misnomer.... It is not a garden but a rubbish dump. It is flanked on all sides by the backs of houses and people throw refuse on to it from their rear windows. It contains three trees and one small tomb...." Hardly an appropriate setting for one of the most deadly episodes in the history of Indo-British encounter and one which, although few may have realised it, was to mark the beginning of the end of British rule in India for a number of complex and even contradictory reasons operative on both sides of the litigation. But then the martyrdom of the humankind often has a way of running its bitter course in the most unlikely and incongruous places as we know from Golgotha onwards.

Given the poignant context of time and place and events the Thirty-fourth session of the Congress might reasonably have been expected to live up to it. And to all appearances it did. The Reception Committee, expecting a massive influx of delegates and visitors, had erected an oversize *pandal* capable of accommodating twelve thousand people. But they had underestimated and more than sixteen thousand people came, including a large number of women. The crush inside the *pandal* was terrific and led to much confusion and it was announced that an overflow meeting would be held outside and addressed by many of the star turns at the session, including Gandhi, who, with Tilak, had arrived fairly early in the morning at the Aitchison Park though the session was scheduled to begin at one in the afternoon.

The record turn out of delegates and visitors was not surprising. Most of the giants of Indian politics of the day were to be on the platform. Apart from Gandhi and Tilak they included Annie Besant, Madan Mohan Malaviya, Bipin Chandra Pal, C.R. Das, Hasan Imam, C. Vijayaraghavachariar, Dinshaw Petit, M.A. Jinnah, Raja of Mahmudabad, and even "Moderates" like Srinivasa Sastri and K. Natarajan. But the Royal Proclamation of clemency for political prisoners had made it possible for the authorities to release most of the Punjab leaders—Drs. Kitchlew and Satyapal, Harkishen Lal and Rambhuj Dutt Chaudhry. Their arrival together was a signal for tumultuous scenes of jubilation, profuse garlanding and embraces, according to an eye-witness account. More : the real *pièce de resistance* was the dramatic entry of the Ali Brothers who had also been freed in time from their five years of detention at Chhindwara for them to come to Amritsar to attend the Congress session and also the session of the All-India Muslim League which, after some doubt and hesitation, it had been decided to hold at Amritsar in the post-Christmas week thus dispelling inspired rumours of an incipient rift in the Congress-League accord.

There were some other unusual features about the Amritsar Congress session which illustrated the singular, if not unique, anatomy of the Congress movement. For the first time in its history, it had picked on as the Chairman of the Reception Committee, not a respectable and well-to-do burgher or politician and professional man who could persuade other men of property to loosen their purse strings and provide funds for hospitality for the delegates and the distinguished visitors, but a world renouncer, a *sanyasi* as he described himself, Swami Shraddhanand. Born a year before the uprising of 1857, he had practised Law at Jalandhar in the Punjab and, like many members of the trading and professional Hindu middle class in the Punjab and Northern India generally, he had taken a keen interest in the Arya Samaj, a movement of highly combative Hindu revivalism often misleadingly equated with Hindu Reformation. He had founded the Gurukul at Hardwar in 1902, a seminary which reflected the revivalist orientation of the Arya Samaj. His real name, before he donned the saffron robes, was Munshi Ram.

He was aware of the paradox of a *sanyasi* presiding over the Reception Committee formed to make arrangements for hosting

the annual session of India's foremost political organisation. As he was to explain in his address of welcome to the Thirty-fourth session of the Congress:

In the history of the Congress this is perhaps the first occasion when a Sanyasi stands on its elevated platform. From the very day that I was selected as the Chairman of the Reception Committee the question is being asked "Can a sanyasi take part in political agitation consistently with his vow?" My answer is quite simple. The day I entered this sacred stage of life I took the vow of looking upon this entire creation as my family and its entire wealth as one common store. I pledged myself to a life of service and social helpfulness. ...It is not for political agitation but for something higher that I stand here.

This was an edifying rationalisation and, in his case, close enough to truth as was demonstrated by the leading part that he took in the procession in Delhi to protest against the Rowlatt Bill on March 30, 1919, and which he was able to keep largely peaceful, despite provocative postures taken up by the police and the military which resulted in several deaths. But soon he had ceased to take any interest in the Satyagraha movement and indeed had disbanded the Satyagraha Sabha in Delhi without even prior consultation with or even informing Gandhi till the deed was done as we learn from a "Note on the informal Private Satyagraha Conference" held in Bombay on May 28, 1919, where a letter from the Swami was read out. There could, therefore, have been no question of Swami Shraddhanand favouring the idea of a revival of civil disobedience. Whether or not Gandhi was upset by the withdrawal of the Swami from the Satyagraha movement, he took it stoically and seemed even to exult in this and other desertions. "I rejoice (almost) in the wreckage about me," he wrote to Polak in London on June 6, "Shraddhanandji gone. Mr. Jamnadas has left. Some others may follow suit. These occurrences do not baffle me as does violence from the people. But I approach the 1st of July with confidence. ...Civil disobedience will be intensive, not extensive, this time." Actually, of course, as we know, there was no civil disobedience, intensive or

extensive, on July 1st. He had decided not to resume it in the circumstances.

The Swami, for his part, despite his withdrawal from the Satyagraha movement, had agreed to serve on the Punjab Sub-Committee set up by the Congress to which Gandhi had also been co-opted. Nor is there any doubt that Shraddhanand was indefatigable in bringing relief and solace to the people who had suffered bereavement or imprisonment during the Martial Law. It is even possible that the reason why he had dissociated himself from the Satyagraha movement was that he felt the authorities were less likely then to interfere with the humanitarian relief work he wanted to undertake in the Punjab. It was consequently highly appropriate that he should have been chosen to head the Reception Committee at the Amritsar session.

In striking contrast to the Swami the man elected to preside over the Amritsar Congress session was no world renouncer, but very much a man of the world—and in the best sense of the term. Saffron robes were not for him. Indeed, he had been for most of his adult life the glass of fashion, and as K. Iswara Dutt in *Congress Cyclopaedia : Volume I* in a felicitously worded and perceptive pen-portrait of Motilal Nehru, puts it: "Those were days when Savile Row was sartorially annexed to Anand Bhawan [the house in Allahabad where the Nehrus lived and which has since been gifted to the nation]". Largely a self-made patrician, he had built a lucrative practice at the Allahabad Bar and legends had grown about the fortune that he had built up and his life-style. These were somewhat exaggerated as almost all such stories tend to be, especially in India. But there was no question that his was a baroque personality and a certain baroque style of living went with it. In his autobiography, Jawaharlal Nehru describes his approach to life at that stage as a kind of vague Cyrenaicism. This was probably truer of the father than the son. His house at Allahabad, Anand Bhawan, before the jail-going routine began, was the scene of much lavish entertainment and attracted a great deal that was brilliant and forward-looking in the intellectual and social life of India. Indeed, upon it were to converge in time many currents of cultural and political enlightenment, both Eastern and Western.

Politically, Motilal Nehru had been identified with the "Moderate" school of thought till well into his late fifties. He had



been present on the platform at Surat in 1907 when the infamous shoe incident occurred and, as already related, he was not at all amused by the attitude taken by his son, Jawaharlal, who in far away Cambridge, seemed lightheartedly to align himself with the "Extremists". It was not until 1917 that he joined Annie Besant's Home Rule League which for him was a step towards a more radical position. However, events transform men and women. The unsatisfactory character of the Montagu-Chelmsford scheme of reforms, but above all the massacre of the Jallianwala Bagh in April 1919 and the overtones of racial contempt for the Indians which surfaced among the British during the Martial Law and after, made a profound impact on Motilal Nehru's political thinking. We have confirmation of this from Jawaharlal Nehru who wrote in his autobiography: "The Punjab happenings and the inquiry into them had a profound effect on father. His whole legal and constitutional foundations were shaken by them and his mind was gradually prepared for that change which was to come a year later. He had already moved far from his old moderate position."

But at the time he presided over the Amritsar session, he was still going through a phase of transition, psychologically and politically. He had undoubtedly shed some of his liberal illusions and had come to the reluctant conclusion that constitutional mode of agitation by itself was not going to persuade the British to give up their stranglehold on Indian destiny. But he still seemed unsure whether Gandhian satyagraha and periodic prison pilgrimages would bring Indian freedom. And this sense of hovering between two attitudes, the one already manifestly irrelevant and the other not yet wholly crystallised, communicated itself to what he said in his presidential address which was supposed to set the tone of debate at the Amritsar Congress session. It reflected a mind very much in a political transition and caught up in the perplexities inherent in such a process. If the people of the Punjab—and India—expected some clarion call for action or even spelling out of a strategic design for meeting the challenge of imperialist policies from the tribune of the nation they could not but have been disappointed.

Not that those who had died and suffered were not remembered. Motilal Nehru spoke of it as the "saddest and most revealing . . . tragedy," adding, "No Indian and no true Englishman can

hear the story of the *Khuni Bagh* [Garden of Blood], as it is now aptly called, without a sickening feeling of horror." And he quoted the verdict of an Englishman, C.F. Andrews, who had described it "as a cold and calculated massacre," and after going through "every single detail with all the care and thoroughness that a personal investigation could command," pronounced it as "an unspeakable disgrace, indefensible, unpardonable, inexcusable."

Speaker after speaker was feelingly to refer to the tragedy which had been enacted hardly a mile away and sympathy for what the Punjab had been through during those few weeks when what was called Dyerarchy ruled the Province was not in short supply, either in prose or verse. Rabindranath Tagore, for instance, was not at Amritsar. But he had been deeply stirred by the events in the Punjab and had begun to take keen interest in political affairs such as he had not shown since the early days after the Partition of Bengal. He had sent a poetic message entitled "Soul Ever Free". Its English rendering cannot evoke the consolatory immediacy of the original, but even so the concluding lines do connect somewhere deeply with the problem of reconciling ourselves to the problem of gratuitous, arbitrary and seemingly unavailing suffering which both individuals and collectivities have to face:

Therefore I still have hope, not that the wrecks will be mended,  
but that a new world will arise.

It is thy will to let us rush into the thick of conflicts, hurts.

Only give us Thy own weapon, my Master, the power to  
suffer and to trust.

Honour us with difficult duties and pain that is hard to bear.  
Summon us to efforts whose fruit is not in success, and to  
errands which fail and yet find their price.

And at the end of our task let us proudly bring before Thee  
our scars

And lay at Thy feet the Soul that is ever free and life that is  
deathless.

Tagore's poem was read out on the second day. But there was another poetic offering at the session on the fourth and the last day. It was a poem by Sarojini Naidu. Where Tagore was implicit,

Sarojini Naidu was explicit. Her poem was simply entitled : 'The Punjab 1919.' It began:

How shall our love console thee,  
or assuage thy hapless woe,  
  
How shall our grief requite,  
The hearts that scourge thee  
And the hands that smite  
  
Thy beauty with their rods of bitter rage?

And it ended:

O mournful queen! O martyred Draupadi!  
Endure thou still  
Unconquered, undismayed,  
The Sacred river of thy stricken blood  
Shall fold the five-fold stream of Freedom's blood  
To guard the watch-towers of our Liberty.

How, indeed, could the anguish of the Punjab be consoled and assuaged? Perhaps the fact that Tagore and Sarojini Naidu were moved to write poems to express their solidarity in its suffering did in some measure console and comfort, though even they must have realised that it is difficult, almost impossible, to relate to and identify with mass suffering even given their imaginative reach. But this could not be said of the rest of the business transacted at Amritsar. The session turned out to be a rather tame affair if not quite an anticlimax despite the presence of all that was noble and generous in the public life of the country. Somehow the priorities of concern appeared to be a little awry.

This seemed clear from the word go. Swami Shraddhanand's address of welcome as Chairman of the Reception Committee had many edifying passages. It also claimed—and rightly—"The doses of Martial Law, which Lt. Col. Frank Johnson and General Dyer, administered to the Punjab have, instead of casting it 50 years behind, stimulated its political activity so far that now having as if bridged over a number of years it stands abreast of the other more advanced provinces." Not only that, he added:

Where the idea of political unity and its privileges were known only to a handful among the educated, in that very soil of the Punjab even the remotest and the most unknown villages are now replete with a knowledge of the aims and strength of the National Assembly—nay even the ladies are evincing considerable interest in the movement. The letters that I have received from different villages during the last 15 days, and the remarkable change that I noticed in every sister and brother of the villages I visited, convince me that the nation is now fully awake.

Just now every string of the lute of this motherland is in tune. All of them sound the same note....

This was pitching it rather high, but it was essentially true. Equally pertinent was the question that he felt impelled to pose: "Is it not time then to stifle the discordant notes of political party spirit in this welcome harmony of the followers of different faiths? Moderates, Liberals and Extremists, Radicals, Home rulers of Maharashtra [Tilak's followers] as well as those of Adyar [Annie Besant's flock] and their various sections all profess to work for the same goal.... Then why should they hate each other so much?" Why indeed? For his part, he was "neutral". He was "neither a 'moderate', nor an 'extremist', nor again a 'home ruler'." "A Sanyasi," he said in so many words, "has no concern with institutions whether religious or political."

However, it became clear as he followed his rather intricate if not Jesuitical line of reasoning that although he was "neutral", he was neutral on the side of those who were for the acceptance of the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms without any further ado. He was even able to quote Tilak to drive home his well-intentioned message: "Lokmanya Tilak Maharaj has pronounced his verdict saying, 'accept what has been given to you, and keep up a constitutional agitation for a full measure of Self-Government.'" That for him settled the controversy. What is more, he was also for public expression of thanks to Edwin Montagu "who in spite of the hardest opposition could successfully win some measure of self-government for a nation that had gone down to the depths of degradation." He appealed to his audience "in the name

of the ancient civilisation of India not to let this splendid opportunity slip from your hands. Take care that you do not get the stigma of ungratefulness impressed on you."

This was magnificent, but in the context rather insensitive. Even Jesus of Nazareth had not suggested that after turning the other cheek the victim should also propose a vote of thanks to the bully. Montagu, it is true, had had his private reservations about the Rowlatt Bills. He was also appalled—at least in private—by what Dyer and O'Dwyer had done in the Punjab even before the Martial Law had been promulgated. "Our old friend, firm government, the idol of the Club smoking room," he had written to Chelmsford on May Day 1919, "has produced its inevitable harvest." But in public he had continued to cover up for the very men who had perpetrated what were, by any standard, crimes against humanity. He could not be absolved of the responsibility for these acts. For he could have prevented the mischief by standing firm and refusing Chelmsford's demands or, alternatively, he could have resigned and honestly stated in Parliament the reasons for his resignation and his differences with what was, in all but name and its titular Prime Minister, a Tory Government. The Swami, however, did not quote the scriptures to Montagu to remind him that he who must have his political life must also be prepared to lose it—as he did before too long.

Motilal Nehru's presidential address, of course, belonged to a very different universe of discourse. It was certainly long. It ran to thirty-eight foolscap pages in print. It had its *longueurs*, or would have had if, as Gandhi told his readers in *Young India* of January 7, 1920, fortunately, the President of the Congress had not "skipped over many pages whilst he was reading it." But it also had a certain sense of the prevailing mood, if not inside the *pandal*, at least outside it. "Fellow-delegates", he said at the very outset, "you have assembled here in deep mourning over the cruel murder of hundreds of your brothers and in electing your president you have assigned to him the position of chief mourner. That position I accept in all reverence..."

He went on immediately to place the situation that had developed in India in its larger world perspective. They had all been looking forward, "full of hope, to the great peace which would endure and which would bring the blessings of freedom

to all nationalities." "Peace has now come, partially at least", he said, "but it has brought little comfort even to the victors. The pledges made by statesmen have proved but empty words, the principles for which the war was fought have been forgotten and the famous fourteen points are dead and gone. *Vae victis* is still, as of old, the order of the day."

Continuing his *tour d' horizon* of the international scene he referred to "Russia, hungering for peace," but being "allowed no respite" and "a number of little wars" that were being waged on the continent of Europe; to the fate of Turkey which was hanging in the balance and to Ireland and Egypt which were being made to feel "the might of the British Empire" much like India where "the first fruits of the peace were the Rowlatt Bills and Martial Law." "Is it any wonder," he asked, "that the peace has aroused no enthusiasm and that the vast majority of the people of India have refused to participate in the peace celebrations?" He noted the "concession" which had come "with coercion" as in Ireland. "Our rulers," he argued, "have failed to realize that repression and conciliation cannot go hand in hand." So much for the "policy of balance between conciliation and repression" which the new school of British historians of the Raj, like Dr. Judith Brown, seem almost to applaud.

However, he saw "a ray of bright sunshine" amidst the encircling gloom—the Royal Proclamation of clemency "to be exercised by the Viceroy in the name and on behalf of His Majesty to all political offenders suffering imprisonment or restriction on their liberty" which had enabled "the great leaders of the Punjab who till yesterday... in jail" to be with them. He seemed particularly touched not only by the language of the proclamation but the announcement at the same time that the Prince of Wales was to visit India the next winter as a gesture "of affection and devotion" and said that it consoled them in their misfortunes. This tribute could hardly have failed to surprise any neutral observer at the Aitchison Park as, indeed, the portraits of the King-Emperor and the Queen-Empress that were put up at both ends of the *pandal*, and the fact that the very first resolution on the agenda was a vote of "respectful thanks to His Majesty the King-Emperor for His Gracious Proclamation" and assurance of "a warm welcome" to the heir-apparent (the Unlucky Edward VIII) during his forthcoming visit. But it was not

only Motilal Nehru who was passing through a political transition. So was Gandhi as can be judged from the piece he wrote on the Royal Proclamation for *Young India* of December 31, 1919, in which he speaks of it coupled with the Reforms Act as "an earnest of the intention of the British people to do justice to India."

In point of fact despite "the river of blood" that had flowed, the Amritsar session was to show that the Congress was still very much in transition even though the Moderates for the most part had by now distanced themselves decisively from it. Yet the point of no return had been reached even though the Congress leadership was unable or reluctant to recognise this. At any rate it was to be the last Congress session which publicly paid homage to the British Royalty even though in fairness to the latter it must be admitted that often it was to show itself a little more mindful of Indian susceptibilities than the political establishment which ruled the roost at Westminster or Delhi.

The central part of the presidential address was, predictably, devoted to two themes—the Punjab and the Reforms Act. If anything, the Punjab took up the larger part of the address. It certainly was given priority of attention. "India", said Motilal Nehru, "has suffered much at the hands of an alien and reactionary bureaucracy, but the Punjab has in that respect acquired a most unenviable notoriety." He quoted from Ramsay MacDonald's *The Awakening of India* the passage in which the future Labour Prime Minister describes the Punjab Government as "the most incompetent", taking "its stand upon two foundation rocks, 'Prestige' and 'Sedition', the meaning of the former being that it can do what it likes and of the latter that if any Indian questions its doings his house will be raided and he will be deported.... It has no notion of statesman-like handling, no idea of political methods."

This was true. But Motilal Nehru's own analysis of the so-called 'Punjab tradition' was superb and can still be read with profit and, perhaps, ought to be made compulsory reading for all those in Delhi who have to deal with the problems of what is now Punjab and not the Punjab that was. He saw that tradition, rightly, as "hallowed" by following "the broad and easy path of piling repression on repression" and characterised the "O'Dwyerian regime" as the very apotheosis of that stern tradition

of governance. He quoted chapter and verse of how, long before the Rowlatt legislation was conceived and hatched, O'Dwyer had utilized the Defence of India Act to intimidate the Press and the people of the Punjab by staging conspiracy trials by special tribunals. He dwelt on the methods of coercion used to maximise the recruitment and collection of war funds. The country wide agitation against the Rowlatt legislation—he called it “a terrible visitation”—and “the convenient bogey of the frontier” gave Sir Michael O'Dwyer “the opportunity he sought” and he “prepared himself to deal the last effective blow.”

He dealt in some detail with what happened at Amritsar, Lahore, Gujranwala and Kasur before, during and after the Martial Law and went on to say that “besides the attempt to terrorise the people, the Punjab officials aimed a blow at the most valuable asset of our political life, the union between Hindus and Mohammedans.” Scenes of fraternisation, he added, “were treated by the Punjab officials as heinous crimes amounting to open rebellion and waging war against the King, and a new offence was created which was defined as ‘fraternization of Hindus and Mohammedans against the Government by law established’. One of the most shameful acts of the Martial Law authorities was to ridicule the Hindu-Muslim *entente* publicly in various ways. . . . And an attempt was made under official inspiration during the closing days of Martial Law to found separate political associations or *Sabhas* for Hindus, Mohammedans and Sikhs.”

Before he concluded his account and analysis of the events in the Punjab, he underlined the lessons to be learnt from them both by the Indians and the British. “To us”, he remarked, “they point to the path of steadfast endeavour, the path of sacrifice and patient ordeal. That is the only way to reach our goal. To Englishmen they teach the oft-repeated truth that tyranny degrades those who exercise it as much as those who suffer under it.” While it was for England to learn the lesson and “put an end to conditions which permit these occurrences,” the moral for India was clear. “If our lives and honour,” he argued, “are to remain at the mercy of an irresponsible executive and military, if the ordinary rights of human beings are denied to us, then all talk of reform is a mockery. Constitutional reform without free citizenship is like rich attire on a body of a corpse.”



This was well put. Logically the conclusion to be drawn from this ought to have been that acceptance of the Reforms which Montagu had laboured so hard to get through the British Parliament could not be contemplated by the Congress as it would have involved abandoning all the positions it had held so far. But it was clear as soon as he began his scrutiny of the Reforms Act and which was to take up most of the rest of his address that Motilal Nehru was going to counsel the exact opposite. He said:

The act is not based on the wishes of the people of India and its provisions fall short of the minimum demands made by the Congress. But let us not belittle the good that the Act does us. We must recognise that it gives us some power and opens out new avenues of service for us which had hitherto been closed to Indians. I venture to think that our clear duty in these circumstances is to make the most of what we have got and at the same time to continue to press for what is our due.

To reinforce his argument he invoked the advice given by Ramsay MacDonald:

Take advantage of whatever reforms are introduced into the Government of the country; lay down a fuller and a juster programme for the nation and let every one concerned know that you consider yourselves bound by none of the provisions to which you have taken exception, and go on using your influence to get what you want.

This was pragmatic wisdom, certainly, though no prophetic soul could have at that point in time foreseen that within a little more than a decade MacDonald's pragmatism was to lead him to betray the party and the movement which had raised him to the Prime Ministership of Britain and earn him the enduring obloquy of the British Labour movement. Motilal Nehru, of course, was a man of very different kidney. Unlike MacDonald he was to move towards increasingly more radical outlook as he grew older. Indeed, much of his speech, paradoxically, was devoted to pointing out the serious defects of the Reforms Act. It did not give the Indians "free citizenship" he lamented, adding:

"Our demand for a Declaration of Rights was placed before the Parliamentary Joint Committee. It was ably pressed before them by our deputation, but the Committee did not give it even the courtesy of a brief notice in their report. We are thus left in the dark as to the reasons why this most natural demand has not been acceded to."

One would have thought the reasons would have been clear as daylight to all except anybody who was pretending not to see. Not that Motilal Nehru did not see what was wrong with the package of reforms offered by the British Government on a take it or leave it basis. He saw it only too well. He spelt out clearly where they fell short of the minimum acceptable to the Congress. They vested "enormous reserved powers" in the hands of the Governors and the Governor-General in respect of legislation, including the Budget. The provisions relating to "fiscal autonomy" were so ambiguous as to be nugatory. The proposal to institute a parliamentary inquiry every ten years as to whether further subjects should be transferred to popular control in the provinces was "wounding" to Indian self-respect. The reforms did not extend to doing "justice to the political rights of Indian women." There was no enfranchisement of the masses and wage-earning classes and the Joint Committee had "limited the total number of people enfranchised to about 1.5 per cent of the population." The President of the Congress seemed to be arguing against himself very incisively.

Perhaps realising as much, he cut himself short when he came to consider the question of "India's right to enlist her youth and manhood in the service of her army and navy [the air force apparently was still such stuff as dreams are made on, at least for India and Indians, though it had been used against the defenceless people of the Punjab], in the highest as in the lowest ranks." He merely contented himself with posing the question: Will Parliament then take immediate steps to fulfil this responsibility? He did not pause to answer, but passed on to other matters—like the Khilafat question, Swadeshi, and a plea that B.G. Horniman be allowed to return to India—but all too briefly and concluded by holding out the bright hope that:

...when we get the power to mould our institutions, we:

preliminary to legal proceedings being taken against him," it merely placed on record its opinion that the Government of India and the Punjab Government be "held responsible for the inexcusable delay in placing an authoritative statement of the Massacre of the Jallianwala Bagh before the public and His Majesty's Government." The reference to His Majesty's Government which had come to know of what had actually happened at a fairly early stage seemed strange in the context, not to say a gratuitous let-off.

The next resolution was firmer in demanding that in view of his "oppressive regime" and endorsement of General Dyer's massacre, Sir Michael O'Dwyer should be taken off the Army Commission which he was heading in India "as a preliminary to necessary legal action being taken against him." Resolution number seven was expression of gratitude for Sir Sankaran Nair's resignation from the Executive Council of the Governor-General as a protest against the Martial Law and all the repression and rough justice which were visited on the Punjab in the months that followed. The ninth resolution was in two parts. The first offered "respectful condolence" to the relatives of all those, whether "English or Indian", who had been killed and wounded during "the April disturbances". Part two of the resolution envisaged the setting up of a trust in the names of Madan Mohan Malaviya and Motilal Nehru to acquire the Jallianwala Bagh (which, according to Gandhi, was owned by about 40 individuals at the time of the massacre) for the Nation in order "to perpetuate the memory of those who were killed or wounded on the 13th day of April last." Another committee was appointed, consisting of Malaviya, Motilal Nehru, Gandhi, Swami Shradhdhanand, Girdhari Lal, Kitchlew and Harkishen Lal, with powers to co-opt others on the committee "to devise the best method of perpetuating the memory of the dead" and to collect funds for the memorial.

The next three resolutions called for the repeal of the Rowlatt Act, protested against the passage of the Indemnity Bill, and urged that in conformity with "the letter and spirit of Royal Command" the general amnesty clause should apply to all detenus, deportees and political prisoners in Bengal and other parts of India, including the Andamans, who had not till then been released. The thirteenth resolution demanded the recall of

Chelmsford who had "completely forfeited the confidence of the people of this country." This was rather a strange demand not because there was anything to be said in favour of Chelmsford, a weak man who had allowed himself to be manipulated by the reactionary cabal of bureaucrats around him and browbeaten by O'Dwyer, but because what applied to him applied also to Montagu who was ultimately responsible for giving his sanction to the Rowlatt legislation. What was equally surprising was that Gandhi, who had shown a remarkably naive trust in Chelmsford, raised no strong objection to the attitude adopted by the Congress to Chelmsford.

So resolution followed resolution covering all manner of things like Swadeshi, Labour Unions which the Provincial Congress Committees were called upon to promote, cancellation of the Indemnity Act, condemnation of the unjust treatment meted out to the university and school students in the Punjab, the constitution of Delhi as "a Regulation Province" as also of Ajmer-Merwara which had found no mention in the Reforms Act and the woes of third and intermediate class passengers on the Indian Railways. Even Burma was not overlooked and the thirty-fifth resolution saw no reason for the exclusion of Burma from the operation of the new Government of India Act.

All these issues were relevant and it was legitimate to raise them at the time of national stock-taking which the Congress sessions in those days used to be. But the sequence in which they were presented at Amritsar was so haphazard as almost to make no sense. Thus it was not until the thirteenth resolution that the draconian curbs on the Press in India were noted and "the immediate repeal of the Indian Press Act" was demanded though this linked well with the next resolution which urged the immediate cancellation of the deportation order on B.G. Horniman, the brilliant editor of the *Bombay Chronicle*. The Chairman of its Board of Directors at the time, incidentally, was none other than M.A. Jinnah.

If the arrangement of the agenda suggested a series of after-thoughts occurring in no coherent order it was, perhaps, because the mind of the Congress leadership was focused on two main issues—the new Government of India Act and the fate of the Khilafat. There was also the question of the latest curtailments of the rights of the Indian settlers in South Africa, the resolution

on which was moved by Gandhi himself in a matter of fact speech a good part of which consisted of quotation from C.F. Andrews' letter to the Congress from East Africa (the anti-Indian agitation by the Whites was going on in East Africa, too). But this was a non-controversial resolution and its passing was a matter of formality. The same applied to the resolution number fifteen which protested against "the hostile attitude of some of the British Ministers towards the Turkish and Khilafat question" and urged the British Government to settle it "in accordance with the just and legitimate sentiments of Indian Mussalmans and the solemn pledges of the Prime Minister." But the crux of the session was in the debate on the fourteenth resolution which dealt with the reforms being offered in the Government of India Act.

The battle order was clear from the line taken by Motilal Nehru in his presidential address. His advice was that the opportunities offered by the reforms should be accepted and utilized for the achievement of full responsible Government. This was the position taken up not only by Madan Mohan Malaviya, Jinnah and even more fervently by Annie Besant who had performed something of a political *volte face* since she had characterised the whole package as "unworthy of England to offer and India to accept" or words to that effect, but by Gandhi whose attitude was to prove decisive. In the Subjects Committee C.R. Das' draft had been approved. It did not explicitly reject the reforms, but it implied rejection:

- (1) That this Congress reiterates its declaration of last year that India is fit for full Responsible Government and repudiates all assumptions and assertions to the contrary wherever made.
- (2) That this Congress adheres to the resolutions passed at the Delhi Congress regarding Constitutional Reforms and is of opinion that the Reforms Act is inadequate, unsatisfactory and disappointing.
- (3) That this Congress further urges that Parliament should take early steps to establish full Responsible Government in India in accordance with the principle of Self-determination.

However, Gandhi was not happy about Das' draft. He tabled an amendment to it which would have completely altered the

thrust of the resolution as approved by the Subjects Committee. This accepted the three clauses of the resolution as drafted by Das but omitted the word "disappointing" and added a fourth paragraph which read:

- (4) In the opinion of the Congress, whilst the Reforms Act falls short of the requirements of the situation in India and therefore inadequate and unsatisfactory, the Congress recognizes, it is a definite step towards Responsible Government and without prejudice to its full rights to agitate at the earliest opportunity for remedying the glaring omissions in the said Act, it calls upon the people to co-operate with the authorities in making the Reforms a success and that this Congress expresses its cordial thanks to the Right Hon'ble E.S. Montagu and Lord Sinha for their labours on behalf of India in connection with the constitutional reforms.

This was the text of the amendment as printed on the agenda. But by the time he rose to speak on his amendment on January 1, 1920—the session had been extended to the New Year Day—he had changed the text and it read:

Pending such introduction (of Responsible Government) this Congress begs loyally to respond to the sentiments in the Royal Proclamation, namely, 'Let it (the new era) begin with a common determination among my people and my officers to work together for a common purpose' and trusts that both the authorities and the people will co-operate so to work the Reforms as to secure an early establishment of full responsible government and this Congress offers its warmest thanks to the Right Hon'ble E.S. Montagu for his labours in connection with them.

Speaking in Hindi at first he said that it pained him to speak against a resolution which had been moved by Das and seconded by Tilak, especially because he agreed with them "to a great extent". But he was not prepared to characterize the Reforms as "disappointing." After moving his amendment in its revised version, he spoke in English and it was nothing if not a puzzling speech. For he admitted that what was being given fell "far short

of the Congress ideal" and that at the earliest moment they should have responsible government. Nevertheless he argued that "the Indian culture" demanded that they should "trust the man who extends the hand of fellowship." "The King-Emperor," he claimed, "has extended the hand of fellowship. (Hear, Hear). I suggest to you that Mr. Montagu has extended the hand of fellowship, and if he has extended the hand of fellowship, do not reject his advances. Indian culture demands trust and full trust, and if we are sufficiently manly, we shall not be afraid of the future, but face the future in manly manner. . . ."

All this was edifying, but hardly politically relevant. But more in the same vein was to come. He wanted them to say, "All right, Mr. Montagu, all right, all officials of the bureaucracy, we are going to trust you; we shall put you in a corner, and when you resist us, when you resist the advance of the country, you shall do so at your peril." That, he said, "is the manly attitude that I suggest to you." At the end he even evoked the teachings of the *Bhagavad Gita* and addressing Tilak whom throughout his speech he called "Tilak Maharaj," he said: "If you accept your own civilization, I ask the author of the commentaries on *Bhagavad Gita*, if he accepts the teachings of *Bhagavad Gita*, then let him extend the hand of fellowship to Mr. Montagu."

He had, however, some valid points. As he pointed out, Tilak's stand was rather ambiguous. "Tilak Maharaj," he observed, "tells you that we are going to make use of the Reforms Act, as he must, and as he has already told Mr. Montagu, as he has told the country, that we are going to take the fullest advantage of the Reforms, then I say be true to yourselves, be true to the country and tell the country you are going to do it." He went on to say, rightly, "that these reforms enable you to advance further to your goal, if you believe that these reforms can be used as a stepping-stone to full responsible government, then I say, give Mr. Montagu his due and tell him, 'We thank you'. . . ." If, on the other hand, they did not thank him because they knew what his reforms were and what his intentions were, and intended to frustrate those intentions by obstructing him at every stage, then they should also be frank about it and state it clearly and openly.

The argument was consistent with his notion of truth in

politics. But he was, perhaps, in a minority of one in thinking that. There was no obligation on the part of Congress leaders to reveal exactly what plans they had of using the Reforms Act as a leverage for advancing to full self-government. Revolutions, it has been said, are not made with rose water. Nor are national liberation struggles won by sticking to the truth and nothing but the truth. That was certainly Tilak's view and probably Das' as of many others. They could not have been convinced by his strange mode of reasoning either. But after some back and forth Gandhi won the substance of his point though not exactly his precise wording or the omission of the word "disappointing". In its final form, as Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya has it, the resolution embodied "the original Resolution moved by Mr. Das with the replacement of Gandhi's extra paragraph by the following":

Pending such introduction this Congress trusts that, so far as may be possible, the people will so work the Reforms as to secure an early establishment of full Responsible Government, and this Congress offers its thanks to the Rt. Hon. E.S. Montagu for his labours in connection with the Reforms.

It was not a famous victory for Gandhi. He had to resort to the technique of exercising moral duress against the opposing side. He had threatened that if the intention of the Congress was to obstruct the Reforms Act, he would challenge that position by going across from one end of India to the other and say, "we shall fail in our culture, we shall fail from our position if we do not do our duty that culture demands, if we do not respond to the hand that has been extended to us." Earlier, at the Amritsar session, he had applied the same kind of pressure during the discussion on another crucial resolution—number V—which referred to the events in the Punjab and Gujarat. The resolution bracketted the atrocities and acts of provocation committed by the authorities with "a sudden outburst of mob frenzy." The Subjects Committee had rejected the resolution, apparently late at night. Gandhi was, however, insistent that the violence on the part of the people should be condemned. According to Dr. Sitaramayya, "He firmly, but politely and respectfully



expressed his inability to be in the Congress if the Congress could not see its way to accepting his view point."

This moral pressure had worked. Again, according to Dr. Sitaramayya, "The next morning, amidst the whinings and whimperings of the bulk of delegates, Resolution V was approved." But only after what the official historian of the Congress describes as a "superb" speech on the subject by Gandhi in which he said:

There is no greater Resolution before this Congress than this one. The whole key to success in the future lies in your hearty recognition of the truth underlying it, and acting up to it. To the extent we fail in recognising the Eternal truth that underlies it, to that extent we are bound to fail.

He had gone on to insist that there had been violence "on our part" and he was prepared to produce "abundant proof of it" from Ahmedabad, Viramgam and Bombay, though he also acknowledged that there was "grave provocation given by the Government in arresting Dr. Kitchlew and Dr. Satyapal and in arresting me" who was bent on a mission of peace "at the invitation of Dr. Satyapal and Swamiji [Shraddhanand]". His conclusion was simple. The Government, he said, "went mad at the time; we went mad also at the time. I say, do not return madness with madness, but return madness with sanity and the whole situation will be yours."

It almost sounded a paraphrase of the gospel. But what had it to do with the politics of a suppressed nation? It is hard to believe that either Tilak or C.R. Das or Hasrat Mohani or Mohamed Ali who was on the platform having come from Chhindwara—but, as he added, "with a return ticket"—were persuaded that it made any sense in terms of *realpolitik*. Nevertheless Gandhi had his way. The resolution was duly passed. "There is no manner of doubt whatever that the whole Congress was a triumph for Gandhi," says Dr. Sitaramayya. So does Judith Brown working from the opposite side, though she puts it much more guardedly and speaks merely of "Gandhi's emergence and recognition as a potential all-India leader" in the period leading up to and at the Amritsar session. There is no doubt, at any rate, that at Amritsar he took a much more

active part than he had taken at the important Lucknow session in 1916 where the Congress-League concordat was concluded and ratified. Of course, he had not attended either the Special Session at Bombay at the end of August 1918 or the Delhi Session in December, the latter due to his "poor health". At Amritsar, on the other hand, his was the decisive voice in determining vital policy decisions. Indeed, as he records in his *My Experiments with Truth*:

I must record my participation in Congress proceedings at Amritsar as my real entrance into the Congress politics. My attendance at the previous Congresses was nothing more perhaps than an annual renewal of allegiance to the Congress. I never felt on these occasions, that I had any other work cut out for me except that of a mere private, nor did I desire more.

Judith Brown is right in suggesting that he felt that "if he was to right 'wrongs' and show his country the way to Swaraj, he must play a larger part in them [Indian politics] than he had so far." But he could have done that without getting directly and intimately involved in Congress politics. The reason for that was related to his experience of the abortive Rowlatt Satyagraha. He probably realised that it was impossible to sustain a mass agitation to set right the wrongs merely through an ad hoc organisation like the Satyagraha Sabha that he had improvised. What was needed for such a nationwide movement was some stable organisation and instrument and only the Congress, rooted in India's needs and political and cultural traditions, whatever its defects, fitted the bill. This was a conviction which, whatever his relationship with the Indian National Congress from time to time and whether or not he was formally a four-anna member of it, was to remain with him till his dying day....

## CHAPTER V

### ON A COLLISION COURSE

Paradoxically, a year which had been marked in India by a high tide of widespread political turbulence and witnessed an accentuation of alienation between the rulers and the ruled surpassing that experienced during the period following the Partition of Bengal, seemed to end on a note of a visitant calm, or what the French call *soulagement*. Indeed, 1920 began in a climate of optimism and the New Year Day was celebrated in a mood of rejoicing at the liberation, if not yet of the Indian people as a whole, at least for a small fraction of them who had been driven by poverty to seek livelihood by emigrating to Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific islands like Fiji to work as indentured labourers under conditions which were tantamount to slavery in all but name.

The system of indentured labour had grown up almost over a century as a kind of substitute for slavery. As a very large proportion of those who were sucked into this system were Indians, it had become a sore point with the Indian public of all shades of opinion and none, irrespective of creed or confession. However, it was the Congress, thanks to Gandhi's initiative, which systematically took up the issue as an essential part of its programme and kept up the pressure on the Government for its abolition.

It was an issue on which the Indian Government could not afford to be altogether unresponsive for fear of earning international opprobrium.

The result was that the abolitionist argument had made some headway, though the success was slow and came piecemeal. The system of indentured labour in Natal ended because of the refusal of the Indian Government to permit further recruitment of labour for the purpose in India. It ended in Mauritius in 1911 because there was no more demand for it. But in other parts of the colonial empire, like Fiji, British Guiana (as it was known at the time), Trinidad, Jamaica and Surinam the pernicious system persisted because it furnished cheap bonded labour for the owners of plantations and because the Colonial Office in London, for all its Platonic headshaking at the evils of the system, was willing to look the other way.

However, the Government in India was under increasing pressure from Indian opinion and during 1914-16 made enquiries among the governments in the Provinces which constituted the main reservoir of recruitment for indentured labour overseas. These enquiries established that not only was there considerable popular resentment at grassroot level, but the system generated corruption, blackmail and many other abuses. Meanwhile, under Congress inspiration, C.F. Andrews and W.W. Pearson, both closely associated with Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore, had gone out to Fiji in 1915 to investigate how the system worked and report back. Their report revealed the appalling conditions under which the indentured labour had to work and live and Hardinge was persuaded to accept Malaviya's motion in the Imperial Legislative Council aimed at the abolition of indenture. However, he qualified his acceptance with the proviso that "some delay must be allowed while adjustments were being made." This was to lead to a storm of indignation later when it became known that he had yielded to the pressure from the Colonial Office and agreed in private to allow recruiting for indenture to continue for five years.

The Government of India was challenged by Andrews to come clean and had to admit the existence of a secret understanding between the India Office and the Colonial Office to allow recruitment for feeding this system of slave labour. Gandhi who was by then beginning to be politically active in India after

his year of political self-abnegation took up the issue and started an anti-indenture campaign. So did Annie Besant in Madras—the Province most affected—in the spring of 1917. By the end of May that year Gandhi had threatened to launch a Satyagraha movement against further recruitment. This pressure worked and on April 12, 1917, it was announced that the Defence of India Act would be invoked to stop recruitment—incidentally the unique occasion on which this particular Act was used to serve a good purpose.

But the possibility that the system might be revived after the War when the Defence of India Act lapsed remained and the need for agitation to be kept up was realised by the Congress and especially Gandhi. Andrews, on Gandhi's advice and with the full approval of Tagore, spent nearly a year in Fiji again to collect material to prove the evils inherent in the system. According to Dr. Sitaramayya, "He also greatly interested the women of Australia in the moral question involved, and gained strong support for the abolition of the indenture system. In March, 1918, he met Mr. Montagu at Delhi and was able to put before him the facts he had in his possession and to convince him that the system was altogether immoral."

The upshot of this continuous build up of opinion in India, in Britain and other parts of the world against the system of indenture was that in 1919 an announcement was made by the Indian Government not only that there would be no further recruitment of labour for indenture, but that all indentured labourers who had not completed their five years' term should be set free on January 1, 1920. This was a relatively small mercy. But combined with the seductive offer of clemency under the Royal Proclamation a week earlier, it was enough to earn the gratitude of Indian political leadership. It probably helped Gandhi in winning support for his argument for the acceptance of the Reforms Act in a constructive spirit. It also ensured that although there was much impatience reflected in some of the speeches and the cry of "How Long, O Lord, How long?" was heard at the Aitchison Park from Jitendralal Banerjee, not to mention calls for the impeachment of Chelmsford who had never bothered even to tour the Punjab after the shambles of the Martial Law, that the Amritsar session should end on a note of mild hopefulness.

But the hopefulness proved to be short-lived. Gandhi's success, such as it was, in persuading the Congress to adopt a positive approach to the Government of India Act was to turn out to be deceptive if not pyrrhic. The two crucial resolutions—the one on reforms and the plea on the Turkish and Khilafat question—were going to be bypassed by events and become virtually irrelevant. There were two time-bombs ticking away which had not been noticed or, if noticed, were ignored. They were to go off more or less simultaneously. The Amritsar Congress had referred to the fact that “neither the Hunter Committee nor the Congress commission” had completed its “examination of witnesses and issued its Report.” The report of the Congress Sub-Committee had been submitted to the Congress President as early as February 20, 1920, though it was not published until March 25. It had thus stolen a march over the Hunter Committee Report which was not published until May 28 although it had been completed more than two months earlier, possibly because the Government of India whose baby the Hunter Committee was, was more than a little embarrassed that the Committee had not been able to present a unanimous report but had divided on racial lines and submitted a majority and a minority report.

The divergence between the Majority and Minority reports of the Hunter Committee was not very wide, but it pivoted on a neuralgic issue—the issue whether the Martial Law was necessary at all and whether the manner in which it was administered and its duration could be considered justifiable. The British members of the Committee, although critical of Dyer's deeds at Amritsar, judged the Martial Law as necessary and did not think that it was unduly prolonged. The three Indian members of the Committee—Jagat Narayan, C.H. Setalvad and Sultan Ahmed—thought the exact opposite not only of what was done by Dyer to produce a “moral effect”, but the manner in which all over the Punjab there had been wholesale and indiscriminate arrests, floggings and other ad hoc humiliating forms of punishment. They felt that these acts merited much more severe criticism than their British colleagues were willing to countenance.

In India, of course, the Congress Inquiry Committee's report had already been available for nearly two months. In the light of the evidence it had produced—it had heard nearly 1700 witnesses and by going into rural areas of the districts most ruthlessly

treated—even the sharper critical tone of the Minority Report seemed rather timid and inadequate. But in England the *Times* was worried for another reason. Whilst it did not want to hear of “Swords of Honour on one side and of the Martyrs’ Memorial on the other,” it lamented that the Committee could not have had the services of a Chairman better versed “in the art of composing variations of opinion” who “might have succeeded in inducing his colleagues to present a unanimous report.”

This was a little unfair to Lord Hunter, but the worry of the *Times* leader-writer was understandable. In its despatch accompanying the two reports the Government of India as well as the reply which Montagu had sent to the Governor-General there was a distinct impression of agreeing with the Minority Report though in a much more diluted language. For example, the Government of India’s despatch admitted : “The administration of Martial Law in the Punjab was marred in particular instances by misuse of power, by irregularities and by injudicious and irresponsible acts.” As for the Jallianwala Bagh episode, it acknowledged that Dyer acted “beyond the necessity of the case, beyond what any reasonable man could have thought it to be necessary, and that he did not act with as much humanity as the case demanded.”

In the context this did not seem to be severe censure of either Dyer or the Punjab administration. In India it was felt that both were being allowed to get off lightly when the least that the British Government could do to assuage Indian feeling of hurt was to put both Dyer and O’Dwyer on trial. The latter in fact had been put on the Esher Committee to report on the future of the Indian Army. But a strong section of the Tory Party was up in arms against the enforced resignation of Dyer whom it regarded as the saviour of the Empire in India. *Sunday Sportsman*, reflecting the views of the very large body of rabid Tories, had written in vitriolic terms and said that an honourable soldier had been “told off” publicly by a party of “mugs to the huge delight of grinning niggers, whose great joy would be to murder every white man and rape every white woman, and who are only restrained from realising their pet ambition by a gentleman named Thomas Aitkin, who may be an absent-minded beggar, but is a pretty good fellow back of a Lewis-gun.” This Tory

pressure had succeeded in some measure and the Army Council had to reopen the case.

It was in an atmosphere charged with partisanship that the Punjab disturbances were debated in Parliament in July 1920, apparently on a "supply" motion. Montagu made a speech which was rather like the proverbial Curate's Egg, good in parts. But as Mafley, who was in the House when the debate took place, wrote to Chelmsford, "from the moment he [Montagu] began to speak I could feel antipathy to him sweeping all over the House." After all, again to quote Mafley, was "a British General to be downed at the bidding of a crooked Jew?" What he said, however, was perfectly just. He described Dyer's approach as "the doctrine of terrorism (Kenworthy: 'Prussianism')" and went on to add: "Were they going to keep their hold on India by terrorism, racial humiliation, and subordination and frightfulness, or were they going to rest it upon the goodwill and the growing goodwill of the people of the Indian Empire?" His whole argument turned on the question of the choice between two theories, one of subordination, the other of partnership. But this made little impact on the Tory ranks and, indeed, there were cries of "Bolshevism."

Curiously, it was Churchill, Minister of War at the time, who made the most telling speech which may well have won over some of the waverers to the Government side. "However they might dwell upon the difficulties of General Dyer during the Amritsar riots," he said, in effect, "one tremendous fact stood out—the slaughter of 400 persons and the wounding of probably three times as many at the Jallianwala Bagh on April 13—episode without precedent in the modern history of the British Empire." He almost paraphrased what the Congress Inquiry Committee, choosing its words very carefully, had said when it described Dyer's action as "a calculated piece of inhumanity... unparalleled for its terror in the history of the Modern British Empire." He pointed out that "the chief characteristic of an army, surely, was that it was armed. That crowd was unarmed." What he meant by frightfulness, he argued, was "the inflicting of a great slaughter or a massacre upon a particular crowd of people with the intention of terrorising not merely the rest of the crowd but the whole country." He could not, he said, admit that doctrine: "Frightfulness was not remedy known to the British pharmacopoeia."



"He did not wish to conceal from the House his sincere opinion," he continued, "that General Dyer's conduct deserved not only the loss of employment from which so many officers were suffering at the present time, not only a measure of censure which the Government had pronounced, but also that it should have been marked by a distinctly disciplinary act—namely, his being placed compulsorily on the retired list."

But even with this rather forceful speech by the Secretary of State for War who might have been expected to be indulgent towards a General, Dyer's supporters were able to muster an impressive tally—131 against 232 for the Government. Most of them, inevitably, were Tories—119 in all which was seventeen more Tories than the Government whips were able to shepherd into the "Ayes" lobby when the House divided. Thus the majority of the Unionists had voted for Dyer, though, it seems, seven coalition Liberals also did the same. So it was hardly surprising that the Government suffered a defeat when the matter was debated in the House of Lords later that month. The debate took place on July 19, 1920 on a motion in the name of Lord Finlay that "the House deplores the conduct of the case of General Dyer as unjust to that officer." Many of the peers from the backwoods had turned up and Finlay's motion was passed by 129 votes to 86.

The strong current of support for Dyer which the debates in the Commons and the House of Lords revealed was not calculated to accelerate the process of reconciliation between India and Britain which the Royal Proclamation was designed to promote. Coming after the fund raising to compensate Dyer for the loss of his employment and the singularly callous refusal by Montagu in his reply to the Government of India's despatch on the Hunter Committee Report to condemn aerial bombardment of civilian population in the Punjab and give assurances that it will not be repeated, it had seemed to Indians like rubbing salt into the wounds inflicted by the Martial Law atrocities. Simultaneously and parallel with these developments another neuralgic issue was coming to a head in the first half of 1920—the future of Turkey and the Khilafat.

On this question the Government of India was in great difficulty. It was aware of the strong feeling among the Indian Muslims about the Khilafat and the fate of their holy places of

which the ramshackle Ottoman Empire had been the custodian. It was also aware that Gandhi had been urging the Hindus and other communities to make common cause with their Muslim compatriots on this issue and was succeeding up to a point, despite some reluctance, if not opposition, of some Congress leaders like Tilak. Hitherto the strongest card in the British hands to maintain their hold over India had been the Muslim card. This card had been partly trumped by the Congress-League concordat negotiated in 1916. Now it was in danger of being made virtually useless. How useless had been demonstrated during the days leading up to the Martial Law in the Punjab and after which were witnessed remarkable scenes of fraternisation between the two major communities in the Punjab—and India generally.

But the Indian Government knew perfectly well that it was not in a position to retrieve the situation and persuade the Government in London to change its policy with regard to Turkey and the Khilafat. That policy was dictated by the great imperial design for the Near and the Middle East in the post-war period. That design included the establishment of strong Western imperialist bridgeheads in the Levant, the control of the entrance to the Black Sea (as part of the policy of containment of Soviet Russia), the returning of Thrace to Greece, the hiving off of Egypt in order to strengthen British overlordship over it, and the setting up of a series of tribal kingdoms in the Middle East dependent largely on Britain and at the times almost its pensioners.

The fear of an intensification of opposition to this design for the carve up of the Near and Middle East if the Ali Brothers and other Muslim leaders, like Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, were released, perhaps, was one of the reasons why their detention had been prolonged even after the War was over and despite the almost continuous prodding by Gandhi. However, it was impossible also to keep them under detention indefinitely without any excuse. For that, too, could lead to another set of difficulties for the Government, especially as it knew that the case for their detention even in war time had not been particularly convincing. Certainly, the Ali Brothers had vague Pan-Islamic sympathies. But they were very far from being flaming revolutionaries and the notion of their waging war against the King-Emperor was ludicrous. Mohamed Ali in an interview in London

in March 1920 was to declare that "if Turkey were to attack India, Indian Moslems will defend [India]," and revealed:

I myself was interned on the ground that I had sympathy with the King's enemies. As a matter of fact, the wire I sent to Talaat (Bey) was sent from Simla with Government money, and was written in the office of the head of C.I.D....It read as follows : Please think a thousand times before you enter the war and if you enter this war against England our position will be extremely sad. The Government should have used us as ambassadors to Turkey to influence her.

The Government's fear proved to be justified. After their release which was just in time to put in an appearance at the Amritsar session of the Congress and the Muslim League, the Ali Brothers had lost no time in taking up the Khilafat cause. They had arranged a conclave in Amritsar itself and it was decided to take a deputation to the Viceroy next month as soon as it could be arranged. Gandhi had agreed to be on the deputation. It included many of the influential leaders of the two communities. Apart from Gandhi, they were Hakim Ajmal Khan, the two Ali Brothers, Dr. M.A. Ansari, Maulanas Abdul Bari and Abul Kalam Azad, Madan Mohan Malaviya, Motilal Nehru, Saifuddin Kitchlew, Hasrat Mohani, Swami Shraddhanand, Rambhuj Dutt Choudhry, Syed Hasan Imam, Syed Zahur Ahmed (Secretary, Muslim League), Fazlul Haq and M.A. Jinnah.

The deputation saw Chelmsford on January 19 and Dr. Ansari read out the address which Gandhi had not particularly liked because, as he wrote to Maffey on January 18, he considered the presentation of the Khilafat case in the address "vague and in general terms, whereas at a critical moment like this, the statement should have been dignified, brief, precise, as unargumentative as possible, confining itself merely to bare facts and presenting the case from the highest platform and not from the platform of diplomacy." Curiously, however, Maffey did not agree with Gandhi's criticism of the address and wrote back that "it covers the ground very fully and I think they have exercised a wise discretion in excluding a presentation of claims on such an occasion."

The deputation, however, got little change from the Viceroy beyond sympathy with the feelings of Indian Muslims. He was in any case in no position to offer them anything else, least of all hopes of a change in the policy of the British Government. All he could say was that at the Paris Peace Conference "Montagu, two Indian representatives, Lord Sinha and the Maharaja of Bikaner, and an Indian Muslim deputation" were pressing their claims as he was doing himself in London. But this was cold comfort, especially as Chelmsford cautioned them that the Sultan and Turkey could not expect a differential treatment by the Peace Conference and that those who had drawn "the sword in the cause of Germany could not wholly escape the consequences" of their action. In vain did the deputation remind him of the pledges given by both Asquith and Lloyd George during the War.

The Khilafat supporters thought that the best thing to do was to send a deputation to Europe to put their case, though whether Gandhi hoped any good to come out of their venture is doubtful. A deputation consisting of Mohamed Ali, Syud Hossain and Saiyed Sulaiman Nadvi, head of the Shibli Academy, left for Europe where they arrived early in March. It was not altogether an auspicious beginning. For they were held up by a railway strike while en route from Venice to Paris. But they were able to reach London just in time to attend a debate in the House of Commons on the future of Constantinople (now Istanbul). For the next two months or more the deputation, with the help of the British Committee of the Indian National Congress and other radical organisations, were to carry on intensive publicity for the Khilafat cause. They were received by Lloyd George, accompanied by H.A.L. Fisher. According to a British observer, the case made for the Khilafat "was very muddled...and made more so by Mohamed Ali's rather bald presentation." One can well believe that, Mohamed Ali, though an earthy popular speaker, was not exactly a Demosthenes in debate. But Lloyd George, for all his Welsh rhetorical talent, was by no means exactly a well instructed and informed Prime Minister. Moreover, he was not willing to make any effort to understand what the Khilafat deputation wanted to say. He trailed quite a few red herrings across the discussion and asked the younger Ali, for instance, whether his support of the inviolability of the

Ottoman Empire meant that he (Mohamed Ali) was opposed to the independence of Arabia. This was a trick question and Mohamed Ali, rather ingenuously, answered, "Yes", but added that within the Ottoman Empire there would be "opportunities of autonomous development."

The Khilafat deputation did not confine its work of propaganda and persuasion only to Britain, though its main effort was concentrated there. It also visited Rome and Paris. It was in Paris on two occasions at least, first, early in May and then again in July. On the first occasion it tried to see Millerand but could not because Millerand was in San Remo, but was able to see the head of the "Asiatic" Department at the Quai d'Orsay. It also addressed a meeting at the Salle Hoche organised by the *Comite de Defense des Interests Francais en Turquie* at which a former French Finance Minister, Jules Roche, presided. It was a well attended meeting, with representatives of Turkey and countries of the *Maghreb* present and even, apparently, Muslims from Egypt, China and Russia. In July again, when Mohamed Ali and Syud Hossain were in Paris, they addressed a meeting at the Salle Wagram.

However, by then it was already too late and the French, though they were discontented with the share of the spoils in the Near and Middle East which they had been given, were not in a position to pull the Khilafat's chestnuts out of the fire even if they wanted to and there was no reason to believe that they wanted to beyond using the Muslim card to further their own interests and secure a larger share of the cake that was going round for the asking after the carve up of the Ottoman Empire. The terms of the peace treaty with Turkey—the Treaty of Sevres—were published and they left the Sultan of Turkey with very little apart from Constantinople as the capital of a truncated and moth-eaten state. Even the Port of Constantinople was to be declared an "international" port together with several others, like Alexandretta, Smyrna and Trebizond, with a "free zone" around it. Eastern Thrace was ceded to Greece and Turkey was to renounce several islands in the Aegean. Syria, Mesopotamia and Palestine were to be nominally independent but in effect under the rule of Mandatory Powers. In case of Syria—and Cilicia—the mandate was given to France whose protectorate over Tunisia and Morocco Turkey was made to recognize *de jure*. The mandate on Palestine,

including Jerusalem, was assigned to Britain thus paving the way for the eventual creation of the Zionist State of Israel. There were other harsh terms embodied in the Treaty of Sevres, but symbolically most galling was that the Sultan was to cease to be the warden of the Muslim holy places, including Mecca and Medina which were to pass under the authority of the King of Hedjaz (modern Saudi Arabia). Thus the Khilafat was for all practical purposes defunct.

It was a Draconian peace treaty imposed by the victors on Turkey. The shock to the Indian Muslim opinion was all the greater because with a naivety beyond belief they had entertained hopes that the Allies would let Turkey off lightly. Even as late as the end of April, as Gandhi was to tell his readers in *Young India*, he had received a rather optimistic cable from Mohamed Ali saying that "unlike as in England his deputation is receiving much support from the French Government and the people." Indeed, hope of the Treaty being revised under public pressure remained alive in many an Indian Muslim's breast even after its terms had been published simply because Montagu had described it as "a monstrous peace." But he was doing that partly to shrug off his own responsibility in the matter and to let the Indian Muslims know that he had done all he could to save what he could of the Khilafat at Paris Peace Conference and they had better not make too much fuss about it.

This was also made clear to them in the message by the Viceroy published in *Gazette of India Extraordinary* simultaneously with a summary of the Treaty of Sevres on May 14. It was a mealy-mouthed and rather hypocritical message, claiming that the decisions taken by the Supreme Council of the Allies in respect of the peace settlement with Turkey "are in full accordance with the high principles which have been applied in the peace settlement with all other powers lately at war with Britain and her Allies." As a sop to Muslim sentiment, however, he admitted that the Treaty included "terms which I fear must be painful to all Muslims" and added that in the "hour of their trial" he desired to send them "a message of encouragement and sympathy" which he trusted would uphold them. In other words, they were to grin and bear it. In fact, more. He was confident that "with the conclusion of this new treaty that friendship will quickly take life again and a Turkey regenerate, full

of hope and strength, will stand forth in the future as in the past, a pillar of Islamic faith." He trusted that this thought would "strengthen them to accept the peace terms with resignation, courage and fortitude and to keep their loyalty towards the Crown bright and untarnished as it has been for so many generations." The message ended with the words: God save the King Emperor.

Gandhi was as deeply upset and shocked as the most ardent supporters of Khilafat in India or elsewhere. And, perhaps, for two reasons. His faith in the British sense of fairness and justice had been shaken badly by the conduct of the British Government in the previous two years, but it still lingered and he did not think that the pledges so solemnly given by both Asquith and Lloyd George, as he had interpreted their words, would be so wantonly broken. He seemed still to be hovering between trust in Britain's promises and disenchantment. Secondly, he had identified himself completely with the Khilafat cause as practically everything he wrote in the six months between December 1919 and May 1920 indicates. He knew that many of his Hindu friends, both within the Congress and outside it, were extremely doubtful of the wisdom of the stand he had taken on what was, according to them, a purely confessional concern as indeed it seemed to be with most Indian Muslims who have never been fortunate in their choice of causes to espouse in our times.

Certainly, as a profoundly religious man, and therefore sensitive to other people's religious susceptibilities, he sympathised with the feelings of the Muslims on the Khilafat question and even shared them. However, as he was again and again to stress in his letters and articles on the subject, it was also a question of justice which he was convinced was on the side of the Muslims. "On the Khilafat question" he wrote in *Young India* of April 28, 1920, "I refuse to be a party to a broken pledge." This stand was at least consistent with the code of conduct he had set himself and which by and large he was to observe throughout his political life even when it seemed liable to earn him great unpopularity.

British historians of the period, whether belonging to the old imperialist school or the contemporary neo-colonialist vintage, take a very different view of his commitment to the Khilafat cause. They are inclined to see in it a wily stratagem on his part to achieve two objects at the same time: to establish

himself as an all-India leader whose constituency straddled both the major communities and bring the Muslims into the mainstream of Congress politics and thus vitiate the tacit alliance between the Raj and the Muslims which had been the central element in the British policy of *divide et impera* ever since Clive.

Such opportunism would, of course, be perfectly in order in terms of *real politik*. But the only flaw in this theory is that, on their own showing, quite a number of Hindu Congress leaders—and some among them men of great influence and power, like Tilak and Madan Mohan Malaviya—were very lukewarm if not actually hostile to Gandhi's fervent support of the Muslims on the Khilafat question which went to the extent of his arguing that it was a more important issue than the Reforms and must have priority over it. An even more bizarre theory explaining Gandhi's motivation during this critical period has been spun by Dr. Judith Brown with her characteristic ingeniousness. She suggests that Gandhi saw in the Punjab crisis "a counterpoise to the Khilafat." In June 1920 he launched it "as a well-timed Hindu counterpoise to Muslim concern for the Khilafat." It is not very clear what she means or implies. But on the face of it, the intention seems to be to make out that Gandhi was engaged in some kind of a balancing manoeuvre between the Hindus and the Muslims—an argument which would command willing suspension of disbelief if it could be proved that Dyer's bullets only hit the Hindus and before the floggings were inflicted on all and sundry the confessional identity of the victim was established by some litmus test and the Muslims were spared the treatment.

However, these sophisticated defence mechanisms for not facing reality apart, it is arguable that the Khilafat cause was not an historically and politically viable cause for Gandhi and the Congress to make their own; that the Indian Muslims and Muslims generally, not for the first or the last time, were being moved by their confessional nostalgia into identifying themselves with an obsolescent institution which could not possibly survive as indeed was shown soon enough when Mustafa Kamal—who, incidentally, had been sentenced to death together with his associates by an extraordinary court-martial on the very morrow of the publication of the terms of the "Peace" Treaty with Turkey—gave it a *coup de grace* and tried, and partially succeeded, in



constructing a modern secular polity on the shabby ruins of the Ottoman Empire, and the Khilafat, or Caliphate.

This is a valid argument, but only up to a point and considered in isolation from the wider context. For the fact is that the Supreme Council of the Allies in imposing a punitive peace settlement upon Turkey was not guided by the desire to hasten the death of a medieval and obscurantist state structure and release forces which could bring about the regeneration of Turkey and pull her by scruff of her neck into the mainstream of modern political life. This was not anything remotely in its mind any more than it was in the mind of Il Duce who let loose his legions in Abyssinia in the 1930s and whose air force was to drop bombs upon the Ethiopian population so that it could witness the spectacle of human flesh "opening up like a rose" (as Mussolini Junior was to describe the scene after a bombing sortie), though some Western radicals thought so at the time, including, unhappily, George Bernard Shaw. In fact, the allies were motivated by wholly imperialistic aims, the principal among them being the creation of a number of subservient reactionary feudalities in a strategically and economically vital region to shore up and perpetuate their control over it.

Gandhi was not unaware of this purpose. Indeed, he could not have remained unaware. For quite a number of his correspondents—some of them British, including a few who had been associated with him during his South African struggle—wrote to him chiding him for standing up for a thoroughly reactionary regime in Turkey whose record of oppression and inequities against its subject nationalities they quoted with evident relish. The language of anti-imperialism did not come automatically to him at the time and he formulated his answers to their arguments in his own somewhat confusing language. But the essential thrust of his counter-arguments cannot be mistaken and connects with the anti-imperialist logic. An Englishman, for instance, wrote to him that "a temporal sovereignty which violated the principles of self-determination" could not be upheld and went on to say:

The non-Turkish Mohammedan subjects of the Sultan in general wanted to get rid of his rule. It is the Indian Mohammedans who have no experience of that rule who want to

impose it on others. As a matter of fact the idea of any restoration of Turkish rule in Syria or Arabia seems so remote from all possibilities that to discuss it seems like discussing a restoration of the Holy Roman Empire. I cannot conceive what series of events could bring it about.

The point was well made within its own premise. But the premise seemed to Gandhi to be wrong. He published a long extract from his English correspondent's letter in *Young India* of May 12, 1920—that is two days before the details of the Treaty were public property. He answered it at some length beginning with words of praise for his correspondent. "It is a typical letter," he said, "sober, honest, to the point, and put in such graceful language that whilst it challenges you, it commands your respect by its very gracefulness." But the writer, he added, "has built up a convincing argument on imaginary data."

He pointed out that the Mohammedans "have never asked for Turkish rule in Arabia. . . . On the contrary, they have said that they have no intention of resisting Arabian self-government. . . . They want the Khalifa's control over the Holy places of Islam. In other words they ask for nothing more than what was guaranteed by Mr. Lloyd George (in his speech of January 5, 1918, and on the strength of which guarantee Mohammedan soldiers split their blood on behalf of the Allied Powers. All the elaborate argument therefore and the cogent reasoning of the above extract fall to pieces based as they are upon a case that has never existed. I have thrown myself heart and soul into this question because British pledges, abstract justice and religious sentiment coincide. I can conceive the possibility of a blind and fanatical religious sentiment existing in opposition to pure justice. I should then resist the former and fight for the latter."

He was certainly presenting the case for Khilafat better than its perservid supporters were doing, or capable of doing, in India and elsewhere. He was able to do so precisely because he had given the matter much serious thought; indeed, he had become so preoccupied with it that it figured even in his dreams as we learn from his letter to Saraladevi Choudhurani written on April 30 while he was still thinking of going to England to plead the Khilafat cause with the British authorities (as we know, he had sought the Viceroy's permission and Montagu's approval

of his trip) though the idea was eventually dropped and the passage to England cancelled. It was certainly not taken up in a fit of political opportunism as a convenient stick with which to belabour the British Government or as a facile trick for conjuring up Hindu-Muslim unity as his critics suggested at the time and as an influential body of British historians of the Raj continue in varying ways to insinuate.

He may not have seen the many pitfalls which are obvious in the hindsight, but in the context of the time and season it was not so easy to detect them. What is more, some political lead had to be given over a question which was agitating the minds and hearts of a substantial segment of Indian humanity and, intuitively, Gandhi sensed the need for standing up and being counted as a supporter of the Khilafat cause when so many other leaders were carefully weighing the pros and cons or being held back by other inhibitions. A generous impulse underlay his decision, but the decision itself was reached after much deliberation and he was by no means carried away by an emotional spasm and was in fact much more cautious in chalking out a course of action than he had been before launching his satyagraha over the Rowlatt legislation.

It is pertinent to recall that two days before the publication of the terms of the Treaty of "Peace" with Turkey at a meeting of the All-India Khilafat Committee held in Bombay, with Haji Mian Mohamed Chotani as the President, it was unanimously decided "to adopt and work a full non-cooperation programme as recommended by the sub-committee consisting of Messrs Chotani, Gandhi, Abul Kalam Azad and Shaukat Ali." Even so the first press statement he issued after the terms were published, while admitting that they were "a staggering blow to the Indian Mussulmans," was the soul of caution and even some degree of *Cowatism*. "I hope," he said, "that the Mohammedans will not lose self-control nor give way to despair. Given an adequate measure of intelligent self-sacrifice, I have no doubt that it is possible to secure justice. There is no sacred character about the peace terms. They are capable of being revised."

They were certainly capable of being revised, but in suggesting, even if by implication, that they might be revised, he was being oversanguine. But, presumably, he was anxious for the

Indian Muslims not to take any precipitate action that might lead to violence. "I am convinced," he added "that non-cooperation is the only effective remedy both for avoiding violence and for healing the wound inflicted on Mohammedan India." He, therefore, wanted the Khilafat Committee to "call immediately a joint conference of Hindus and Mohammedans to consider the steps to be taken with a view to concerted action being taken for securing a revision of the terms in consistence with the pledged word of British ministers and the known religious sentiment of Indian Mussulmans." This was the line which he continued to take over the next few weeks in everything he wrote or said on the Khilafat theme.

Meanwhile, however, the other time-bomb that had been ticking away had gone off—the publication of the Hunter Committee report together with the Government of India's despatch to the Secretary of State for India and the latter's reply to it. When the Committee had been appointed and even when the Government had rushed in with the Indemnity Bill, Gandhi had taken a complacent, even complaisant view, of the affair. However, the manner in which the Government and the Committee had refused to meet even the minimal conditions set by the Congress for its cooperation in the enquiry into the Punjab "Disturbances" had disillusioned him long ago. The disillusionment was only deepened by the Majority Report of the Hunter Committee and the accompanying gloss by the Government of India and Montagu. While he described the Minority Report as "an oasis in a desert" and congratulated the three Indian members who had the courage of their dissent, he was scathing about the Majority version. Under the heading "Political Freemasonry," he wrote in *Young India* of June 9, 1920:

Freemasonry is a secret brotherhood which has, more by its secret and iron rules than by its service to humanity, obtained a hold upon some of the best minds. Similarly there seems to be some secret code of conduct governing the official class in India before which the flower of the great British nation fall prostrate and unconsciously become instruments of injustice which as private individuals they would be ashamed of perpetrating. In no other way is it possible for

one to understand the majority report of the Hunter Committee, the despatch of the Government of India and the reply thereto of the Secretary of State for India.

He was sharply critical of the way the Committee had gone about its task. After referring to "the special pleading introduced to defend General Dyer even against himself" and "the vain glorification of Sir Michael O'Dwyer although it was his spirit that actuated every act of criminality on the part of the subordinates" and "the deliberate refusal to examine his wild career before the events of April," he wrote:

Instead of accepting everything that the officials had to say, the Committee's obvious duty was to tax itself to find out the real cause of the disorders. It ought to have gone out of its way to search out the inwardness of the events. Instead of patiently going behind the hard crust of official documents, the Committee allowed itself to be guided with criminal laziness by mere official evidence. The report and the despatches, in my humble opinion, constitute an attempt to condone official lawlessness.

For Gandhi this was harsh language to use. But he was really upset by what he called "the cautions and half-hearted condemnation pronounced upon General Dyer's massacre and the notorious crawling order" and regarded the whole Majority verdict as "page after page of thinly disguised official whitewash." How then, he asked, were they "to break down this secret—be the secrecy ever so unconscious—conspiracy to uphold official iniquity?" For, he maintained, "a scandal of this magnitude cannot be tolerated by the nation, if it is to preserve its self-respect . . . : In my opinion the time has arrived when we must cease to rely upon mere petitions to Parliament for effective action. Petitions will have value, when the nation has behind it the power to enforce its will. What power then have we?"

He answered his own question by ruling out armed rebellion. "I do not believe in armed risings," he said. "They are a remedy worse than the disease sought to be cured. They are a token of the spirit of revenge and impatience and anger." And he cited the example of the Allied powers who, while waging war

against the Germans, had become "like the Germans, as the latter have been depicted to us by them." We have a better method," he claimed. "This method is to refuse to be party to the wrong. . . . India has the choice before her now." And what was the choice? "Appeal to the Parliament by all means if necessary," he concluded. "But if the Parliament fails us and if we are worthy to call ourselves a nation, we must refuse to uphold the Government by withdrawing co-operation from it."

If this was how Gandhi felt about what he considered to be an exercise in thinly disguised whitewash, it is not difficult to imagine how the rest of India felt. Even the Moderates were deeply disturbed, partly because the Hunter Committee Majority report seemed to cut the ground from under their feet. The Congress leadership was incensed, judging from the reaction of the man who had presided over the Amritsar session and had thrown his weight on the side of caution and a positive response to the new Government of India Act—Motilal Nehru. A man not easily given to being swept away by political emotion, as his son has testified, he happened to be in Arrah in connection with some case in which he was appearing—incidentally C.R. Das, it seems, was appearing on the other side—when the Report was published. He wrote to Jawaharlal on the very morrow in a mood of anger. "I have carefully read the A.P. summary of the Hunter Committee Report and that of the Govt. Resolutions," he said. "They are most astounding documents. We must not allow the grass to grow under our feet." He told him that Gandhiji would be arriving at Benaras for the All-India Congress Committee meeting that had been called there on May 29; that Malaviya was already there; and that he had sent out his "Whip in the shape of a press telegram to the principal papers calling upon all members to attend."

After telling him that he had better stay with him at Mrs. Gyanendra's, he instructed him to "bring the whole file of the Amritsar Conspiracy case" though he was afraid that "the resolution passed at the Jallianwala Bagh meeting of the 13th April is not there." He added:

Please look for the file prepared for the Privy Council which was received by me at Lahore from the Legal Remembrancer. That file is likely to contain at least a complete list of the

papers on the file. I am wiring to Santanam also in case the file is with him. If we cannot get hold of the resolutions we must call upon Jagatnarain [presumably, one of the signatories of the Minority Report] to make a public statement. This is not a matter to be treated as private. *My blood is boiling ever since I read the summaries you have sent. We must hold a Special Congress now and raise a veritable hell for the rascals* [emphasis added].

Indeed, that was the main decision taken at the meeting of the A.I.C.C. held at Benaras on May 29-30. It was only the second time since its foundation that the Congress had felt the need of holding a "Special" Congress in between its successive annual sessions, the first Special Congress having been held at Bombay at the end of August 1918. Gandhi was present at the Benaras meeting which decided that the venue of the Special Congress be Calcutta which already held the well-merited record of hosting the annual sessions seven times before. Most of the leading A.I.C.C. members who took part at its Benaras gathering went straight from it to attend the joint Hindu-Muslim Conference held at Allahabad on June 1-2, followed by a meeting of the All-India Central Khilafat Committee the next day. Gandhi addressed the meeting of the Khilafat Committee. It was a "solemn speech" and "was listened to in perfect silence" as the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* reported.

It was also a cautious speech. In contrast to his rather hasty decision to launch the Satyagraha movement against the Rowlatt legislation, he seemed to be anxious to hasten slowly and methodically towards the second non-violent combat. According to the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, he said "he knew full well that Muslims realized that non-co-operation was the only remedy now left to India" in a war which he saw as one "between false Christianity and Islam." They wanted to win the war with "moral force. The course that the movement of non-co-operation should pursue would be graduated in four stages. ... His Excellency the Viceroy should be approached and given notice of one month to see that the Turkish peace terms were revised in conformity with Moslem demands, and, in case it was not done, to resign and join the movement of non-co-operation. After a month he first stage would be put into operation."

He did not favour boycott of British goods and instead suggested they should adopt swadeshi. Above all he wanted them to avoid violence "in any shape or form," and he proposed that "a committee consisting of members prepared to remain with him and invested with full powers be appointed to work out the scheme, whose decisions would be binding on all people." In other words, he wanted nothing to be left to chance or ad hoc decisions of local leadership as on the previous occasion, but wanted a general staff or decision-making and planning group to work out the strategy of his war to be waged, not with guns, but "moral force."

Thus the two strong current of political discontent, one connecting with Britain's imperialist international policy and bearing on the post-war carve up of the Near and Middle East, the other directly related to the system of governance of India, which had been running parallel during the closing phase of World War I and had tended to converge throughout 1919 till, largely under Gandhi's influence, the Congress officially adopted the Khilafat cause at its Amritsar session, found their point of confluence at Allahabad where the waters of the Ganga and the Yamuna flow into each other. Whether those who thought of holding the joint Hindu-Muslim Conference at Allahabad at the beginning of June 1920 had this symbolism in mind is hard to say. But it could not be missed even though, unlike the merging of the two great rivers of India, this confluence was to prove transitory.

Much has been made of the reservations, implicit or explicit, which some of the prominent Hindu leaders of the Congress, like Tilak, had over the Congress getting mixed up with the Khilafat question. Ms. Judith Brown in her *Gandhi's Rise to Power* harps a great deal on these reservations as she does on the differences among the Muslim leadership itself some of whom were extremely lukewarm about a policy which might lead the Muslim community into a disastrous confrontation with the Government and spell economic ruin for it. Undoubtedly, these reservations were operative as inhibitive factors. What is more the Government played on them as hard as it could and tried to mobilize its allies, the big landlords, the businessmen, and the rulers of the princely Muslim states, as a countervailing force. It is pertinent



in this connection to recall that on May 21, the Nizam of Hyderabad issued an ukase or firman prohibiting his subjects from participating in the Khilafat movement.

It is also true that the Muslim Khilafat leaders had some difficulty in accepting Gandhi's creed of non-violence though, paradoxically, the Indian Muslims throughout the period of the struggle for Indian independence were allergic to the cult of the bomb as a political weapon. Moreover, while they were willing to abide by it as a matter of policy they were not quite on the same creedal wavelength as Gandhi except a few individuals. As Jawaharlal Nehru has recorded in his autobiography:

There were long talks with the Moulvies and the Ulemas, and non-violence and non-co-operation were discussed, especially non-violence. Gandhiji told them that he was theirs to command, but on the definite understanding that they accepted non-violence with all its implications. There was to be no weakening on that, no temporizing, no mental reservations. It was not easy for the Moulvies [Muslim clerics] to grasp this idea, but they agreed, making it clear that they did so as a policy only and not as a creed, for their religion did not prohibit the use of violence in a righteous cause.

But for the time being this basic difference of approach made little difference to the acceptance of Gandhi's guidance and command by the Khilafat leadership. As an intelligence assessment made early in May 1920 bemoaned:

The association of Gandhi with any movement is a great asset, because his name is one to conjure with among the ignorant masses. Hence Shaukat Ali and his disciples claim Gandhi as their *guru* and profess to be guided entirely by his advice. . . . Using the glamour of Gandhi's name and their own weapon of religious fanaticism, the most ardent and revolutionary Pan-Islamist can work at this scheme, knowing that from passive to active resistance is but a step. Gandhi, in order to lead, has to follow; at most, he can but hope to be a brake on progress.

This was rather a neat formulation. But the Government was beginning to be really concerned, and the concern increased as the two movements seemed to coalesce, or at least become mutually sustaining. The concern was all the greater because the Government had assumed that the "loyalist" conditioned reflexes of the Muslims had struck deep roots over the years, and especially during the war years. Its own reflexive reaction was to look to its arsenal of instruments of repression and get ready to use them. Symptomatic of its jitteriness was an externment order which the police served on Jawaharlal Nehru who had accompanied his mother, Kamala Nehru and his two sisters to Mussoorie about the middle of May. Kamala Nehru was seriously ill and Mrs Swarup Rani Nehru was keeping indifferent health and the doctors had advised change of climate. They were putting up at the Savoy Hotel where, it so happened, an Afghan delegation was staying at the same time. The authorities saw in this coincidence some deep-laid plan by the young Nehru and the Congress, on the one hand, and the Afghans, on the other, to hatch a conspiracy to overthrow the Indian Government. Jawaharlal Nehru was asked to give a "positive undertaking" not "to see or have any communication with the Afghan delegates."

This he had refused to do. Not because he had any "intention whatever of seeing the Afghans or having any communication with them," but because, as he explained in a letter to a certain M.L. Oakes, Superintendent of Police, Dehra Dun, "I utterly dislike the idea of binding myself down to any course of action at the instance of the Government, even though such action may not prove irksome." It was, he added, "really a question of principle or conscience." So, the next day—May 16—he was duly served with the order to leave Mussoorie "and not to enter, reside or remain, in any area within the limits of the district of Dehra Dun" because the Local Government had "reasonable grounds for believing that Jowahirlal Nehru [sic] is acting or about to act in a manner prejudicial to public safety."

Eventually, after an exchange of letters between Motilal Nehru and the Lieutenant-Governor of the United Provinces, Sir Harcourt Butler, who had been on the most friendly terms with the Nehru family for thirty years, the order issued under the Defence of India (Consolidation) Rules (1915), was withdrawn. But others were less lucky than Jawaharlal Nehru though his

"luck" was also soon to run out. In a piece entitled "Insanity" in *Young India* of May 26, Gandhi had quoted reports of what was happening in Sind, then a part of the Bombay Presidency. He had written how "some respectable men connected with the Khilafat movement were sent to jail" and "a respectable Zemindar (landholder) was whipped by the Deputy Commissioner within closed doors...without any cause whatsoever." He had described such acts as "the very height of midsummer madness."

However, there was evidence of divided councils within the Congress which could only encourage the authorities to believe that they would be able to cope with any challenge. Tilak, who had attended the Benaras A.I.C.C. meeting had, for instance, not taken part in the joint Hindu-Muslim Conference at Allahabad though Shaikat Ali had personally appealed to him to attend it. According to Tilak's biographer Dhananjay Keer, he "told him that he would not attend any meeting except that of the Congress to decide questions of national policy...that his idea was that Muslims themselves should take the initiative in the matter, and it was for the Hindus to support them in whatever decision they would arrive at." But this was rather disingenuous. The truth, perhaps, was that his heart was not in the Khilafat movement which appeared to him to be an off-beat, if not dubious, cause, historically untenable.

But then, maybe, ever since his return from England at the end of November 1919 his heart had not been really in anything at all. The injustice of the dismissal of his libel suit against Valentine Chirol had hurt him deeply although, like the burden of other disappointments and frustrations in his public and private life, he had suffered it courageously and almost uncomplainingly. But coming at a time when his physical and psychological reserves were at a low ebb, it told more than he was willing to admit even to himself. It perhaps accounted for that nervous irritability that led him into gratuitous polemics in the spring and early summer of 1920 which could easily have been avoided because often the bitter arguments arose not because of anything Tilak had said or done, but were occasioned by the acts and words of some of his less intelligent followers. This, for instance, was the case when Annie Besant protested that

Khaparde, not renowned for a civil tongue or delicacy of expression, had called her Putana, the *Rakshasi* who conspired to murder Krishna.

It would have been both chivalrous and politic for Tilak not to get involved in this kind of low and unseemly polemics. But he did not resist the temptation to reply to Annie Besant and in terms which did not improve the tone of the exchanges. So much so that Gandhi was moved to complain to Tilak "for stigmatising Mrs. Besant as Putana and told him that she was doing her work in her own way honestly." Tilak continued to stick to his guns and said that "Putana also did it honestly in her way to kill Krishna"—which was fair enough as a debating point but not particularly edifying in the context. It is even possible to detect in his reaction to Gandhi's protest a sense of irritation with Gandhi whose habit of mixing politics with morality and even "theology" jarred on him so that on a public occasion—at a meeting of the Provincial Congress Committee in Bombay where the votes were being counted and there had been complaints of irregularities, according to Keer—he exclaimed: "What has morality got to do with politics?"

Keer in his *Lokmanya Tilak* suggests that during this phase of his life "the shrewd politician in Tilak" had realised that "the needs of the society, the mood of the people, and the methods of the freedom struggle coming up with the emergence of Gandhi in Indian politics, were changing fast. So he told Khadilkar (K.P.) that he would not accept the presidentship of the Congress session at Calcutta.... Tilak sometimes said that he wanted to hand over charge to someone...." This was probably true, but only up to a point. For he seemed to be in two minds and much of what he said during the last phase of his life tended to be characterised by a peculiar ambivalence.

Thus he was fully aware that the Congress represented the mainstream of Indian politics and no party which wanted to be effective in India could separate itself from that mainstream, much less run counter to it. At the same time he always wanted a party of his own and, as it were, tailored to suit his own personality. Earlier he had founded his Home Rule League for this purpose, and on April 20, 1920, he published the Manifesto of the Congress Democratic Party which he intended to found. It is a remarkable document in many ways, embodying

a comprehensive political, economic and social programme which partly foreshadows the Declaration adopted by the Congress eleven years later at its Karachi session. It is possible to discern in it the influence of his recent stay in England for more than a year and, in particular, the impression which the British Labour Party made on his mind. He conceived of it, however, as functioning within the Congress or as an auxiliary to it, not apart from it. At the very outset, the Manifesto declared:

The Congress-Democratic Party, as the name denotes, is a party animated by feelings of unswerving loyalty to the Congress and faith in Democracy. It believes in the potency of democratic doctrines for the solution of Indian problems, and regards the extension of education and political franchise as two of its best weapons. It advocates the removal of all civic, secular, or social disabilities based on caste or customs. It believes in religious toleration, the sacredness of one's religion to oneself and the right and duty of the state to protect it against aggression.

The Manifesto then went on to paraphrase, but in concrete terms, the broad policy aims of the Congress by declaring that the party "believes in the integration or federation of India in the British Commonwealth for the advancement of the cause of humanity and the brotherhood of mankind, but demands autonomy for India and equal status as a sister-State with every partner in the British Commonwealth, including Great Britain." In other words, Tilak was anticipating the Statute of Westminster which came a few years later, and already claiming for India that theoretically plenary equality encapsulated in the phrase "in no way subordinate" which it conceded to the White Dominions. His Manifesto made this clear beyond all doubt by asserting "the fitness of India for Representative and Responsible Government" and claiming "for the people of India, on the principle of self-determination, the exclusive right of fashioning the form of government and determining the most appropriate constitution for India."

As for the stand of Tilak's prospective party on the Reforms, the Manifesto, like the resolutions passed at the Amritsar session of the Congress, found the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms (it

called them Montagu Reforms, dropping Chelmsford's name, possibly deliberately) "inadequate, unsatisfactory and disappointing." But nevertheless, like the Congress, the Party-to-be agreed to work them, adding that the party would "strive to remedy the defect by introducing, with the aid of the members of the Labour Party and other sympathisers in the British Parliament, at the earliest opportunity, a new Reform Bill for establishing full responsible Government in India, including full military control, and full fiscal freedom, and an exhaustive declaration of Rights with constitutional guarantees."

More. It promised active international propaganda to press forward Indian claims. "To achieve this object," the Manifesto said, "it [that is, the Congress-Democratic Party] contemplates and recommends a resolute and energetic campaign in India and in the countries represented on the League of Nations. In this matter the party's watchword will be 'Educate, Agitate and Organize.'" This formulation has a very modern ring and, indeed, Tilak was one of the first leaders who recognised the need for a systematic and organised publicity campaign for the national demands, both at home and abroad. Certainly, one of the reasons why he wanted to set forth for England at the age of sixty-four, he told V.J. Patel, was to set up an Indian Information Bureau in London. And not only in London, but also eventually in Paris, New York and Tokyo. As his biographer, Keer, tells us, he had also an idea of setting up an Indian News Agency for the dissemination of information about what was really happening in India worldwide. Nobody had yet heard of or even coined the phrase "New Information Order," but that did not mean that the need for breaking through the wall of disinformation built up by the Western news agencies, which were even more of propaganda instruments than they are today, was not felt by leaders of the freedom struggle of countries under imperialist domination. Tilak certainly felt it strongly and was seriously planning to do something about it.

But, unhappily, it was all too late. Tilak had an abiding interest in the stars in their courses. After all he had, at least to his own satisfaction, established the antiquity of the *Vedas* by a piece of astronomical detail concerning the position of a stellar body mentioned in one of the sacred texts. Indeed, early in 1920, according to Keer, he was engaged in work which he had started

years earlier—the reform of the Hindu Calendar. On February 16, 1920, he had actually presided over the Astronomical Conference held at Sangli. However, knowledge of Astronomy, or even Astrology, enables no man or woman either to determine with any precision the terminal point of his or her own life-span. Death comes always as something of an ambushade. Certainly, Tilak, on an earlier occasion as already related, had said that he did not expect to live beyond the age of 63. But he had exceeded that limit. For he was going to be sixty-four in July 1920.

He was to celebrate, if that is the appropriate term in the context, his sixty-fourth birthday in bed—ill—in Bombay. He had come there on July 12 to follow the closing stages of one of those complicated adoption-cum-property cases which go on for years—the Tai Maharaj Case. It had gone on for almost two decades, and though Tilak was not directly a party involved in it, he was passionately committed to one of the parties—Jagannath Maharaj whom he regarded as his “third son.” While in Bombay, waiting for the judgement to be given by the High Court, he met Gandhi and Shaikat Ali. The meeting must have been either on July 12 or 13. For Gandhi was to leave for the Punjab on the 13th and actually addressed a meeting at Jalandhar on July 15.

The main topic at their meeting must have been the Khilafat movement. Gandhi in the *Reminiscences and Anecdotes about Lokamanya Tilak*, Vol. I., giving his version of their talk, recalled:

About Hindus and Mussalmans, he [Tilak] said to the Maulana, “I will sign anything that Gandhi suggests, because I have full faith in him on the question.” About non-co-operation, he significantly repeated to me what he had said to me before. “I like the programme well enough, but I have my doubts as to the country being with us in the self-denying ordinance which non-co-operation presents to the people. I will do nothing to hinder the progress of the movement. I wish you every success, and if you gain the popular ear, you will find in me an enthusiastic supporter.” Tilak added that if the Muslims boycotted the council he and his party would follow suit.

This can scarcely be described as enthusiastic promise of

support. Keer in his book goes on to complete what Tilak said to Gandhi at their last talk. Apparently he also said: "I consider an armed revolt also constitutional." Only he did not think that there was an even four anna in a rupee, or twenty-five per cent, chance of success of an armed revolt for which the country was not prepared. His support of Gandhian non-violence, which he traced to the Jain influence on Gandhi's thinking, was thus for want of any alternative practical strategy or, as it were, *faute de mieux*. And he seems to have remained till the end even more sceptical about the Khilafat movement which he believed the Hindu leaders were supporting for opportunistic reasons—to secure Muslim backing for the national struggle. This was more than a little unfair to Gandhi whatever may be true of some other Hindu leaders. But Tilak had a valid point when he said: "Never seek to introduce theology into our politics."

As far as he himself was concerned these differences on political and social issues had now only an academic meaning. On July 20 he went for a long drive with Diwan Chaman Lall, at the time working as Assistant Editor of the *Bombay Chronicle*, and a man of much charm and considerable literary and political talent, and a brilliant speaker in English. When Tilak returned from the outing he was feverish and went to bed. At first the doctors—Dr. D.D. Sathye and Dr. Gopalrao Deshmukh—thought it was recurrence of Malaria, but later they diagnosed pneumonia, in those days a killer affliction. His sixty-fourth birthday found him in sickbed, seriously ill, with high fever. On July 28 there was a temporary remission and the temperature came down to normal and his pulse was regular. This raised hopes, including his own. For he is recorded as having told his nephew that he was "not going to die for another five years, be sure of that" and that "the critical period was over." Whether this was because he wanted to cheer up his nephew or an exercise in *Coveism* nobody can tell. Perhaps it was something of both.

Sadly, however, the crisis was not over. On Thursday, July 29, his condition worsened again. He was delirious and became comatose. His friends like Joseph Baptista, R.P. Paranjpye, M.R. Jayakar and even Gandhi who had returned from his Punjab tour came to see him, but he was already beyond communication. The next day there was a slight improvement in his condition, but it proved fleeting and deceptive. By Saturday



night his heart began to fail and some forty minutes after the stroke of midnight the end came "in the presence of his two sons and three daughters, and his colleagues Kelkar, Khadilkar, Dr. Sathye and Dr. Deshmukh."

The news of his death spread like bushfire, not only in Bombay but all over the country. Crowds converged upon the Sardar Griha where he had been staying and his biographer Keer tells us that "about eleven o'clock [August I] a huge mass of humanity spread down from Dhobi Talao to the end of Carnac Road." Train loads of people came from Poona to get a last glimpse of the man they loved. Indeed, Poona leaders wanted his body to be taken to Poona for the last rites, but the public in Bombay would not have it and insisted that cremation should take place in Bombay. And this was agreed. Gandhi was among those who shouldered the bier as it was taken out of the house; so did Shaikat Ali and Dr. Kitchlew, much to the consternation of some of Tilak's orthodox Brahmin friends and relations who felt that only Brahmins should lift the bier.

It was a mammoth funeral procession which wound its way through the streets of Bombay to the Chowpatty sands where on many an occasion he had addressed huge crowds. Among those who accompanied the procession was Jawaharlal Nehru. By a special dispensation of the Government a sandalwood pyre was built up on the sands and his body placed on it, and the last rites performed before the pyre was lit under an overcast sky and a fine drizzle. That was the journey's end for a man of whom Gandhi was to say that "patriotism was a passion with him", and add "he knew no religion but love of his country."

This was and remains true, despite all the controversies and polemics in which he figured and of which often he was the chief protagonist. To Gandhi's brief and simple but apt summing up of what was most central in Tilak's personality, however, it is permissible, perhaps, to add two things. The first is that during his rather fitful and at times turbulent association with the Congress he brought to it a quality of combative audacity that it had not known before. This in turn, in a curiously paradoxical way, prepared the psychological ground on which Gandhi could work and succeed, even if intermittently, in persuading the Congress to accept his philosophy of mass action, although Tilak

till the end remained highly sceptical of the virtue of non-violent non-cooperation as an effective weapon in politics.

The second point that may usefully be made has a crucial bearing on the scope of Tilak's contribution to the Indian struggle and India's progress in general. For all his impressive learning and scholarship which were acknowledged even by those who were by no means sure that he had deployed them in the right direction or for worthwhile ends, for all the intensity of his commitment to India, not to mention his ability to influence and move people, there seems to have been an irreducible deficit in his understanding of the time and age in which he lived which, perhaps, inhibited his realising his full stature. Consequently, there remains a certain sense of inadequacy or incompleteness about his achievement as a great political leader.

The grief felt by the Indian people at Tilak's death was for real and not just formal or conventional shedding of tears. It was felt across frontiers of caste and creed and confession; felt not only by those who admired Tilak, but even those who differed with him and considered many of his social ideas regressive. It was also heightened because perceptive people were aware of the tragic element that rounded his public life and all that he had suffered and sacrificed. The special session of the Congress that was held at Calcutta a little more than a month after his death—September 4-9, 1920—met under a pall of gloom. Predictably, the very first resolution on the agenda was a resolution of condolence at Tilak's death. It read:

This Congress places on record its sense of deep and profound sorrow at the death of Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak. The stainless purity of his life, his services and sufferings in the cause of his country, his deep devotion to the welfare of the people, his arduous endeavours in the fight for national autonomy—these will enshrine his memory in the grateful recollections of our people, and will be a source of strength and inspiration to countless generations of our countrymen. At this crisis in the history of the nation, the Congress will sorely miss his wise, helpful and courageous leadership, the lofty inspiration of his radiant patriotism, and the healing benediction of his counsel in difficulty.

This moving encomium was no doubt drafted in all sincerity. In any case, it has always been easy to praise the dead in India than to recognise their virtues while they are alive. However, it is by no means certain that Tilak would have been all light and sweetness if he had lived long enough to attend the Special Session of the Congress at Calcutta. It is true there had been a suggestion that he should preside over it. He thought that this was some sort of subtle manoeuvre by his opponents, as he told Khadilkar, though why it is not quite clear. That was why he did not receive the suggestion favourably. He said he wanted to "avert the rift among the Congress leaders on the question of non-cooperation" at the Calcutta session, though, again it is not quite clear why he thought he was the best person to do so.

He was on a very different wavelength to that on which Gandhi was operating. He had written rather sourly to V.J. Patel who had gone to England again to plead for the Congress cause at the end of April. He said in his letter to Patel of June 26, 1920, that the Punjab issue could have been used by the Congress "to work up the British people for the reforms in the constitution of the country" and that he had tried to convey this to the All-India Congress Committee at Benares, but found both Madan Mohan Malaviya and Gandhi unresponsive and that nothing could be done without their help because "they are the men on the Punjab Committee who should have taken up the work in right earnest. Not only they would not do it but they do not much value foreign agitation...."

With his death, the choice of the Congress for presidency of the Calcutta Special Session fell on Lajpat Rai. He had been in England when the war broke out and had eventually gone to the United States and had remained there throughout its duration and done systematic propaganda for the Indian cause which had made him even more of a *persona non grata* with the British Government than before and many Tory MPs were furious that he was allowed after the war to spend a few months in Britain. He had returned to India from his long self-imposed exile only at the end of February 1920. One of the more gifted among the Punjab leaders, his stay abroad had tempered his mind and made him politically more mature and certainly more conversant with the intricacies of international politics. His name was on the short list of those being considered

for election as President of the Calcutta session, partly in recognition of his own "service and sacrifice" in the national cause as his biographer, Feroze Chand, claims, and partly as a gesture to the Punjab as the wrongs suffered by the Land of Five Rivers were going to be a major item on the agenda. However, Tilak's name had precedence over his.

Once it became clear that Tilak was unwilling to accept the honour, Motilal Nehru sent Lajpat Rai a telegram, saying: "Tilak definitely declined; none other more suitable than yourself." This was on July 24, just a week before Tilak's death. Three days later another telegram arrived from the elder Nehru who was evidently at Dumraon where he was appearing in a law suit with C.R. Das as the opposing counsel. It said: "You are duly elected President Special Congress. Congratulations". But as Feroz Chand tells us, "He still vacillated particularly because the election had revealed no unanimity, not even an absolute majority." His friends, including Kalinath Roy, Editor of the *Tribune*, and Asutosh Chaudhuri, a former Judge of the Calcutta High Court who, after his retirement was taking active part in the Congress affairs in Calcutta, and pressure from others made him overcome his hesitation and he agreed to preside over the Calcutta Congress. This was just as well. For the opportunity was not to come his way again.

However, his hesitancy had been due not only to the fact that his election had not been by absolute majority; it was also because he was in two minds over the central issue which was to be debated at Calcutta—the issue of non-cooperation. His presidential address reflected this dichotomy. It was a very long address—50,000 words to be precise. But then he was a prolix writer. Much of it—three-fourths in fact, according to Feroz Chand—was devoted to the Punjab and its tale of woe. He made the point which Motilal Nehru had made at Amritsar; that the torment of the Punjab antedated the Martial Law regime. O'Dwyer's rule throughout had been, he said, "a regime of terrorism and frightfulness." But he was sure that "having passed through the fire of Martial Law, the Punjab is to-day purer, stronger, more advanced, more determined, more patriotic and very much more united."

This claim was largely true. The British had always boasted of the tradition of "loyalism" to the Raj they had created in the

Punjab. But for once that tradition of loyalism, which in our own days would have been called Quislingism, seemed to be in some danger of breaking down. Common suffering and shared humiliation had for the time being forged an emotional identity among a very large body of the people of the Punjab which transcended confessional and sectarian divides and even the competing economic egotisms. But while Lajpat Rai dwelt at great length on the inequities suffered by the Punjabi humanity, he seemed curiously evasive about laying down any clear line of action for securing redress beyond saying:

Our progress depends more than anything else upon the volume and vigour of our own public opinion in this country. It will be wise to have this supplemented by the moral support of the great nations of the world.

The two important issues before the special session and upon which hinged the question of a programme of non-co-operation, were the Reforms and the Rules framed to work them and the Turkish Peace Treaty. He was scathing about the Reforms and said that the "partial elation in 1918," sank into the "depression in 1919" and "despair" of 1920. He was even more scathing about the Rules that had been laid down which would render them in practice even more nugatory. He was, of course, willing to accept half a loaf if that half "was not selected by the bureaucracy" which was "so adept in the art of mixing and cooking" that the half which they proposed to retain for themselves contained "all the nourishment of the whole leaving the other half worse than chaff." Worse than chaff, especially because they had injected it with the "germ of disease"—further compartmentalisation of the electorate along confessional lines. He said:

It will be a marvel of good fortune, if with all the distinction of Hindus, Mussalmans, Sikhs and Christians, of urban and rural, of Brahmanas and non-Brahmanas, of resident and non-residents, of British subjects and those of Native States, of military and civil, made in the Rules and Regulations, we are still able to evolve a national spirit which will rise

above these differences and consolidate us into one people, with a will to live and prosper as a free nation.

He was even more lucid in his critique of the Turkish Peace Treaty. As for the religious aspect of the issue, he thought it was "a matter for our Mohammedan countrymen to decide" and they had decided it. He was also in no doubt that the pledges given by the British Prime Minister "had been cast to the winds." But it was when he came to the political aspect of the Treaty that he developed the anti-imperialist argument against it which Gandhi had tended rather to blur and which the Central Khilafat Committee was incapable of bringing out because of its confessional preoccupations. He formulated it in very firm and concrete terms:

But there are in my judgment other issues also involved in the Turkish Peace Treaty which deserve consideration. I maintain that any further extension of the British Empire in Asia is detrimental to the interests of India and fatal to the liberties of the human race.... If the British Imperialist has no scruples in using Indian troops in Egypt, Persia, Arabia, Mesopotamia, Syria and Central Asia, why will he have any in using the troops he raises in these countries against us? The Hindu-Muslim problem will become ten times more troublesome and dangerous, if this turns out to be true. Then there is another aspect of the question. If the Muslim population of these countries continue to resist British attempts at occupation which they are likely to do for years, the Indian Army will be in constant requisition to fight their battles in those regions, which means a constant and never-ending drain on our resources, both human and economic.

This was undeniable. So was his assessment of the League of Nations which some of the Moderates still believed was going to usher in an era of just international peace and respect for the sovereignty of all nations and the right of self-determination of the people in bondage. "Gentlemen," he warned his audience, "there is no such thing as a League of Nations. Great Britain

and France are the League." For the Indian people he thought it was time for decision:

Our success will be determined by the extent of our earnestness, the spirit of self-sacrifice in the leaders, the spirit of self-denial in the rank and file, the power to lead righteously and to be led by righteous men. The time has come when we must decide between the freedom of body and soul and the life of convenience and comparative ease.... If we decide for the former, we must be prepared for the consequences....

This was well put. But the paradox of the drift of his argument was that he would not say which way he had himself decided to turn. Even his sympathetic and good biographer, Feroz Chand, remarks that "he spoke very firmly of the Khilafat wrong and he spoke with all the vigour that he could command of the Punjab wrong; but... he kept quiet over the corollary of these two—the non-co-operation programme advocated by Mahatma Gandhi to get these wrongs redressed." The reason he gave for his silence was rather legalistic and must have sounded disingenuous. "The President should not try to anticipate the decision of the Congress on a question on which the country is so sharply divided as it is on the question before us..." he said and went on to add, "I have my personal opinion on the question involved in the programme of non-co-operation but during the session of the Congress, I will conduct the proceedings without taking sides." This he did. As Feroz Chand puts it, "As President of a 'special session', it was easier for him to act up to this precept, for his tenure ended with the session itself."

There were only five resolutions on the agenda, the first two of them being condolences at the death of Tilak and Dr. Mahendranath Ohdedar, a member of the All-India Congress Committee from the United Provinces, who was described in the resolution mourning his death as "a true patriot, a distinguished servant of the country, and a courageous champion of the cause of the people." The third resolution was also non-controversial. It commended the Punjab Enquiry Sub-Committee appointed by the Congress for the "great industry and judicial care" with which it had collected the evidence and written its report. It

passed on to express its "deep and bitter disappointment at the drift, tone and tendency of the majority report of the Hunter Committee," charging it with "bias and race prejudice" and whitewashing "the conduct of the Punjab Government and the Government of India," and declaring it to be "incomplete, one-sided and biased by self-interest." It found the recommendations contained in it as falling "far short of the minimum legitimate requirements of the case," and went on to express the "deliberate opinion" of the Congress:

That the action proposed to be taken in the review with reference to the conduct of guilty officials is grossly and utterly inadequate to the gravity of the state of things disclosed, and has dispelled all illusions about the fairness of British justice.

The fourth resolution, too, was one which could be approved without any heated debate and with virtual unanimity. For it expressed the disappointment of the Congress, which was shared by the country at large, "at the British Cabinet's failure to take adequate action with reference to the atrocities of the Punjab, at their acquiescence in the recommendations of the Government of India, and their practical condonation of the misdeeds of the Punjab officials." The Congress was not impressed by the "fine and lofty sentiments expressed in their despatch" by the British Cabinet and held that "by their failure to take adequate action," they had "forfeited the confidence of the people of India."

So far it was more or less plain sailing at the Calcutta session. The crunch and controversy came on the fifth and final resolution. It was a very long resolution. In the first paragraph the Khilafat question was taken up and the Indian and Imperial Governments and the British Prime Minister were accused of breaking their pledges to and signally failing "in their duty towards the Mussalmans of India." It called upon every non-Muslim Indian "in every legitimate manner to assist his Mussalman brother in his attempt to remove the religious calamity that has overtaken him." The second paragraph dealt with the Punjab atrocities and accused both the Indian and Imperial Governments of failing "to protect the innocent people of the Punjab, and punish officers guilty of unsoldierly and barbarous behaviour



towards them," and exonerating "Sir Michael O'Dwyer who proved himself, directly or indirectly, responsible for most of the official crimes." It found the debate in the House of Commons and specially in the House of Lords as betraying "a woeful lack of sympathy with the people of India" and showing "virtual support of the systematic terrorism and frightfulness adopted in the Punjab." In view of "the latest Viceregal pronouncement" which was "proof of entire absence of repentance in the matter of the Khilafat and the Punjab," it said:

This Congress is of opinion that there can be no contentment in India without redress of the two aforementioned wrongs and that the only effectual means to vindicate national honour and to prevent a repetition of similar wrongs in future is the establishment of Swarajya. This Congress is further of opinion that there is no course left open for the people of India but to approve of and adopt the policy of progressive, non-violent Non-co-operation inaugurated by Mr. Gandhi until the said wrongs are righted and Swarajya is established.

It then laid down a seven-point programme of action which would involve "the minimum risk... and to call for the least sacrifice, compatible with the attainment of the desired object," but would nevertheless make the functioning of the Government apparatus difficult besides undermining the institutional basis of its legitimacy. The programme called for:

- (a) surrender of titles and honorary offices and resignation from nominated seats in local bodies;
- (b) refusal to attend Government Levees, Durbars, and other official and semi-official functions held by Government officials or in their honour;
- (c) gradual withdrawal of children from schools and colleges owned, aided or controlled by Government, and in place of such schools and colleges, establishment of National schools and colleges in the various provinces;
- (d) gradual boycott of British courts by lawyers and litigants, and establishment of private arbitration courts by their aid, for the settlement of private disputes;

- (e) refusal on the part of the military, clerical and labouring classes to offer themselves as recruits for service in Mesopotamia;
- (f) withdrawal by candidates of their candidature for election to the Reformed councils, and refusal on the part of the voters to vote for any candidate who may, despite the Congress advice, offer himself for election;
- (g) boycott of foreign goods.

It further said:

And in as much as Non-co-operation has been conceived as a measure of discipline and self-sacrifice without which no nation can make real progress, and in as much as an opportunity should be given in the very first stage of Non-co-operation to every man, woman and child, for such discipline and self-sacrifice, this Congress advises adoption of Swadeshi in piece-goods on a vast scale, and in as much as the existing mills of India with indigenous capital and control do not manufacture sufficient yarn and sufficient cloth for the requirements of the nation, and are not likely to do so for a long time to come, this Congress advised immediate stimulation of further manufacture on a large scale by means of reviving hand-spinning in every home and hand-weaving on the part of the millions of weavers who have abandoned their ancient and honourable calling for want of encouragement.

Although described as minimum programme, it was clearly a remarkably revolutionary programme, especially in the context of the past record of the Congress—and revolutionary in more ways than one. To begin with, it knitted together many of the active modes of resistance to British rule which had been toyed with and even sporadically resorted to ever since the Partition of Bengal days though the Congress itself had fought shy of ever committing itself to these modes of struggle officially and wholeheartedly. In so doing, it was meant to serve as a coherent strategy for challenging the authority of the Raj. In fact, however, it was intended to do even more. While the adoption of Swadeshi had for some years been part and parcel of the Congress thinking and seen as a legitimate economic weapon calculated to weaken the

stranglehold of British capitalism over the Indian economy, the call for surrender of titles and honorary offices was designed to undermine the cheap and shoddy system of patronage which the British had perfected for buying "loyalty". Finally, by proposing gradual withdrawal of children from schools and colleges and gradual boycott of British courts by lawyers and litigants alike, it was meant to take the first step towards setting up an alternative system of governance almost. If accepted and implemented effectively, it would have very considerably undermined the structure of the Raj and, what is more, made it look rather ridiculous—with courts having nothing to do and schools and colleges which nobody attended.

But there came the rub. Could the programme as Gandhi conceived it win acceptance on a nationwide scale and could it be effectively implemented? That presented a formidable difficulty. For the first step towards building national consensus around it, was to get the Congress to accept and sanction it. This was not easy. Since the Amritsar session of the Congress dramatic shifts in political positions taken up by the various Congress leaders, including Gandhi, had been witnessed. Gandhi, as already noted, had been opposed to even expression of any sense of disappointment with the Reforms and favoured working them in a constructive spirit. He had insisted on the Congress thanking Montagu "for his labours in connection with the Reforms," and was even prepared to go his separate way if the Congress turned down his suggestion. This had irritated Tilak and even Annie Besant. "Don't be too generous," Tilak had said, "too kind, too humane, to accept with a fulsome dose of thanks what little has been thrown to you now".

On the question of the Reforms Act, there were others who had been even more dissatisfied than Tilak. C.R. Das, for instance, whose draft had been approved by the Subjects Committee, and Hasrat Mohani and S. Satyamurti. The latter, indeed, had cried out impatiently: "We, nationalists, are often accused of being impatient. We are not. We have waited long enough. One century and a half is a long period in the history of any nation. We are tired, we refuse to wait, and we are not going to be frightened by any." If they had eventually accepted Gandhi's addition to Das' draft, it was because they recognised the importance of Gandhi and with explicit reservations. As Dr.

Sitaramayya has recorded, Das' speech "made it clear that he reserved for the Nation the right of pursuing a policy of obstruction if necessary and co-operation if possible."

But nine months later there was a reversal of roles. Gandhi by now had become wholly disenchanted with the Government whether in Delhi or London. He considered the Reforms not only disappointing and unsatisfactory, but irrelevant. In an article in *Young India* of July 28, he had explained the shift in his position:

When at Amritsar last year I pleaded with all the earnestness I could command for co-operation with the Government and for response to the wishes expressed in the Royal Proclamation, I did so because I honestly believed that a new era was about to begin, and that the old spirit of fear, distrust and consequent terrorism was about to give place to the new spirit of respect, trust and goodwill. I sincerely believed that the Mussulman sentiment would be placated and that the officers that had misbehaved during the martial law regime in the Punjab would be at least dismissed and the people would be otherwise made to feel that the Government that had always been found quick (and rightly) to punish popular excesses would not fail to punish its agents' misdeeds. But to my amazement and dismay, I have discovered that the present representatives of the Empire have become dishonest and unscrupulous. They have no real regard for the wishes of the people of India and they count Indian honour as of little consequence. I can no longer retain affection for a Government so evilly manned as it is now-a-days.

Indeed, when at Calcutta the Congress finally approved the fifth resolution adopting the policy of "non-violent non-cooperation inaugurated by Gandhiji" the past tense used in the text was not meant to be a literary device which the author of the *Gita* employs in the very opening verses. Those who drew up the text were aware that in passing the resolution the Congress was retrospectively giving its sanction to a *fait accompli*. As far as Gandhi was concerned, he had already inaugurated non-cooperation without waiting for the Special Session of the Congress and despite Madan Mohan Malaviya's appeal to him to wait

This was on August 1 when he had returned his Zulu and Boer War medals as well as his Kaiser-i-Hind gold medal to the Viceroy though not "without a pang" as he told Chelmsford in his letter written on August 1, 1920, in which he lamented that His Excellency had treated official crime light-heartedly, and added: "In my humble opinion, the ordinary method of agitating by way of petitions, deputation and the like, is no remedy for moving to repentance a Government, so hopelessly indifferent to the welfare of its charge as the Government of India has proved to be". Furthermore, on that day a country-wide *hartal* had been observed as directed by the Non-Cooperation Committee and the response had been sufficiently positive for even Judith Brown to admit that "Gandhi had broken through at the level of genuine all-India politics, whereas previously political organisation and propaganda had been the preserve of elite groups in specific localities."

Ironically, however, while Gandhi had changed his stance from one of cooperation with the Government as far as possible to that of non-cooperation, the radicals and militants of yester-year had moved in the opposite direction since the Amritsar Congress session. This was not surprising in the case of followers of Tilak. Tilak had been a Laodicean till the end over Gandhi's non-cooperation programme and his lieutenants, like Baptista and Khaparde, had never been enamoured of Gandhian ways and ideas in politics. But it was surprising to find C.R. Das among those who led the opposition to Gandhi. In fact, the opposition to his proposition came both from what in modern parlance would be considered the Left and the Right. Men like Jinnah, Malaviya and Jamnadas Dwarkadas found themselves on the same side of political barricades, so to speak, as the radicals like C.R. Das, Satyamurti and the old veteran Bipin Chandra Pal. As Gandhi was to relate in his autobiography, "My plight was pitiable indeed. I was absolutely at sea as to who would support the resolution and who would oppose it. . . . I only saw an imposing phalanx of veteran warriors assembled for the fray."

This was no exaggeration. Before the session began there was a concerted attempt to bring together the various strands of opposition to Gandhi's programme. G.S. Khaparde, one of the late Lokmanya Tilak's close associates, joined hands with the Bengal leadership, young and old, among them C.R. Das, Motilal

Ghose, Bipin Chandra Pal, B. Chakravarti, to bar the way to the adoption of Gandhi's ideas. Even Motilal Nehru, although he had been roused to a high pitch of indignation by the unfairness and Pecksniffian attitude and verdict of the Majority Report of the Hunter Committee, tried to persuade Jinnah, Das, Madan Mohan Malaviya and Annie Besant to combine forces to oppose Gandhi's proposal for the boycott of the councils. Yet, somehow, the band-wagon of Gandhi's opponents got stuck from the very start. This was clear from the result of elections to the Subjects Committee which showed that Gandhi had the wind in his sails.

All the same, it was a close run thing in the Subjects Committee. The debate in the Committee lasted three days—from September 5 to September 7. Gandhi stood his ground against all comers. On the last day, as a last ditch manoeuvre, Bipin Chandra Pal moved an amendment to Gandhi's resolution which, while accepting non-cooperation in principle, urged that "controversial" points should be left for further consideration; that a committee be set up to draw up a programme appropriate for the various provinces; and that a further mission be sent to England to demand Swaraj or self-government without further delay. It sounded reasonable enough. But Gandhi was not having it. The only modification he accepted, it seems suggested by Motilal Nehru, who had apparently changed his position from one of opposition to one of acceptance under persuasion by his son, was that the withdrawal of students from schools and colleges and lawyers from the courts might be gradual as a matter of practical politics. Gandhi's proposals were carried by 148 votes to 133, with a few abstentions.

It was a very narrow majority and it could have been turned in the open session of the Congress. But the ground swell of opinion among the rank and file delegates was not with the opposition to non-cooperation. On the contrary, the tide was running strongly in favour of Gandhi. The voting did not take place till September 9 and it showed a two to one majority for non-cooperation—1886 to 884 according to Ronaldshay, at the time Governor of Bengal and later to be Secretary of State for India as Lord Zetland, quoted by Dr. Judith Brown. Other sources give other figures. Gandhi's *Young India* of September 15, for instance, gave the voting figures as

1,855 for the resolution and 873 against, or rather for the amendment moved by Bipin Chandra Pal. But the variations are not materially important since they do not change significantly the balance of voting. What is more, the provincewise breakdown of voting reported in *Young India* showed that Gandhi's resolution had substantial majority among delegates from every province, including Bengal (551 against 395), with the solitary exception of the Central Provinces and Berar whose delegates voted two to one against Gandhi's resolution—thirty-five voting for and sixty-one against.

There were, of course, altogether 5,873 registered delegates which meant that more delegates did not care to vote than actually voted. The opposition to Gandhi made much of this fact as, indeed, have some of the British historians dealing with the theme. But two things have to be borne in mind in considering this massive abstention from voting. The first is that there is no evidence that all those who did not vote were necessarily opposed to Gandhi's programme of non-cooperation. Some of them may have been and did not stand up to be counted because they did not want to be seen as ranged against him. The other thing to remember is that delegates to the Congress even in those good old days were not exactly models of discipline. Anybody who has ever attended a plenary session of the Congress must know that the delegates tend to be fidgety and restive, and can rarely sit through long debates as the one on non-cooperation undoubtedly was. So, probably, a considerable number of them were not in their places at the time of counting votes on September 9. Some of them may even have gone away since the Congress was originally supposed to end on September 8.

At all events the huc and cry raised by Gandhi's opponents after the battle was lost by them suggests that they did not really question that he had a majority, but claimed that he had won majority by unfair, if not foul, means, though Ronaldshay is quoted by Judith Brown to have cheered Montagu with the story that Gandhi had packed the house by men picked from the streets and that his supporters had mustered a majority by selling "delegates' bagdes...at Rs. 10 to any who applied." The *Hindu*, under Kasturi Iyengar's editorship, echoed this bazar gossip probably planted by the Government's disinformation services to discredit Gandhi. What was even more surprising

was that the *Bengalee*, a mouthpiece of Surendranath Banerjee who had drunk deeply of Western liberalism, stooped to atavistic illiberality if not xenophobia by suggesting that Gandhi had manipulated the Congress and conjured up a majority with "the votes of Marwari and Hindustani communities, who are here [in Calcutta] on purposes of business." In Bombay, according to a Government report quoted by Dr. Judith Brown, Khaparde and Baptista were "bitter against Gandhi and *Khilafatists* in outmanoeuvring them" and Baptista in an interview to a correspondent of the *Bombay Chronicle*—Jinnah, who was opposed to non-cooperation idea root and branch, was the Chairman of its Board of Directors—practically accused Gandhi "of handing over the Congress, a Hindu preserve, to the Muhammadans, not hesitating to over-ride even the constitution of the Congress in his determination to play in the full Mohamadan card."

However, it is doubtful that these stories prompted by disappointment and malice found much credence even among the more sober opponents of Gandhi and non-cooperation. As Judith Brown points out, "Two of Gandhi's opponents who could have made capital out of such a charge—the 'Moderate' paper *The Indian Social Reformer*, and N.C. Kelkar—discounted it." After all, All-India Muslim League had also simultaneously with the Congress passed Gandhi's resolution on non-cooperation despite the opposition of Jinnah and his friends and the fact that there were no Marwari businessmen on its rolls to swell the vote in his favour. The truth, of course, was simple and straightforward. For once the two currents of discontent, one national and political and the other certainly a mixture of political and confessional sentiment, were flowing together and the attempts to dam or at least divert them was not succeeding.

On the contrary, in the months following the Calcutta Special Session of the Congress, the idea of non-cooperation gained momentum to the point where even some of those who had taken a prominent part in opposing Gandhi had to make angonizing reappraisal of their position. Quite a number of them were inclined to accept their defeat in good grace and fall in line with the majority view. In an article in the *Bombay Chronicle*, while regretting the way things had gone at Calcutta which he thought would deprive "the Nationalists, for at least three years more, of the use of an effective lever of constitutional agitation inside



constituted official bodies," N.C. Kelkar acknowledged that Gandhi had won and they "must loyally abide by the decision of the Congress." In Bengal whose Radicals were never to take to Gandhi and his ways, C.R. Das, B. Chakravarti and others took the same view that the majority decision ought to be accepted.

Others, however, were not so gracious. Srinivasa Sastri, for instance, whose place was really in the Indian Liberal Federation which the Moderates had set up after their break with the Congress, but who still kept a toe-hold in the Congress camp, continued to argue that the majority decision taken at the Special Congress was not binding on the minority. Lajpat Rai who had remained neutral and impartial at Calcutta thought the same. Consequently, the battle was reopened when the All-India Congress Committee met in Bombay on October 2, 1920. There were two main items on the agenda: the raising of two funds—the Tilak Memorial Fund and the Swarajya Fund; and to discuss the report of the Sub-Committee which the Congress had appointed at Calcutta to draft instructions for non-cooperation.

The Sub-Committee, which consisted of Gandhi, Motilal Nehru and V.J. Patel, had issued its report on draft instruction for the Congress organisation on September 22. That report was the battleground and once again Gandhi prevailed over fierce opposition by both Baptista and Satyamurti. This was to lead to the resignation of two members of the A.I.C.C.—Jamnadas Dwarkadas and M.G. Seth—the former bemoaning that "want of discrimination and enthusiasm for a highly respected" leader had led the Congress into acceptance of non-cooperation whose practice, he predicted, "will prove to them the unwisdom of their step."

Curiously, Jinnah who attended the A.I.C.C. meeting on October 2 but took no part in the discussion on the report did not follow Jamnadas Dwarkadas' example in resigning. He and nineteen others were to resign from the Swaraj Sabha—or Swarajya Sabha—as the All-India Home Rule League had been renamed and of which Gandhi had become the President at the end of April after Annie Besant's resignation from the organisation which she had founded. But that was in protest at its new Constitution at its meeting on the morrow of the A.I.C.C. meeting in Bombay at which the instructions to the Congress

organisation relating to non-cooperation had been approved. Jinnah and his friends had objected to the change on two grounds—one procedural and the other political. They had argued that the change was made "contrary to the rules and regulations of the League" and further that the new constitution omitted reference to "British connection" and sanctioned "unconstitutional and illegal activities."

Gandhi in his letter to Jinnah written from Laburnum Road, Bombay, on October 25 dealt with his objection at some length. On the procedural plane Jinnah's point was that the decision was taken without a majority of three-fourths. Gandhi replied that it was a general meeting of the League and not a meeting of its Council, and he could find nothing in the constitution of the League which required that its decisions at general meetings to be operative had to be voted by a three-fourths majority. Gandhi was technically right, but Jinnah's point had some moral force. For the meeting had been very thinly attended. Only sixty-one members had turned up though the membership of the League in Bombay alone was 600 while countrywide membership was over 6,000. It is true that of those who were present more than two-thirds voted for the change—42 to 19—but it seemed hardly politic to rush through a substantive change of the constitution at a meeting so poorly attended.

The second point made by Jinnah and others was less valid and Gandhi was right in arguing: "So far as British connection is concerned I think you are clearly wrong. Because the meaning of the word 'swaraj' is deliberately limited by the new constitution so as to keep the Sabha strictly loyal to the Congress creed." That creed had till then not abjured the British connection, though significantly Gandhi wrote: "I am not opposed to that connection by itself but I do not wish to make a fetish of it. I will not keep India for a single minute under slavery for the sake of that connection. But I and those who think with me have limited our ambition in order that we can carry the Congress with us and be thus enabled to remain affiliated to that body."

As to the new constitution of the League authorising "unconstitutional or illegal activities" Gandhi's argument was again rather legalistic. He was right in claiming that the Swarajya Sabha's new constitution "specifically eschewed" violence. But his own experience should by now have convinced him that

it was perfectionist to believe that any large scale movement of non-cooperation could wholly avoid violence. Equally, however, Jinnah and his friends were trailing a red herring across the argument in order to find a plausible excuse for parting company with the erstwhile Home Rule League. Jinnah had never declared non-cooperation itself to be unconstitutional and illegal. He had certainly not resigned either from the Congress or the A.I.C.C. which had approved Gandhi's proposals on non-cooperation, though he was to do so later. Still more pertinent, he had not resigned from All-India Muslim League which also had passed Gandhi's resolution on non-cooperation. He could not have done so because that would have been tantamount to committing political hara-kiri by isolating himself both from the mainstreams of National and Muslim politics; and he was too shrewd and too ambitious a politician to do any such thing. What he wanted to do was publicly to take his distance from Gandhi whom he never quite understood and whose ways he realised were alien to him—and to do this with no great political risk to himself.

The whole argument, of course, in itself was of no consequence. Membership of the Home Rule League was a matter of no great importance. For the Sabha as the All-India Home Rule League was to be known in its new incarnation was an organisation which proved to be without a tomorrow. But the argument was, on another level, big with consequence. It was the first polemical skirmish between Gandhi and Jinnah and as such portended that prolonged dialogue of the deaf which proved so fateful—some might say, fatal—and in which each side scored plenty of debating points against each other without communicating anything except, perhaps, their mutual temperamental incompatibility. There were others no doubt who were even more critical of Gandhi at the time and attacked him quite unfairly and even with a certain want of ordinary courtesy which on his side he never denied his opponents—not only Khaparde, for instance, but the old and urbane stalwart, Dinshaw Wacha, who in a letter to G.A. Natesan allowed his irritation with Gandhi to run away with him and nearly exhausted the vocabulary of political invective in inveighing against "the pernicious doctrine of non-cooperation" and its author:

The man is full of overweening conceit & personal ambition

and the vast unthinking multitude, let alone the so called "leaders" of the hour, and the lip "patriots", seem to be quite mad...in following like a flock of sheep, this unsafe shepherd who is bringing the country on the very brink of chaos & anarchy. And your people [meaning Madras] were for a time so *enthused* & worshipped him as if he were a mortal god on earth. Time, time, time, will be the avenger of the wrongs this madman is now inflicting on the poor country in his mad & arrogant career.

But these angry words and ridicule availed as little as the legendary King Canute's sword in holding back the tide which was flowing strongly in the direction in which Gandhi wanted to take the Indian people. Even Dr. Judith Brown while tracing in her book the developments in Indian politics during the four months between the Calcutta Special Session of the Congress and the Nagpur plenary session, while leaving no contrary eddy uncounted, acknowledges that "in the oldest Presidency [that is, Bengal] non-cooperation was taking root among groups who had been untouched by *bhadralok* pioneers of nationalist politics" and that even the Muslims "were also deeply stirred"; that in Gujarat "notorious for its political lethargy" it "caught on and penetrated deeply into society"; that the C.P. "once so politically backward, presented the spectacle of new groups entering nationalist politics for the first time, ousting any of the western educated who refused to follow Gandhi's plans"; that in the Punjab elections "only 8.5% of urban voters, both Hindu and Muslim, went to the polls" though "the rural poll was heavier" (she does not say that it was largely the urban voters who figured on the electoral rolls because of the property and educational qualifications); and much the same pattern emerged in voting in other provinces.

Thus it seemed that, for good or ill, neither the Government propaganda nor the opposition of the moderate school of Indian politicians had been able to check the progress of the idea of non-cooperation which looked like becoming the wave of tomorrow—and certainly the day-after....

## CHAPTER VI

### A POINT OF HONOUR

Nagpur had been rather unlucky. Very early on—in 1891—it had the honour of hosting a Congress session, with P. Ananda Charlu, the first Indian from South of the Vindhya, presiding. However, it had not since then been given an opportunity to repeat the hospitality. It felt particularly sore about this because there was a feeling among its citizens that by accident or design it had been cheated of the honour on more than one occasion. The Twenty-second session of the Congress held at Calcutta in 1906 over which Dadabhai Naoroji had presided, for instance, had resolved “that the next Congress assemble at Nagpur.” But that was not to be.

The tussle between the Moderates and the “Extremists” as their opponents and critics called them and “Nationalists” as they liked to think of themselves, had already begun and the latter, in fact, as related in the earlier volume, had wanted to press Bal Gangadhar Tilak’s claims to preside over the Calcutta Congress but had been outmanoeuvred by the Moderates putting up the name of the Grand Old Man of Indian politics to take the wheel—a proposal the Radicals dared not oppose. But they had hoped that the following year Nagpur Congress would install Tilak rather than the amiable Dr. Rash Behari Ghose

as the President. But again they were outmanoeuvred. The Congress "Patriarchs"—in those days the term "Bosses" had not come into currency—especially Pherozeshah Mehta, taking advantage of the factional tensions between the Moderates and the Radicals in Nagpur, were able to secure a change of venue to Surat, a city associated with the cotton trade, which the Lion of Bombay thought could be safer because of his business connections with it.

But the change of venue did not help. Surat was an unmitigated disaster and the Congress session there in December 1907 was to dissolve into chaos leaving deep wounds behind. Tilak and his men saw to it that it never took off. There had been talk among the Radicals that in 1908 "a regular session of the Congress on old lines...keeping it open as usual to members of all parties so as to keep its continuity" be held at Nagpur. But the Government had intervened, first by arresting Tilak, sentencing him to six years' imprisonment and sending him away to Mandalay, Burma, and then "about the middle of December 1908" promulgating an order under the notorious Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code—which, incidentally, is still very much with us—prohibiting any assembly of more than four persons. This put paid to the idea of holding a Congress session at Nagpur which the "Nationalists" had been contemplating. For although they were dubbed as "Extremists", their extremism had not yet reached the stage of running the gauntlet of the might and majesty of the Government's prohibitory orders or seeking confrontation with its agencies of Law and Order.

So Nagpur had to wait for another twelve years to achieve its ambition of playing host to the Congress session a second time. At the end of 1919 Tilak had returned from England in time to attend the Amritsar Congress. His admirers and supporters in Nagpur had his blessing in canvassing the claims of the city as the venue for the next Congress session. As this proposal had the backing of both the Hindi and Marathi-speaking areas of the Central Provinces, it proved irresistible. But, soon according to the anonymous writer of the Preface to the transactions of the Nagpur Congress session, "as if it were to test the stamina and patriotism of the organisers of the invited Congress, impediments after impediments were thrown in their way." A controversy broke out on whether the Congress be held at

Nagpur, capital of the C.P., which was in the Marathi-speaking part of the Province or at Jabalpur which was the centre of the Hind-speaking region. The controversy, we learn, "assumed a racial appearance of Maharashtrians versus Non-Maharashtrians and thus a good deal of bitterness was imported into it. The first half of the year was spent in this way in such fruitless and disintegrating discussions and nothing more than framing a paper constitution of the Reception Committee could be so long achieved."

The matter was eventually referred to the All-India Congress Committee and it decided in favour of Nagpur which did not please the Hindi-speaking region and the anonymous writer speaks of "a general atmosphere of some alienation... between the two portions of the Province." Until well into July 1920 "not a single pie could be raised and the treasury of the Reception Committee was absolutely empty." But, apparently, judging from the lamentations of the two General Secretaries of the Congress, Dr. M.A. Ansari and V.J. Patel over the refusal—or neglect—of the Provincial Congress Committees to fulfil their pledged financial obligations towards the A.I.C.C., in their annual report to the Congress, even the central organisation's "treasury" tended to be chronically empty and it had to resort to desperate shifts to meet its expenses. It was to give some financial stability to the Congress that the A.I.C.C. had decided at its meeting early in October to set up two funds; and the Provincial Congress Committee with the help of District and other organisations were urged "to make every endeavour to collect funds and submit monthly reports of receipts and expenditure to the All-India Congress Committee." But, as its two distinguished General Secretaries ruefully put it, "these resolutions have so far remained a dead letter. The Congress has no permanent funds and if we are to make any headway towards securing Swarajya, huge National funds are essential and the sooner we realise this fact the better."

Never a truer word was said. But because Congress organisations at every level were, so to speak, congenitally improvident, they had developed over the years a reflexive talent for last minute improvisation. So, we learn, through interest free loans from a few leading Nationalists in Nagpur, "a sum of about Rs. 10,000 was deposited in cash in the treasury of the Reception

Committee in the month of July . . . .” But just when it looked as if things were beginning to move at last “in right earnest,” not only did the monsoon set in “impeding” all work, but (to quote the language of piety and resignation of the preface-writer) “the Almighty and all-wise God, in His Merciful [sic] will, decided to curtail the span of existence in this world, of the Great Lokmanya . . . . The suddenness of the news [of Tilak’s death, that is] . . . fell like a thunderbolt on us and thoroughly dumb-founded us for a time.”

But the living have no option except to bury or burn their dead and go on with their appointed earthly tasks; and so did the members of the Reception Committee at Nagpur. It is an ill wind that blows nobody any good and Tilak’s death, for a time, stilled all controversies, including the controversy between the Congress organisations of the C.P. and its Siamese twin, Berar. In a moment of shared sorrow the Berar Congress, the Preface records, cast in “its lot with ours” and joined hands “in holding a Joint Session of the Congress for the Combined Province of C.P. and Berar.” This, it seems, was “a timely encouragement, which eventually proved to be of substantial help as well.” For once “the controversy was laid at rest,” the Hindi and Marathi regions of the Province “vied with each other in friendly rivalry to do their best in making the session a success.” With a leading Marwari businessman, Seth Jamnalal Bajaj, as the Chairman of the Reception Committee, the initial financial difficulties were soon overcome.

Holding the second Congress session at Nagpur had evidently been “peculiarly a point of honour” with the Nationalists in the city and that honour was upheld. They saw to it that it should be a Congress session to remember. “The special feature of the arrangement for the lodging of the delegates made by the Reception Committee,” it is recorded, was the setting up of a temporary township “afterwards popularly and lovingly known as Congress Nagar,” or Congress City; and this was an example which subsequently was to be followed by other cities and towns which hosted the Congress session. It was no easy task either. Nagpur session was the biggest in terms of the number of delegates which attended it—14,582. This was more than twice the number which attended the session at Amritsar, itself a record. The problem of lodging and feeding and providing for the creature



comforts, like hot and cold baths to say nothing of other sanitary arrangements, was obviously not easy to tackle. But it appears that it was well tackled.

The second Nagpur Congress Session was not only the biggest in terms of the muster of the delegates since the Indian National Congress was founded thirty-five years earlier. It was also, and in a very real sense, the most momentous in terms of the decisions it was called upon to take. It is true, of course, that a watershed had been reached in its outlook and methodology of struggle with the passing of the Rowlatt Act and the traumatic events which it triggered off. But it was not until the special session of the Congress at Calcutta in September 1920 that the logical conclusions were drawn from these events and a programme of effectively meeting the challenge was agreed upon. But even after the acceptance by the Congress at Calcutta of Gandhi's programme of non-cooperation attempts had continued to build up pressure on and within the Congress to ensure a reversal of the decisions taken at Calcutta. What is more, and because of the very nature of the limitations under which the special session laboured, the necessary consequential changes regarding the constitution and organisational framework and instruments of the Congress had not been considered much less any decisions taken on what needed being done. Predictably, therefore, these questions and the reaffirmation and amplification of the resolution stating the argument for and a programme of non-cooperation figured at the top of the agenda at Nagpur.

The session began on December 26 in the afternoon at 1.30. It opened with the singing of *Bande Mataram* by Pandit Vishnu Digambar Paluskar of the Gandharva Mahavidyalaya, Bombay, which was followed by more patriotic songs by a choir of young girls from two local schools. Jamnalal Bajaj, Chairman of the Reception Committee, who was for many years to be Honorary Treasurer of the Congress and contributed a hundred thousand rupees to the Swaraj Fund "specially earmarked for financial help to lawyers who gave up practice and participated in the Civil Disobedience movement" besides courting imprisonment gave his address of welcome in Hindi. It was not a profound or politically rousing speech. But it had a ring of sincerity and made a point of appealing to the youth of the country that if they wanted to know their responsibility towards

their own national movement, they should study the histories of other countries when they were in the throes of similar national upheavals. "India in her present non-violent campaign," he said, "expects such . . . sacrifices from her youth as were made by the youths of Russia, Ireland, Egypt and China, in the revolutionary periods of their history." Coming from the lips of man who by the standards of the day commanded enormous wealth, it must have sounded rather strange and paradoxical.

Earlier in his speech he had been even more paradoxical. He had chided his fellow businessmen "who so far have remained rather listless towards the political life and the national needs of their country." He reminded them that they, too, had "certain grave responsibilities towards the land of their birth" which they should realise "at a time of such a national crisis." He went on:

Let them reflect with calm sincerity that though they may have successfully amassed wealth under the British rule, it was not done by making the country happy. Their prosperity has been purchased at the cost of the ever growing poverty and impoverishment of their people. In their moments of elation at the thought of their income of lacs and crores drawn from foreign trade and speculation they should remember that as a result of its ever increasing poverty there are, in India, at least thirty millions, men, women and children who bless their stars if in course of the whole day and night they happen to secure one full meal.

He referred to what he called "the present extraordinary awakening of the Indian mass mind" and added, almost by way of a stern rebuke and warning : "I have suspicions that most of us have not yet fully realised the extent of this awakening and therefore with the utmost humility I wish to warn the leaders of the Indian educated community that if they do not fully utilise this great awakening and fail to give proof of their earnestness and self-sacrifice by leading the present movement for national uplift whether the movement succeeds or fails, they would for ever lose the confidence of their people." He was sure that the common Indian humanity would never be found wanting in the spirit of self-sacrifice. "It will be arrogant on my part to say

anything to the masses of India," he said, "because it is they who are the greatest sufferers for our sins and from our present national degeneration. So far they have never lagged behind the educated community in any political sacrifice nor will they ever do so in future."

This was not what in our contemporary terminology would be described as a Leftist, but a member of the *haute* bourgeoisie speaking. Before concluding he also referred to another issue which had been largely out of bounds in all Congress debates. True, at one time Dadabhai Naoroji had toyed with the idea of bringing the Princely States into the ambit of Congress politics. But he had been thinking primarily of the ruling princes some of whom, especially in those early days, shared the political sentiments of the Congress. But he did not pursue the idea beyond mentioning it to some of his friends in his letters. Presumably, however, it was thought best to concentrate the political mind exclusively on the problems of what was then known as British India lest by enlarging the scope of Congress' concern to the Indian States they might introduce a divisive issue in their discussion and raise further controversy when they had enough already.

However, the taboo was broken at Nagpur—by the Chairman of the Reception Committee himself. He had good reason for doing so. He reminded his audience that he had been born in a Princely State—Jaipur. He had, therefore, some qualification to raise the issue, particularly because they were about "to introduce new changes" in the Congress constitution. And he argued:

I and those who are of my views wish that you should not keep the Native states and their people outside the new Congress constitution. The residents of the Native states are also an important limb of the Indian Nation, and I assure you that the cordial sympathy of many of the princes of the Native states is also with you. And even if some of the princes do not sympathise with our cause you should have no doubt about the sympathy of their subjects. And therefore the real interests of the princes will also lie in joining hands with you. It is for these reasons that I and many others strongly feel that in your new constitution a place should be given to the Native princes and their subjects.

This made political sense even though he was being over-sanguine regarding the possibility of winning over the Indian Princes to the Congress cause. Indeed, with the Congress entering on a new more militant phase of defiance of the Raj, and overwhelming majority of the Princes were about to distance themselves even further from the Congress than they had in the past when some of them, if not actually friendly to it, had been inclined to adopt a posture of benevolent neutrality towards it. Nor did the Congress leadership accept Jammalal Bajaj's suggestion of extending its constitution to embrace the princely states though it found a way of drawing the people of the States into the struggle for democratic rights and liberties through a separate but kindred organisation—the Indian States' Peoples Conference.

For the time being the Congress contented itself with making a symbolic gesture which was calculated to convey to the people of the princely India the message that the Congress was not indifferent to their aspirations, but without (so it imagined) giving undue offence to the Princes who ruled them even though under the often obtrusive overlordship of the Paramount Power—Britain. It had a resolution on its agenda—number twelve—which said "this Congress earnestly requests all the sovereign Princes of India to take immediate steps to establish full responsible Government in their States." But most of the "Sovereign Princes of India" whose pretence to sovereignty was soon to be brutally pricked by a lapidary pronouncement by Chelmsford's successor as Viceroy addressed to the tallest, metaphorically speaking, among the Princely Order in India and who meekly accepted it without as much as a murmur of protest.

However, as far as the Congress was concerned, it was to respond positively to the argument advanced by the Chairman of the Reception Committee at the Nagpur session. At its first meeting on January 1, 1921, which lasted three days, the new Working Committee of the All-India Congress Committee took the first tentative step towards assuming responsibility for the struggle of the people of India's princely states for their democratic and human rights. The very first resolution it passed said: "Every Congress province will have assigned to it all contiguous Indian State areas wherein the prevailing language is that of the Congress province." The resolution went on to give "an

illustrative list" of how the various princely states were to be assigned to the different Congress provinces. Thus at Nagpur yet another Rubicon was crossed.

Jamnalal Bajaj's speech was simple and straightforward. It was delivered in Hindi, or rather, Hindustani, a language which both Gandhi and he championed as the lingua franca of the country and which a majority of Indians understood. Its radical accent could also not be mistaken. The President's address which followed was a striking contrast in every sense. It was, of course, in English. It was heavy with learning. It hardly left any quotation from the sacred texts of Western liberal thought unturned. It harked back to Pericles' Athens and to Demosthenes "who endeavoured, with divine eloquence, to rally the Athenians to resist Philip of Macedon." It invoked Burke, inevitably. But it did not leave out latter-day Irish patriots and Home Rulers, like Henry Grattan and Isaac Butt. It referred to Dicey on the question of political sovereignty. It recalled the charters of King John and King Henry the third, naturally. But it also crossed the Channel to back up the pet idea of a declaration of fundamental rights the credit for which it gave to the French political philosophers and told the Congress that a contemporary French politician, Poincare, had aptly called the Declaration of Rights the "Law of Laws".

Whether or not the delegates at the Congress Nagar at Nagpur were able to follow all these recondite allusions and references, some of them must have known that they would have to digest them when they had chosen President for the session the first Hero of Salem, a victor in many a legal *cause celebre* including two involving his personal vindication and innocence—Chakravarti Vijjaraghavachariar. It was not only that his name exhausted almost half of the letters of English alphabet. His career as public figure was remarkable for many things, but not least for its longevity. Born five years before the uprising of 1857, he not only helped in drafting the constitutional provisions of the Nehru (the elder) Report but lived to see the passing of the Quit India Resolution by the Congress at Bombay and died just three years before the Transfer of Power.

He could not claim, like Burke, that "he was bred to the law." In fact, he began his adult career as a schoolmaster before qualifying himself as "a first class pleader" to set up practice at

Salem. But, perhaps, there is something of a lawyer and law-giver struggling to get out in every South Indian Brahmin; something also of a pedagogue; and so when he entered politics in 1887 by joining the Congress, his speeches tended to be a cross between a lawyer's brief and a school teacher's notes. Incidentally, it was he who at the Calcutta Congress in 1906 moved the resolution calling for "a definite limitation of the State demand on land"—in other words a Permanent Settlement—arguing that "land in India had never belonged to the King; the sages had said that the world belonged to those who were born in it; private property was gained by cultivation and the King, who was ordained for protection, received a share from the cultivators for his services. The idea that land belonged to the King was Western and feudal, not Indian."

He was by then already a prominent figure in Congress politics in the Madras Presidency, having become a member of the Madras Legislative Council in 1896. However, it was not until his translation to the Imperial Legislative Council in 1913 under Hardinge's Viceroyalty that he established his reputation as a parliamentarian of national stature and distinguished himself, as Iswara Dutt in his admirably succinct pen-portrait of the man puts it, by "his knowledge of public questions and of Parliamentary procedure, his resourcefulness in debate and readiness in repartee, his vigilance and forthrightness. . . . Sir Guy Fleetwood Wilson [Finance Member in Hardinge's Executive Council] . . . made the frank admission that when Vijayaraghavachariar was in the House, Government members could not afford to sleep!"

However, after the Surat split he had been only a sleeping member of the Congress at least until 1916 when the breach between the Moderates and the Nationalists had at last been publicly healed. Surprisingly, according to Dr. Sitaramayya, "the Moderate Congress did not appeal to his judgement." Surprisingly, because his presidential address was modulated on a note which would have sounded sweet music in Moderate ears. True, he waxed eloquent over his pet notion of a Declaration of Fundamental Rights. He was also not unduly modest in commanding to the Congress "a draft statute of constitution for the Dominion of British India" which he had painstakingly prepared, complete with a Declaration of Rights the first clause of which proclaimed British India to be "one and indivisible" and in which

"all political power is inherent in the people...to the same extent as in any other people or nation of the British Empire." He annexed it to his address though what became of its is not quite clear. Presumably, it was pigeon-holed in the Congress archives, to be taken out and dusted and read when the time came for the next constitutional exercise.

But the immediate issue before the Congress was the question of non-cooperation and how to build up sufficient mass sanction behind the movement. On this he was not so hot. He could not, of course, take a wholly negative attitude to it. After all, the Special Session of the Congress had already accepted it and what Nagpur session was expected to do was to work out ways and means of implementing it. Moreover, he was aware that his elevation to presidency of the Congress had been decided upon only after Tilak's death who would have been the first choice of the Congress even though he had declined to preside over the Special Congress. He made a feeling reference to it in the opening paragraph of his address when he said: "And on this occasion and in this presence it is impossible for me to resist the very natural temptation to say how deeply I lament the fact that if that great son of India whose manhood was a life of selfless suffering in our country's cause in a spirit of dedication rarely surpassed in the annals of national struggles for freedom, Lokamanya Tilak, had been spared, the confidence you have reposed in me to-day had been of very superior right, his, and would have been, happily, not mine."

Officiating, as it were, for the great Lokamanya who was no more, he could not but try to impart to his keynote address something of the fire and passion that Tilak would have done had he been spared to preside over the Nagpur session. And undoubtedly, Vijayaraghavachariar tried his best, especially in the passages in which he dilated on the struggle for human rights down the ages and especially spoke of France and the French revolution when the people of France "fought and bled for humanity." But having spent all passion in evoking the glorious memories of the battles for civil liberties of all our yesterdays, he seemed to become rather muted, or at least Delphic, and, what is more, to go off at all manner of tangents without ever coming to the point. His digressions on various edifying themes, as, for instance, nation-building activities which he advocated, were listened

to with respect, but what the delegates were anxious to have was a lead on the main and urgent issue. This he avoided giving. Thus very near the end of his address he managed to send the ball in the delegates' court by saying:

I would make an earnest appeal to you and beg of you to realise that, for the past two years, we have been in an increasingly critical state of our life, political and economical. I believe that the crisis has now reached its worst and the Nagpur session of the Congress may be rightly deemed to be the Thermopylae in the history of India, certainly in the history of the Indian National Congress. I believe that it has been allotted to this great presence so to think, so to aim, and so to act as to reap the glory of the nation-making and history-making of our beloved Motherland. In one aspect the work before us consists of two essential parts, one positive and the other negative. I venture to think that our fate just now lies chiefly in the hands of two men : the Right Hon'ble Mr. Montagu and Mahatma Gandhi. Two messages have to be presently framed, one to each. You will frame the message to Mr. Montagu and by virtue of the confidence you have reposed in me I shall frame the message to Mahatmaji. You will tell Mr. Montagu : "Pray do" and I will tell the Mahatmaji "Pray do not" and in the welcome response to each message lies the salvation of our country in the main just now. . . .

What the delegates to the Nagpur session or the Mahatma himself made of the President's cryptic instructions to them is hard to guess at this distance in time. They may not have found his counsel easier to decipher than to follow, though they did not fail to applaud him before getting on with the business on the agenda. This was heavy though the resolutions were less than half those at Amritsar—only twenty-four. Some were repeats, like the resolutions on education, the struggle of Indian settlers in Africa and Fiji, protest at forcible acquisition of land by the Government under the Land Acquisition Act, and the call for promoting indigenous systems of medicine. But quite a number of new and topical matters were covered by the resolutions on the agenda—the unprecedented rise in Indian Sterling Exchange



rate, solidarity with the Trade Unions in their struggle for securing their legitimate rights and calling upon the All-India Congress Committee to appoint a Committee to take effective steps to prevent the exploitation of Indian Labour and Indian resources by foreign agencies.

There was also a resolution thanking the Muslim associations for their resolution against cow slaughter and, while about it, the resolution affirmed the Congress' recognition of "the great economic necessity for the protection of cattle" and urging "upon the people of India to do their best to achieve this object, particularly by refusing to sell cattle or hides for export trade." Another resolution—number twenty—condemned the Government "for its callous disregard of the immediate needs of the Indian people in reference to its policy as regards the exportation of food-stuffs in spite of famine conditions prevailing" and it advised "the traders not to export foodstuffs" and the public not to sell such food-stuffs (particularly rice and wheat) "to exporting traders and agencies or help in any way the export of these stuffs."

The report of the Committee appointed by the Secretary of State for India in 1919 under the chairmanship of Lord Esher to enquire into the administration and organisation of the Army had been submitted to the Government in May 1920 and published a few months later. It was so retrograde in its orientation and niggardly in meeting the claims which Indians of all shades of opinion had been making that even the well-wishers of the Raj advised the Government to take no action on its recommendations. Particularly unacceptable was its underlying doctrine that the Army in India was not solely for the defence of India but must be fitted into the larger design for the defence of the Empire. In India it was attacked even by the Moderates and the Congress naturally condemned it in the strongest possible terms and found in it a "strong additional ground for Non-co-operation, and for showing how dangerous it is to postpone the immediate establishment of Swaraj."

Some of the resolutions on the agenda were of long-term importance. The resolution "earnestly" requesting the Princes to democratize their administration has already been mentioned. Another new departure was meant to reassure the Sikhs, an historically important minority in the Punjab, who had hitherto

remained largely indifferent to the Congress for a number of complex reasons, not least of which was the character and composition of the Congress in the Land of Five Rivers. The nineteenth resolution at Nagpur declared that "in view of the fact that misunderstandings exist among the Sikhs as to the position of their community in the future polity of India, this Congress assures the Sikhs that their interests will receive the same protection in any scheme of Swaraj for India as is provided for Mohammedan and other minorities in provinces other than the Punjab." This assurance came at a time when a situation was already developing in the Punjab directly involving the Sikh community at the grassroot level in a confrontation with the British authorities and it served to draw the Sikhs closer to the Congress at least over the next decade and a half.

The struggle of the Irish people against British imperialism had always inspired those engaged in the struggle for Indian freedom. Indeed, it can be said that even before the Congress was founded and an organised movement for Indian self-government began, Indian intelligentsia had felt a sense of affinity to the Irish nationalists and no less a person than Rammohun Roy in the early decades of the 19th century had championed the cause of Catholic enfranchisement. This affinity had only deepened during the movement against the Partition of Bengal. Naturally, therefore, the hunger-strike of MacSwiney, the youthful Mayor of Cork, had been followed in India with the keenest and even agonising sympathy. The Nagpur Congress remembered his martyrdom and in its fourth resolution paid its homage to his "sacred memory" and sent "its message of sympathy to the Irish people in their struggle for Independence."

Another Irishman was also gratefully remembered at Nagpur. The fifteenth resolution placed "on record its feelings of gratefulness to B.G. Horniman whose arduous labours and courageous championship of the cause of India have made the Indian case widely known to the people outside India" and the Government was condemned for not allowing him to return to India. An earlier resolution—number three—recognised that it was "necessary in the interests of India to disseminate correct information about India and Indian questions in foreign countries. But it went on, with curious if not inverted logic,

to declare :

- (a) That the publication of newspaper *India* as an organ of the Congress be discontinued forthwith and the contracts of the present staff be terminated;
- (b) That, subject to the existing liabilities in connection with the British Congress Committee and newspaper *India* no further financial assistance from the Congress fund be supplied for these purposes; and
- (c) That a Committee consisting of Ben Spoor, Mr. Parikh, Mr. Holford Knight, Dr. Vakil, Mr. M.H. Kidwai and Mr. Dube be appointed for winding up the affairs of the British Congress Committee and newspaper *India*.

This was an unkind cut, to put it mildly; and the reasons for it were mixed in the sense that they were both financial and political. Financially, the upkeep of the British Congress Committee and its organ *India* was costing the All-India Congress Committee dear at a time when, judging from the annual report of its two General Secretaries (the third General Secretary, Gokaran Nath Misra, had resigned in September rather suddenly), were at very low ebb; and, as they complained bitterly, they had been unable to remit to V.J. Patel who had gone to England to present the Congress case on the Draft Rules and Regulations to the Joint Select Committee and Parliament, the funds that had been promised. "Not a single Provincial Congress Committee," they had bemoaned, "has contributed a single pie in carrying on the work of the Congress deputation."

The Provincial Congress Committees had throughout been equally unwilling to carry out their financial obligations undertaken to sustain the work of the British Congress Committee and its publication the weekly *India*. And even in those days the running of a weekly journal cost a pretty penny. As we learn from an editorial note in *Young India* of October 20, 1920, it cost £3,300 annually to run *India*, of which £1,800 went in salaries alone—Syud Hossain as editor-secretary got £550, Fenner Brockway another £550, G.P. Blizzard as secretary received £400, and £150 each was paid to the typist and the clerk respectively. The income of the paper was derisory—under five pounds for the year and its circulation was only 500, of which 220 sold in Great Britain and the rest came to India.

But there were also political reasons for this rather drastic decision by the Congress. Ever since the death of Wedderburn, neither the British Committee nor its journal *India* had found a point of stable equipoise, politically speaking. The breakaway of the Moderates from the Congress had created an almost insuperable difficulty for both the British Congress Committee and *India*. They were both reflexively sympathetic to the moderate line and found the new radical accent of the Congress hard to assimilate. Almost the first thing which V.J. Patel did on his arrival in England with N.C. Kelkar at the end of May 1919 was to put the British Congress Committee as then Constituted and *India* under notice to change their ways and bring themselves into line with the policies of the Congress which funded them. As already related, with some reluctance the Committee had complied and accepted the new Constitution which V.J. Patel and Kelkar had drawn up for it and which made it obligatory for the Committee to accept the object as defined in Article I of the parent organisation, the Indian National Congress. This had led to some though not many resignations from the British Congress Committee.

However, the Congress was not satisfied that the British Congress Committee was really functioning in the way it should. As for *India*, under Helena Normanton's editorial care it had tended to veer towards the radical extreme whereas under her predecessors it had been rather excessively moderate. At all events, Gandhi had by now come to the conclusion that both the Committee and its weekly were serving no useful purpose as far as India was concerned. Himself a very effective propagandist in the best sense of the term for the causes which he made his own, he had very little faith in professional propaganda in foreign parts. In any case, any such propaganda, he felt, should be carried out by the natives of the country themselves if they sympathised with the Indian cause. He explained his views on the matter very frankly in the piece written after Helena Normanton had written to him setting down her ideas on Indian publicity in Britain, in *Young India* of October 20:

I entirely associate myself with her remark that a British Committee, to be true to name, should be composed exclusively of the British people and financed by them. It is then

more likely to exert influence on British public opinion than not. In any case we would then have a real index of the British interest in Indian affairs. I endorse Miss Normanton's views about the newspaper *India* also. The paper costs much more than it is worth. Its influence on English opinion is practically nothing and it is an indifferent vehicle of English opinion for India's enlightenment. Its only value therefore consists in its parliamentary reports which can be received and distributed by the All-India Congress Committee with very little cost. . . . And now that we have embarked on non-co-operation and are determined to become self-reliant, it would be more consistent for us to disestablish the British Committee and stop *India*. It would save a needless waste of public money and turn our attention more towards ourselves.

Gandhi seemed equally unreceptive to another suggestion by Helena Normanton—that *India* "should have a kind of an advisory committee or adviser resident in London to help the proposed British Committee with suggestions." He wrote:

I would rather concentrate all our attention and all our best workers on work in India. The harvest is truly rich and the labourers are few. We can ill spare a single worker for foreign work. It will be time for us to consider the propriety of sending representative abroad after we have created a permanent impression in India itself by substantial and solid work.

On this point he was largely right, though not for the reasons he gave. In normal times a British Committee interested in Indian affairs and sympathetic to the Indian cause would not have needed the services of an Indian adviser or advisory committee; and in times of any acute crisis in Indo-British relations, no matter how sympathetic the British Committee might be to India, it would be unlikely to be influenced in its judgement by any adviser or advisers who truly reflected the nationalist views and sentiments in India as subsequent experience was to show and as Helena Normanton, it must be said to her credit, herself admitted in one of her editorial pieces in *India*.

But Gandhi's judgement on the work of the British Congress Committee and the role of *India* in influencing public opinion in Britain was not only severe and wanting in charity. It was also

less than just. With all its limitations, the British Congress Committee until Wedderburn's death had been reasonably effective in interpreting and presenting the Indian viewpoint to the opinion-forming sections of the intelligentsia in Britain, both inside the British Parliament and outside. As for its journal *India*, its influence and effectiveness could not be judged only in terms of the copies it sold. Its very existence was some check on the disinformation about India and the Congress by the organs of, or close to, the British imperialist establishment. What is more, anybody looking through its files cannot but be impressed by how much light it throws on the developments in the three decades during which it was published and how indispensable it is to anybody who wishes to reconstruct the political history of the period. It certainly was the best periodical devoted to India published abroad either during the pre-independence period or since. And the present writer includes in this most of the Indian journalistic ventures in the West which he has known or been associated with over the past half a century or more.

Gandhi, of course, had a highly puritanical attitude to the use of public money; and it was on the whole a right and proper attitude. But he carried it too far. A saving of Rs. 45,000 was undoubtedly achieved by closing down *India*, but at a cost which cannot be quantified only in terms of money. *India* was a reliable journal of record on Indian affairs and its files that remain in a few libraries constitute an invaluable reservoir of information on political as well as social and economic developments in India for upward of thirty years that it was published. By killing it when it was going to be most needed Gandhi threw away a weapon which would have been of use to him in disseminating information about the non-cooperation movement. For there is little doubt that his voice was decisive during the discussion on foreign propaganda at Nagpur. In his speech on the resolution he not only repeated what he had said in his article in *Young India*, but added:

We shall hurt our cause, rather than help our cause. If we are doing anything here, no propaganda will be necessary. I want foreign countries to understand me. They understand only business, they understand only work. Whilst you have given currency to one solid fact our detractors have tried to

contradict it by various devices. You will put the British nation on their honour, so that they will understand your act of self-denial in withholding information through agency.

This was true but it was not the whole truth.

The decision to wind up the British Congress Committee and *India*, however, was relatively a minor one against the background of the momentous decisions taken on three other related matters—the fixing of the goal of the Indian National Congress, the commitment to a comprehensive programme of non-cooperation and the adoption of a constitution for the Congress consonant with its aim. The objective resolution was listed at the top of the agenda under the heading “Change of Creed”. It declared that “the object of the Indian National Congress is the attainment of Swarajya by the people of India by all legitimate and peaceful means.” As this was to form Article I of the Congress Constitution, the reorganisation of the structure of the Congress was taken up together with the redefinition of the creed and objective of the Congress. Gandhi himself moved the first resolution soon after the plenary session of the Congress began at noon on December 28, having already moved it in the Subjects Committee that morning. He first spoke in Hindi and then, more briefly, in English because, he explained, he did not “propose to detain” them “for any length of time”. He said that, as far as he could understand, there were “only two objections” to the resolution. One objection was that the change of creed meant “dissolving the British connection.” His answer was that it would be “derogatory to national dignity” if they came to look upon the “permanence of British Connection” as the paramount criterion overriding all other considerations in their scheme of national objectives. The paramount consideration must be to secure “elementary justice” for India from the British people. He wanted them to make it plain to the whole world—and India—that they may “possibly” have to do without British connection if the British denied them justice.

However, he said, “I do not for one moment suggest that we want to end the British connection at all costs unconditionally. If the British connection is for the advancement of India we do not want to destroy it. But if it is inconsistent with our national

self-respect, then it is our bounded duty to destroy it." He did not take the view which, it seems, his friend, C.F. Andrews, took and which he described as "extreme," that "all hope for India is gone for keeping the British connection," and who wanted "complete severance, complete independence." His view was and it was the view taken in the resolution that "there is room in this resolution for both, those who believe that by retaining the British connection we can purify ourselves and purify the British people and those who have no such belief. . . . Therefore, this creed is elastic enough to take in both shades of opinion, and the British people will have to beware that, if they do not want to do justice it will be the bounden duty of every Indian to destroy that Empire."

It should be clear from this that even during that phase of Gandhi's political evolution when his mind was still in the process of transition from acceptance of the legitimacy of the British Empire and his eventual repudiation of that legitimacy, his position on the question was far more agnostic and pragmatic than his critics, especially on the Left, credited him with then and until but recently. A degree of pragmatism also informed his argument against those who objected to or were sceptical about the means envisaged in the resolution for the attainment of the goal set in the new creed—Swarajya. It is not, however, very clear what the differences or the doubts were. Presumably, the differences and doubts were regarding what was the precise meaning of the phrase "all legitimate and peaceful means." Gandhi in his speech dwelt at some length on the divergencies among the Bengal contingent. "There was," he said, "a little bit of skirmish, a little bit of squabble and a little bit of difference in the Bengal camp as there will always be differences so long as the world lasts." This was something of a philosophic understatement. At any rate, Dr. Sitaramayya in his account of the episode says:

Mr. C.R. Das brought a contingent of about 250 delegates from East Bengal and Assam, bore their expenses to and fro, and spent Rs. 36,000 from his pocket to undo what was done in Calcutta. There was even a small fight between his men and those of Jitendralal Banerjee, his opponent.



Luckily, however, no great harm was done and no bones were broken though it shows that the Congress sessions even in those good old days were not altogether sugar and spice, and all the things that are nice. The particular fracas in the Bengal Camp, it appears, was settled for the time being by Gandhi's own intervention, though he did not claim that the differences were altogether resolved:

I do not say they have settled their differences. I hope they have. But I do know that they undertook to forget the differences. They undertook not to worry the President, they undertook not to make any demonstration here or in the subjects committee, and all honour to those who listened to that advice....

While for Gandhi the question of means being peaceful was a matter of morality in the widest sense of the term and a categorical imperative, he also stressed that the practical exigencies of the situation in which they were placed made it necessary for them to employ means for achieving Swarajya which were "legitimate...honourable...non-violent" and peaceful. "You have resolved upon this thing," he said, "that, so far as we can see today, we cannot give battle to this Government by means of steel but we can give battle by exercising what I have so often called soul force and soul force is not the prerogative of one man or a Sannyasi or even of a so-called saint. Soul force is the prerogative of every human being, female or male...."

At the Special Session at Calcutta Lajpat Rai who had been the presiding deity over its deliberations, had chosen to remain *au desus de melee* both in word and deed although, as his biographer, Feroz Chand, maintains, probably rightly, that he had his doubts about the whole Gandhian programme and whether the time was "ripe" for it. But in the four months since then some of his doubts had been dissipated—sufficiently at least for him to second the resolution on the change of creed and constitution of the Congress at Nagpur. In so doing, he did not mix the ethical and, as it were, didactic aspect of the question with the political. He said straightaway that he considered the resolution "to be of the greatest importance not only at the present juncture but also for the future of my country".

Lajpat Rai then went on to trace the history of the Congress

Creed since the abortive Surat Congress in 1907, and referred to his own part in the controversy when he had saved the day for the Moderates and how, later at Allahabad, he had not agreed with those very Moderates because they wanted to take certain decisions which would "exclude from the deliberations of this Congress anybody who pitched his ideal so high as the complete independence of his mother country." "And I tell you," he observed, "that one chief point for consideration before me was that no assembly in India could be called National which precluded by virtue of this creed (that is, 'responsible Government within the British Empire') a man of the purity and of the ability and of the absolute disinterestedness and high patriotism...of Aurobindo."

That, however, was twelve or thirteen years ago. And while Lajpat Rai was not prepared to say that they would or could go at once for complete independence, or that they would not remain "within the British Commonwealth, if that were possible," he wanted them to take "the opportunity of pointing out that we shall be lacking in frankness, we shall be lacking in honesty and truth, if we are not to announce in the clearest possible terms the change of mentality that has come over this country." He was quite witty in speaking of the pledges given by British statesmen. "We may place every faith in the words of an English gentleman," he remarked, "but we can no longer place any faith in the words of British statesman." Passing in review members of the British Cabinet—Lloyd George, Curzon, Winston Churchill, Milner and Montagu—Feroz Chand quotes Lajpat Rai as saying: "Point out to me a single member of the present British Cabinet whose words carry greater weight than those of a grocer." This was good clean fun, but perhaps a little unfair to grocers. Levity aside, when dealing with the question of "means" by which Swarajya was to be attained, he said:

I am one of those who believe that every nation has, when the occasion arises, the inherent right of armed rebellion against a repressive autocratic government but I do not believe we have either the means or even the will for such an armed rebellion at the present time. I will not discuss the future possibilities but I want that my countrymen should not have any misconception or misgiving about the fact that the leaders

of the National Congress do not want them to resort to violence for the attainment of any of the objects which have been laid before them.

This intertwining of realism and radicalism in his argument enabled him to keep all his options open. A heated discussion followed on the resolution, according to the Congress report, and the session adjourned leaving it "to the President to decide after taking votes of each province." Even greater heat was generated by the second resolution on the agenda—on the programme for non-cooperation which was the operative crux of the matter. It was a long resolution running to more than eight hundred words. The text began by declaring that "in the opinion of the Congress, the existing Government of India has forfeited the confidence of the country," and since the Indian people were "determined to establish Swaraj" and all methods adopted before the last Special Session had failed "to secure due recognition of their rights and liberties and the redress of their many and grievous wrongs, more specially in reference to the Khilafat and the Punjab." It went on:

Now this Congress while reaffirming the resolution on Non-violent Non-co-operation passed at the Special Session of the Congress at Calcutta declares that the entire or any part or parts of the scheme of Non-violent No-co-operation, with the renunciation of voluntary association with the present Government at one end and the refusal to pay taxes at the other, should be put in force at a time to be determined by either the Indian National Congress or the All-India Congress Committee and that in the meanwhile, to prepare the country for it, effective steps should continue to be taken in that behalf.

The resolution then listed these steps—withdrawal of children from schools and students from colleges; nationalisation of Government affiliated and aided schools and municipalities and local boards to help in the process; gradual boycott of foreign trade relations by the trading community and encouragement of hand-spinning and hand-weaving; the setting up of organising committees in each village or group of villages with a provincial

central organisation at their apex for the purpose of accelerating the progress of non-cooperation; organising of a cadre of workers for national service to be called the Indian National Service; effective steps to raise a National Fund to be called All-India Tilak Memorial Swarajya Fund for the purpose of financing the National Service and the Non-cooperation movement in general.

The text went on to congratulate "the nation upon the progress made so far in working the programme of non-co-operation," specially with regard to the boycott of Councils by the voters. The congratulations were well deserved. The percentage of voters' boycott varied from province to province and as between rural and urban areas in the November elections, but it was nevertheless substantial enough to reflect considerable success for the Non-Cooperation movement. The Government, of course, claimed a success and made much of the fact that in only a few of the 637 "constituencies" no candidate presented himself for election to the "reformed" Councils. But in the Punjab, for instance, only 8.5 voters in urban areas went to the polls and in Lahore, the capital of the Punjab, voting was no more than five per cent.

True, the picture in the rural areas was different, though even there less than forty per cent of the voters troubled to cast their votes. As Dr. Judith Brown puts it, "In Bengal the Governor was surprised at the strength of non-cooperation in the Presidency"—and this despite the fact that a strong faction of the Congress leadership in Bengal was opposed to Gandhi's programme of non-cooperation and especially to the boycott of the Councils. The officials were even more surprised by the "widespread hold" of non-cooperation in the Central Provinces, according to the same source. In Bombay only eight per cent of the electorate turned up to vote and even the aggregate figure of 31.5 per cent for the Presidency as a whole was not exactly a vote of confidence in the Reforms, considering that only a small fraction of the adult male population was entitled to vote at all because of the property and other qualifications needed for the right to vote.

The resolution even made bold to recognise "the growing friendliness between the Police and the soldiery and the people," and hoped "that the former will refuse to subordinate their creed and country to the fulfilment of orders of their officers, and,

by courteous and considerate behaviour towards the people, will remove the reproach hitherto levelled against them that they are devoid of any regard for the feelings and sentiments of their own people." This was sailing very near the wind of sedition. So was its appeal "to all people in Government employment, pending the call of the nation for resignation of their service, to help the national cause"—and not only "by importing greater kindness and stricter honesty in their dealings with their people" but also by "fearlessly and openly" attending all "popular gatherings," though "refraining from taking any active part therein." The Government servants were also asked openly to render financial assistance to the national movement. But it covered itself by laying "special emphasis on Non-violence" as the "integral part of the Non-co-operation resolution" and inviting the people's attention "to the fact that Non-violence in word and deed is as essential between people themselves, as in respect of the Government."

In its final para the resolution called for the promotion of non-violence and non-cooperation with the Government by all the public bodies "whether affiliated to the Congress or otherwise" and appealed to them "to advance Hindu-Muslim unity" as also unity among the Hindus themselves—"between Brahmins and Non-Brahmins"—and at the same time "to make a special effort to rid Hinduism of the reproach of untouchability."

These exhortations, of course, were the stock-in-trade of all reformist organisations. They could be accepted by the delegates to the Congress without turning a hair. The real rub came on the operative programme of non-cooperation and even there on certain points of detail like the withdrawal of students from educational institutions run by the Government or sustained by it in greater or lesser degree and boycott of the Law Courts. But quite apart from the fact that those who opposed these items in the nine-point programme were aware that ever since the Calcutta Special Session political opinion had moved still more decisively in favour of Gandhi and non-cooperation, they were somewhat inhibited in their opposition by the thought that their motives were likely to be misunderstood and interpreted as defence of their "vested interests." It was not quite so simple as that and there was something in their contention that "the Law Courts cannot be completely boycotted at present," and a

boycott, therefore, would not be very effective and might even turn out to be a fiasco.

All the same they fought a tough rearguard action in the Subjects Committee meeting which began on December 29 and went on till after midnight. C.R. Das and his supporters found allies in the fraternal delegates from Britain of whom there were five—Josiah Wedgwood, his wife, Holford Knight, Ben Spoor, and B. Dube. Josiah Wedgwood, a radical Labour MP in those early days who was to follow the usual trajectory of ending up very much on the Right, was present in the Subjects Committee with Ben Spoor and Holford Knight. He even took part in the debate on the resolution on non-cooperation and warned the committee that by opting for non-cooperation the Congress would be isolating itself from progressive opinion in England—a line which Annie Besant had been taking:

You will make it difficult for your friends in England to take up your cause. You will be hampered in your work. The Police will be after you. The lawyers sign a pledge that they would be loyal to the Crown and cannot therefore work for Non-co-operation. You are going into the wilderness. You must pursue a constructive programme.

Wedgwood obviously was sincere and he meant well. It was nevertheless a rather tactless intervention which tended to put the Indian backs up. According to Dr. Sitaramayya, "Hardly had he [Wedgwood] resumed his seat when up rose a voice in reply, and, in five minutes [Wedgwood had spoken for fifteen minutes], answered his objections." The interrupter said:

We have no friends outside India; let there be no mistake about that. Our salvation lies in our own hands. We must make or mar our future. We have realised that, and taken to this programme. The Police are not a new element in Indian politics. If we have opened a small school, every rupee we have collected, we have gathered only under the shadow of the red turban [that is, the Police] during the past fifteen years. Yes, the lawyers have to sign an undertaking to be loyal, so it is that they are asked to tear up their "sanads". We are going into the wilderness we know, because the way to the

"land flowing with milk and honey, the land of Canaan," from the land of our bondage, lies only through a wilderness. And we trust to the leadership of a Moses or an Aaron to lead us from untruth to truth, from darkness to light, from death to life.

This sounded pure apocalypse. That, however, was the ambient mood at Nagpur. Gandhi's notion that if the programme of non-cooperation were carried out in the letter and the spirit, Swarajya could be achieved in "one year" had seemed to carry conviction except for a small number of the sceptics and the worldly-wise. Josiah Wedgwood's counsel of prudence, far from helping the opponents of non-cooperation, proved to be counter-productive. The main concession which Das and others won by their oppositional effort was that the word "gradual" in relation to the boycott of schools and law courts was retained which Gandhi's draft did not contain. In return, Das himself agreed to move the resolution on non-cooperation at the plenary session the next day. The interest was so keen that delegates began to arrive from the early hours of the morning of December 30.

In his speech, Das dismissed the suggestion that the resolution he was moving was weaker than the one passed at Calcutta. On the contrary, he claimed, it was "stronger" and "fuller." For it stated in no uncertain terms that the Congress had "resolved to put in force the entire scheme of Non-co-operation down to the non-payment of taxes." He called on them to pass it "without one single dissentient voice." It was by no means one of his more memorable speeches. Indeed, there was something laboured about it. He was followed by Gandhi who seconded the resolution in Hindi. But the speech which evoked most cheers, it seems, was that of the old stalwart Bipin Chandra Pal.

The cheers for him might have been partly ironical. At the Calcutta Special Session he had fathered an amendment to the non-cooperation resolution. Supporting what Das claimed to be a stronger and fuller resolution four months later was rather like Pal's conversion on the road, not to Damascus, but Nagpur. But he was not the man to adopt an apologetic posture. Rather the reverse. He said that he had never been "against the principle and policy of Non-co-operation" and had "preached it from the

Press and from the Platform" as the "only remedy and our last chance." He admitted that they had their "little differences in regard to the details of the programme" but they were things of the past, and "when the country is determined to work along one single line with a view to achieve the object which every one of us has in view these little differences must be merged in the unity of the country."

There was a prolonged debate, but when the resolution was put to vote it was carried with virtual unanimity, only two delegates voting against it. Surprisingly, however, the first resolution concerning the change in the creed of the Congress was put to vote after the vote on the resolution on non-cooperation programme. Apparently, the President, Vijayaraghavachariar, left after the vote on the second resolution was taken and Motilal Nehru took the chair. There were two amendments which had been moved to the resolution on the new Congress Creed—one by Venkatarama Aiyar which was lost and the other by Satya-murti which was withdrawn. However, just before the resolution itself was put to vote a delegate raised a procedural point of order. The vote on change of creed, he maintained, should be taken provincewise. Motilal Nehru pointed out that he was willing to do that if there were any dissentient voices.

The delegate who wanted provincewise voting persisted and said that there were speakers who had spoken against the resolution, in particular Jinnah. Jinnah, of course, was not present at the time of voting, but had certainly spoken against the resolution and objected to it on two grounds:

First of all, I object to this creed because as I read it, it means nothing else but a declaration for complete independence. The word "Swarajya" is not qualified and the word means nothing else but our complete Independence. It does not at all provide for any kind of [British] connection which may or may not be retained. . . . My second objection is that Non-cooperation on peaceful methods, legitimate, but peaceful methods, may be an excellent weapon for the purpose of bringing pressure upon the Government. But let me tell you once more that the weapon will not succeed in destroying the British Empire.



They were valid, but rather legalistic objections. However, in the light of subsequent evolution of Jinnah's relations with the Congress, they were portentous. For although he did not stay to vote against the resolution on the change of creed, his absence itself was a kind of informal notice that for him the parting of the ways with the Congress had almost been reached. The resolution fixing "Swarajya" as the goal to be attained, as he well knew and as Gandhi had stressed, was sufficiently ambiguously phrased for both the upholders of the British connection and its opponents to interpret it in the sense in which they wished. But Jinnah seemed allergic to the way in which the Congress was developing under Gandhi's leadership. That allergy was the real cause of the break which was eventually to come; the resolution on the new Congress creed was no more than a justificatory excuse.

To leave no room for later objections, Motilal Nehru after putting the resolution to a voice vote, had the vote taken province by province. There were only two votes cast against it—one from Sind and one from the United Provinces. Before declaring the motion as carried the acting President, however, allowed "two minutes" for anyone other than the two dissenters, who was against the proposition to come forward and cast his vote against the resolution. None came. It was clear that there was an overwhelming consensus behind both the resolutions on the new creed and on the non-cooperation programme. Yet another Rubicon had been crossed, and although there were to be backslidings and desertions by individuals and groups and even tactical retreats, there was to be no going back for the Congress movement as a whole....

## CHAPTER VII

### AGE OF ATTRITION—THE FIRST PHASE

The curtain did not come down on the Nagpur Session of the Congress with the adoption of the new creed and non-co-operation programme. The session continued the next day, the last day of the dying year. Much of the business conducted on December 31, 1920, was of a routine nature. The outgoing General Secretaries were duly thanked for the services rendered. New General Secretaries had to be appointed and they were duly appointed. They were: Dr. M.A. Ansari who had already done a year's stint as General Secretary, C. Rajagopalachari and Motilal Nehru. Presumably, Motilal Nehru was to be the "working" General Secretary because the resolution appointing the General Secretaries stated that "the Head-Quarters of the All-India Congress Committee be located at Allahabad." It had become an established convention that the A.I.C.C. headquarters for the year were located where the "working" General Secretary had his fixed abode. This was not a very satisfactory practice. Indeed, the outgoing General Secretaries, Dr. M.A. Ansari and V.J. Patel, had lamented the fact and said in their report for 1920:

We would... urge upon the attention of the All-India

Congress Committee and the Congress the fixing of permanent headquarters for the office of the All-India Congress Committee. The dislocation of the business of the office which follows the annual change, in some cases more frequent, as when the Working Secretary tenders his resignation in the middle of the year, [this had happened in 1920] of the headquarters is a serious obstacle in the way of the smooth working of the Committee office. It takes long, indeed, to restore the office to its normal condition and by the time this is done, it unfortunately happens, that the Congress appoints a new Working Secretary, with the result that the whole arrangement is entirely disturbed. That being so, the office has not been able to preserve proper record, not even the reports of the past Congress, much less a library. This is, to say the least, highly deplorable.

It undoubtedly was highly deplorable and it was perhaps fortunate that at the end of 1920 Motilal Nehru, having been appointed General Secretary though not named as a "working one," the Congress headquarters was shifted to his residence at Allahabad. As Motilal Nehru was to continue to be the General Secretary the following year, the headquarters of the All-India Congress Committee did not have to be shifted from Allahabad in 1922 either and in 1924 the Congress decided that the A.I.C.C. headquarters should remain permanently at Anand Bhawan, Allahabad. And so they remained till independence was achieved. But that is anticipating.

The most important business transacted on the last day of the Congress session at Nagpur, apart from fixing Ahmedabad as the venue of the Thirty-sixth Congress, was the adoption of its new Constitution. Early in January 1920 the A.I.C.C. had set up a Committee to draft amendments to the Congress Constitution and Rules and to present its report "on or before the 30th June last (1920)." But as we know from the letter addressed by the Committee to the Chairman, A.I.C.C., on September 25, 1920, the new draft Constitution was not submitted till then "owing to unforeseen circumstances." The members of the Committee, included Gandhi, N.C. Kelkar and I.B. Sen. They apparently were not "able to meet at any place for mutual discussion" and had been "obliged to confer with one another only

by correspondence." This, indeed, was the complaint made by A. Rangaswamy Iyengar who said that it was largely the handiwork of Gandhi and did not accurately reflect the collective views of the Committee.

This was a little exaggerated. There is nothing on record to show that other members of the Committee felt the same way as Rangaswamy Iyengar. They were present at the Nagpur Congress and could have objected when the new Constitution was discussed. Again, there is nothing on record to indicate that they complained of their views having been ignored by Gandhi in framing the amendments to the Constitution. Nor does there seem much substance in Rangaswamy Iyengar's criticism that Gandhi merely made "a bundle of draft alterations" to the existing constitution. Even the ranks of Tuscany, in the person of Judith Brown who traced Iyengar's "minute of dissent" in Annie Besant's papers, acknowledges the Constitution "was a landmark in the direction, composition and structure of institutional politics."

It certainly was the most coherent and well-constructed constitution that the Congress had to date. As related in the earlier volume, for many years after its foundation the Congress had functioned in an ad hoc manner without any effective constitutional framework. It was not until the Fourteenth and the Fifteenth Congress that a constitution and a set of rules were put into shape. Then came the Surat fiasco followed by the Convention which appointed a Committee to define the Congress Creed and lay down some sort of criteria for membership qualification to keep out the wilder spirits or the militants, as they would be called today. Over the next decade or more from time to time piecemeal changes in the constitution were made to meet certain contingencies and developments, but nothing in the nature of a comprehensive review and revision were undertaken. It was, therefore, high time that the constitution and the rules governing it were brought up to date, especially as the Congress was now committed to throw a challenge, albeit a non-violent and peaceful one, to a well-entrenched Empire still in a triumphalist frame of mind.

This was what Gandhi and his colleagues tried to do, and looking at the constitutional framework they produced in retrospect, they did it not too badly. It consisted of thirty-one

articles in all (see Appendix I), beginning with the definition of the object of the Indian National Congress. It established its structure by listing its component parts from the apex, represented by the plenary Congress, to the base consisting of "Sub-Divisional, Taluqa, or Tahsil, Firka or other local Congress Committees." It accepted the linguistic principle as the basis for setting up Provincial Congress Committees each with its own headquarters, though, it seems, that in the case of Andhra, Sind and Utkal (Orissa) the headquarters town or city was left blank. Altogether there were twenty-one Provincial Congress Committees listed, including one for Burma at Rangoon and the City of Bombay had the distinction of being entitled to a bilingual P.C.C. in its own right.

Membership of the Congress was made open to all above the age of 21, male or female, who accepted in writing "the object and the methods as laid down in Article I" of the Constitution, membership fee being set at four annas annually. The P.C.C.s were to consist of representatives "elected annually by the members of the District and other Committees." A recognisable chain of command was envisaged, from the President of the Congress who was to be the Chairman of the A.I.C.C. for the year following his election, downwards. A new departure was the creation of a Working Committee to be appointed by the A.I.C.C. at its first meeting "consisting of the President, the General Secretaries, the Treasurers and 9 other members." The Working Committee was to "perform such functions as may be delegated to it from time to time by the All-India Congress Committee."

The new Constitution seemed clearly designed for a modern political party, but a party whose constituency was not just a country but almost a continent and with a population which already numbered over three hundred million. Gandhi was credited with having been largely responsible for drafting it. This was rather surprising. Surprising, because at the time his conception of what the Congress should be was akin to that of Hume and other Founding Fathers of the Indian National Congress. For as late as April 28, 1920, in an article headed "To the Members of All-India Home Rule League" in *Young India*, he had written:

...I do not consider the Congress as a party organization,

even as the British Parliament, though it contains all parties and has one party or other dominating it from time to time, is not a party organization. I shall venture to hope that all parties will cherish the Congress as a national organization providing a platform for all parties to appeal to the nation with a view to moulding its policy....

Presumably, as the sun moved from the vernal to the autumnal equinox and the political temperature mounted in the country and outside, Gandhi had come to feel the need for a party with a clear definition of the ends towards which it was working and the requisite means to achieve those ends, and a framework coherent enough to be an effective instrument for the tasks that lay immediately ahead, namely the struggle for Swarajya and to get justice on the Khilafat issue which was in fact more than the Khilafat issue and connected with the struggle of the peoples of West Asia against Western domination even though excessive preoccupation with confessional matters by some of the Khilafat movement leaders distorted their perception of it in varying degrees.

The struggle, indeed, had already begun. There were three resolutions passed at Nagpur which showed that the Congress was aware of this. One of these was listed fairly high on the agenda—number six. It called upon "the people of India" to "refrain from taking any part in functions or festivities in honour of H.R.H. the Duke of Connaught during his forthcoming visit to India." Originally, of course, it was the intention of the British Government to send the heir to the Throne—the future and unlucky Edward VIII—to preside over the ceremonial inauguration of the era of what came to be known as the Montford Reforms. The intention, R. Palme Dutt puts it justly if not too charitably in his *India Today*, was "to test out the feeling of the population in relation to this royal image understood by every Anglo-Saxon expert of the mysterious East to represent the deepest object of veneration and adoration of the Oriental heart." But as political tension mounted in the second half of 1920, there was a change of plans and it was decided that the old Duke should go out first as a kind of pilot engine to draw any fire and also to pour oil over the troubled waters to make it possible for the Prince of Wales to have a smoother passage through India at the end

of 1921. This the Duke of Connaught tried to do with his kind words and striking a rather humble if not penitent posture in his speeches when he landed in India early in January 1921. In one of them he said:

I have reached a time of life when I most desire to heal wounds and reunite those who have been disunited. An old friend of India, I appeal to you all—British and Indians—to bury along with the dead past the mistakes and misunderstandings of the past to forgive where you have to forgive and to join hands and to work together to realise the hopes that arise from to-day.

But “winning words” could “conquer willing hearts”, as Milton had it and as a British satrap of Bombay had quoted him more than a decade and half earlier, only if the words had some correspondence with deeds. But once again the carrot was overshadowed by the stick, or as latter-day historians of the Raj would have it, the balance was beginning to tilt from conciliation to repression, to put it mildly during the second half of 1920 onwards. The Nagpur Congress session had this very much in mind when it passed two resolutions—number ten and thirteen. The former expressed the sympathy of the Congress “with those political workers who have been arrested and imprisoned with or without regular specification of charge and open trial, and who are still detained in prison, or whose freedom of movement and association are still restricted by executive order.” It saw this as yet another argument for “the early attainment of Swaraj” which alone could “render these acts of injustice impossible.” The thirteenth resolution was more specific and said:

This Congress notes the resumption, in spite of declarations of the Government of India to the contrary, of repression in the Punjab, Delhi and elsewhere, and invites those concerned to bear their sufferings with fortitude and, whilst respecting all lawful orders, to prosecute Non-violent Non-co-operation with redoubled vigour.

However, while those whom Judith Brown describes as “Gandhi’s subcontractors”, meaning the local leaders and the

rank and file workers of the Congress and the Khilafat movement, were being rounded up in substantial numbers, Gandhi himself and other top leaders of the two kindred and overlapping currents of political agitation were being allowed long rope and left alone. All the same during the autumn and winter of 1920, debate was going on both in Delhi and London behind closed doors how long this policy of indulgence towards the larger fish while giving no quarter to the smaller fry could be continued. Opinion, obviously, was divided among the British establishment both in India and Whitehall. Judith Brown quotes Chelmsford in a letter to J.L. Maffey written on September 9, 1920, as saying: "It is the small people who speak in the villages who do the mischief, and they have no wish to be made martyrs. They value their comfort too highly, and if we can only by our action convince these people that they are on the wrong side, I think we are in a fair way to combat the movement."

On the other hand, some of the Provincial Governors were persuaded that this discriminatory approach would never work, including Willingdon who was now installed in Madras and had built up a spurious reputation for being "liberal" when he was the Governor of Bombay. According to Judith Brown, administration was for "stamping on Gandhi, and asked the Government of India, for permission to extern him during his projected tour of the Presidency." She goes on to quote what Willingdon wrote to Montagu as early as August 8, 1920, right at the very start of Gandhi's non-cooperation exercise: "As the Governor, Lord Willingdon, said, 'The G. of I. think they are going to kill this agitation by kindness. They won't. I know Gandhi well and have hitherto looked upon him as a selfless and high-minded man, with all his peculiarities a loyal citizen. But I can't think so any longer. He is out for our blood.'"

Montagu, as often, was in two minds. In private and effectively he took the same view as Chelmsford, and was for not touching Gandhi. According to Judith Brown, he feared "most of all that if the government acted against Gandhi himself he would 'hunger strike and die in prison'." "And then," he wrote to Chelmsford on September 9, 1920, "I don't know where we should be." His apprehension did credit to his good sense and prudence. But in public partly no doubt in deference to the diehard Tories who



regarded him as a weak-kneed and gutless Liberal who was being soft on Gandhi and the Congress, he struck more muscular postures and issued warnings that Gandhi could not count on his leniency as in the past. Answering questions in the House of Commons, he had, for instance, declared in July, "If Mr. Gandhi persisted in 'non-co-operation', it would be absolutely impossible to take the same view of his action as was taken last year."

Gandhi himself had not only taken a charitable view of Montagu's barely veiled threats and even of Montagu's understudy saying that the Mahatma "had lost his head". In his writings in his papers—*Young India* and *Navajivan*—he asked his followers not to get angry and "go mad" if he were arrested as they had done when Dr. Kitchlew and Dr. Satyapal had been spirited away the previous year in Amritsar. In an article in *Navajivan* of August 1, 1920, headed "Mr Montagu's Threat", he dealt with the matter, not entirely in a didactic vein which sometimes trailed off into whimsicality and even pure whimsy, but more in political terms. Telling his readers not "to get excited over the threat which Mr. Montagu held out while replying to a question about the Khilafat," he said that the Government could have one of the three aims in arresting him :

1. To frighten me into changing my views.
2. To separate me from the people and thus weaken public opinion.
3. By removing me from their midst, to test the people and see whether they are really agitated over the injustices.

He did not think that the Government had the object of frightening him. It probably did want to weaken public opinion, "but it is more reasonable to believe that it wants to test the people." He added : "It has a right to do so. If the people, however, stand the test and show their mettle, that very day they will win. We cannot complain against being tested in this way.... The very nature of our fight requires us to be always ready for jail." He did not, at all events, want them to be angry. On the contrary, he said :

If I do things which invite imprisonment and then run away

from it, or if the people feel aggrieved over my arrest, then the fault lies not with the Government but with us. In an oppressive and unjust State, a prison is the only place where a subject is really free.

Thus echoing the refrain which has echoed down the corridors of time and inspired the humankind in its struggle for freedom, Gandhi hoped that the people would "go ahead with non-cooperation with still greater vigour" if he were arrested and show "the Government that it cannot rule the people without their consent." He seemed puzzled why "Mr. Montagu should be doubly guilty by taking the wrong road of repression over people." And for once an unwonted note of bitterness articulated itself in his comment on Montagu's conduct:

He has already one crime to his credit, of being a party to the injustice [done to India]. Repression of the people in order to perpetuate that injustice would now be the second crime. The right course would be, seeing that the people are ready to go to the length of adopting non-cooperation, to bow to public opinion and, by undoing the injustice, remove the root-cause of non-cooperation.

However, neither the Government of India nor the Secretary of State had any intention to follow his advice and be logical and remove the root cause of non-cooperation. On the other hand, for reasons of their own, both Montagu and Chelmsford throughout the autumn and winter of 1920-21 had been willing to allow him long rope while being far less indulgent towards local Khilafat and Congress leaders. These reasons were political as well as personal. Politically, they did not want to queer the pitch for the Moderates. As Judith Brown rather neatly puts it, as the elections in November 1920 approached, "Montagu and Chelmsford were convinced that the only stable foundation for British rule in India was a working alliance between the Raj and a substantial proportion of Indian public men on the lines laid down in their reform scheme, and...they were determined to save their brain-child from Gandhi's attack. By a policy of tactful restraint they hoped to salvage a remnant of collaboration from public men who disliked non-cooperation and would be prepared to work

the reforms." And she quotes Chelmsford writing to Montagu on October 6, 1920, that is after the Special Session of the Congress at Calcutta :

I cannot myself see that we are a penny the worse for all the talking and the voting on this question of non-cooperation. It is true that people take a gloomy view of the situation, but I cannot get myself to a state of mind in which I can conceive that non-co-operation is a practical policy. On the other hand, there is no doubt that the policy of Gandhi & Co. is consolidating the moderate party, the leaders of which have come out quite rapidly and denounced it. As it seems to me, we have to sit still and take care that we do not make any mistake through which we shall drive the moderates away from us and into the arms of the extremists.

In addition to these political calculations which were partly accurate at least on a short-term view, in Chelmsford's case there was almost certainly another and personal reason for his disinclination to act against Gandhi and other top Congress leaders though his Home Member, William Vincent, was willing to "prosecute" Khilafat leaders like the Ali Brothers if they became too unruly. Chelmsford's proconsular term was drawing to its close and he was due to leave the shores of India early in 1921 to be succeeded by the first and last Jewish Viceroy—Rufus Daniel Isaacs, 1st Marquess of Reading. He was, therefore, anxious, if he could possibly help it, not to stir up a political hornets' nest by arresting Gandhi and complicating the situation for his successor. Besides, there had grown up a peculiar relationship between him and the Mahatma, and although their relations had soured somewhat in the tragic aftermath of the Rowlatt Act, he still rather hankered after Gandhi's good opinion of him and did not wish to do anything to accentuate the sense of estrangement between them. He did not state this as one of his reasons for sitting still in so far as Gandhi was concerned, but it almost certainly was a consideration at the back of his mind.

Not that the Congress leadership—or for that matter Gandhi—were straining at the leash to engage in battle with the Government on a wide front. Valentine Chirol, it is true, had telegraphed to the *Times* whose Correspondent Extraordinary on India he

was, on January 7, 1921 : "The old Indian National Congress, which, with all its shortcomings, claimed to be thoroughly loyal and constitutional, is dead. At Nagpur the new Congress has proclaimed loyalty to be optional and constitutional methods a matter of expediency." This assessment was largely accurate in a long-term perspective. The Congress that was reborn at Nagpur, with Gandhi acting as the midwife, was undoubtedly going to be a political animal of a very different kidney to the old Congress. It was not going to be content merely with pleading its cause with the Raj through carefully phrased supplications accompanied by appropriate verbal genuflections. It was to challenge its power and authority with open defiance of its laws, non-payment of Caesar's taxes, boycott of the whole institutional apparatus of the Empire. But the change from the old to the new could not come about overnight by a waving of the magic wand. If the old Adam continues to survive in the new, so, too, the new Congress was to continue carrying in its psychological and political make-up many of the reflexes of the old Congress and, perhaps, was never quite to outgrow them.

At all events it seemed to be hastening but slowly to the barricades, metaphorically—and not only metaphorically—speaking. Thus when the All-India Congress Committee met on January 1, 1921, after the Nagpur session, with only seventy-two of its more than two hundred and fifty members present, it undoubtedly implemented the decisions taken or flowing from the resolutions which the Congress had passed. But these concerned organisational instruments. For instance, it elected members of the new Working Committee which was to be the executive organ of the A.I.C.C. The elected members were Gandhi, N.C. Kelkar, C.R. Das, Lajpat Rai, Hakim Ajmal Khan, Maulana Mohamed Ali, K. Venkatappaya, B.S. Moonje, and Shankerlal Banker.

It set up two other committees : a twelve-man committee to carry out the resolution of the Congress about the boycott (by businessmen) of contracts and a committee consisting of ten men and one woman to implement the Congress resolution relating to Labour organisation—the woman on the panel being Anasuya Sarabhai who was a pioneer of trade union work in Ahmedabad. It also took the rather surprising decision not only "to authorise the expenditure of a sum not exceeding £3,000" for the purpose of dissemination of news in the United Kingdom,

but to sanction a sum of 3,000 dollars as a contribution to the India Home Rule League of America to be spent under the direction of N.C. Kelkar and Lajpat Rai. This was surprising, considering that the plenary session of the Congress had decided to wind up the British Congress Committee and its weekly journal *India*. However, the implementation of the political resolutions on non-cooperation did not seem to have been considered.

The attendance at the next meeting of the A.I.C.C. on March 31 and April 1, 1921, at Bezwada with Vijayaraghavachariar in the Chair, was even less. Only forty-eight members were present. But this was not because the enthusiasm for the Congress or its policy of non-cooperation was on the wane. If anything, in the three months that had passed since its last meeting at Nagpur, the country had become much more politically alive, largely because the Mahatma and Khilafat leaders like the Ali Brothers had undertaken extensive joint tours to muster support for the non-cooperation movement. But it was also partly due to the fact that some of the Government's gimmicks to work up support for the Montford Reforms had proved counter-productive. Even the royal magic had not worked. Although the authorities were able to drum up the "loyalists" to attend official processions and ceremonial receptions arranged for the Duke of Connaught, who had arrived in India early in January 1921, the tour was generally a flop and failed to arouse public enthusiasm.

This was not because there was any ill-feeling towards the Royal family or the old Duke himself. As Gandhi was to explain in his "Letter to Duke of Connaught," eventually published in *Young India* as well as other newspapers early in February, "For me it is no joy and pleasure to be actively associated in the boycott of Your Royal Highness's visit. I have tendered loyal, voluntary assistance to the Government for an unbroken period of nearly 30 years in the full belief that through that lay the path of freedom for my country. It was, therefore, no slight thing for me to suggest to my countrymen that we should take no part in welcoming Your Royal Highness." He went on :

We are not at war with individual Englishmen. We seek not to destroy English life. We do desire to destroy the system that has emasculated our country in body, mind and soul.

We are determined to battle with all our might against that in English nature which has made O'Dwyerism and Dyerism possible in the Punjab and has resulted in a wanton affront upon Islam, a faith professed by seven crores of our countrymen. We consider it inconsistent with our self-respect any longer to brook the spirit of superiority and dominance which has systematically ignored and disregarded the sentiments of thirty crores of innocent people of India on many a vital matter. . . . Your Royal Highness has come, not to end the system I described, but to sustain it by upholding its prestige. . . . Hence this non-violent non-cooperation. . . . I ask Your Royal Highness as an Englishman to study this movement and its possibilities for the Empire and the world. We are at war with nothing that is good in the world. . . .

What His Royal Highness made of Gandhi's letter to him is not known. But the authorities were not impressed or even amused. They did not yet want to lay hands on him or the other leading figures in the Congress and Khilafat movement, though their patience was nearing its end. But in their irritation they intensified repression against their rank and file followers, judging from the fourth resolution passed by the A.I.C.C. at Bezwada. What is more, as far as the Punjab was concerned, Gandhi was not exaggerating when he had spoken of the spirit of O'Dwyer continuing to rule the roost in the luckless Province. Under his successor, Edward Maclagan, who was by no means a "pugnacious Ulsterman," it is true, the administration was trying to avoid sins of commission. But sins of omission were a different matter, and the Punjab on the morning of February 20, 1921, was to witness an atrocity which equalled in horror the massacre at the Jallianwala Bagh by Dyer and his men two years earlier even though the number of dead was less—hundred and sixty.

The Government, of course, was not responsible directly for the killings which happened at Nankana Sahib then in Lahore district and the site of one of the holiest of Sikh shrines—the *Janam Asthan gurdwara*—the birthplace of Guru Nanak. It was perpetrated by the Praetorian guard hired by the Udasi Mahant, or priest, Narain Das, a man of excelling immorality and licentiousness even among the Mahants who were notorious for their corruption and venality and treated the Sikh shrines as their

private property. For some years the Akalis had been agitating for the reform of the management of their shrines and the previous autumn had succeeded in taking possession on behalf of the Sikh community of the Golden Temple. But the Government of the Punjab—and in Delhi—had remained passive, or at best neutral on the side of the Mahants who had effective possession of the shrines. On that fateful day in February when an Akali *jatha* or contingent tried to enter the shrine the Mahant's hired killers opened fire on them and those who tried to take shelter in the shrine were "hacked to pieces."

The massacre shocked many others besides the Sikh community and marked a turning point in its political evolution in our times although it is well to recall that much of the upper crust of the Sikh community, including the landed gentry and the rulers of the Sikh States, with rare exceptions, were either ambivalent or indifferent to the sufferings of the Akalis in their attempts to reform the management of Sikh shrines by restoring them to the control of the community as a whole. So, too, was the Punjab Congress because of its distinctive anatomy in which the interests of the urban professional and mercantile classes and a certain confessional bias associated with these classes were strongly articulated. This, however, did not apply to national leadership of the Congress—and certainly not Gandhi or the Nehrus. Indeed, Gandhi with Shaukat Ali were the first two All-India leaders to hasten to the scene of the tragedy. In his speech at Nankana Sahib on March 3, 1921, Gandhi said movingly :

I have come as a pilgrim to tender you my sympathy. . . . I could not make this pilgrimage earlier as I was bound to keep important appointments at Amritsar and Lucknow. Meantime I have heard much about the immolation.

I need hardly give you my assurance that your grief is mine. I am so constituted that the sufferings of others make me miserable. And were it not for the futility of suicide to end grief, I should long ere this have done away with my life by suicide. And so when I heard of the tragedy of Nankana I felt like wanting to be among the victims. As it is I can but show my sympathy to those that are left behind.

He went on to confess that he had not "come to any final judgement as to what actually happened." He found it "almost unbelievable that not a man died at the hands of the Akali party. Did not the brave men who were armed with *kirpans* and battle-axes retaliate even in self-defence? If they did not, it is an event that must electrify the whole world." In fact, that claim of the Akalis was substantially true and Gandhi was later to become convinced of its truth even though he was to remain critical of the Akalis in trying to take "possession" of the shrines by a show of force, even if non-violent force. But that is a separate story within the larger saga. Its relevance to our purpose is that the Akali movement brought the Sikh peasantry in the Punjab closer to the mainstream of the Congress movement from which it had tended to remain aloof for a number of psychological and political reasons until the end of the First World War. The Akali struggle for the democratic control of the Sikh shrines, of course, was not at that stage—or even later—quite on the same political wavelength as the Congress non-cooperation movement. But there is little doubt that its immediate impact in the Punjab was indirectly to help create atmospheric conditions favourable to the growth of the Congress movement in the countryside whilst until then it had been mainly confined to the urban areas.

Quantitatively, it could not be claimed that the items on the non-cooperation programme which were being implemented—like boycott of schools and courts, resignation from honorary posts and local bodies, surrender of titles—were making a spectacular headway. But Gandhi was partly right in claiming that it was not the statistical data of how many students had left the schools and colleges, or the number of lawyers who had given up practice, or those who had surrendered their titles which mattered. What mattered was that for the first time the people had shown that they attached no importance or legitimacy to the institutions of the Raj.

One might have thought that this was an argument for extending the area of non-cooperation to other items in the programme. But Gandhi speaking on the second resolution at the All-India Congress Committee meeting at Bezwada was quite explicit in stating that the Committee "should not recommend civil disobedience suggested in the form which was understood



by those who advocated it" nor in the form in which "he had practised in South Africa." This was in striking contrast to what he had done at the time of launching his first nationwide satyagraha campaign against the Rowlatt Bills two years earlier. Why this extraordinary caution? Witnesses to the era whose testimony must command respect, especially because they were not only witnesses but active participants in the events, have suggested that the Mahatma was rather vague in his mind about what to do. Jawaharlal Nehru in his autobiography speaks of Gandhi's "delightful vagueness." Subhas Bose in his *Indian Struggle* is more blunt:

What his real expectation was, I was unable to understand. Either he did not want to give out all his secrets prematurely or he did not have a clear conception of the tactics whereby the hands of the Government could be forced.

R. Palme Dutt who never quite understood Gandhi and saw his weaknesses much better than he saw his reserves of strength, adds his own wry comment to that of Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Bose. "Gandhi's plan of campaign," he remarks in *India Today*, "was less clear than the date of victory [Swaraj by the year's end]". But it could be that the trouble was not that Gandhi was not clear in his conception of the tactics he wanted to employ, but that he was only too clear of what they should be. Experience of the shambles in Ahmedabad to say nothing of the catastrophe in the Punjab had made him inordinately wary. He was still perfectionist in his demands on his followers regarding non-violence as he was to remain for another two decades. In his speech on the second resolution at Bezwada he had explained why he did not want the A.I.C.C. to recommend civil disobedience just yet:

If the country was organized and restrained so thoroughly as he desired it would then be time to put it into operation. As it was he considered that notwithstanding the great progress of non-violence among the people, there was still an element of what he would, for want of a better term, call mob law, not in the wrong sense but in the idea that the people had not yet so thoroughly disciplined themselves to the restraint.

that was needed when their dearest wishes were violated or when their great leaders were snatched away to prison under most provocative circumstances. Until, therefore, they were able to exercise self-control perfectly, they should not initiate civil disobedience.

But apart from his own perfectionism, there was another factor inhibiting the escalation of the non-cooperation campaign to the point of civil disobedience—the change of Viceroyalty. Chelmsford had departed and Reading landed in Bombay, surprisingly, on April 1, 1921. A change at the top always rekindled hopes in Indian political breasts, especially those of the Liberals and the Moderates; and there were always to remain many of them in the Congress ranks even after the schism. Gandhi himself was not particularly sanguine that things were going to improve under Reading. Not that he had anything against the new Proconsul. On the contrary, he thought well of him and in his "Notes" in *Young India* of January 19, 1921, had written:

The long expected announcement about the new Viceroy has come. But two years ago, the name of the Lord Chief Justice as the Viceroy-designate would have excited wonder and even admiration. Today the public is rightly indifferent. A military dictator might have answered just as well if not better. At the same time the appointment of Lord Reading probably is a silent recognition of the fact that ours is a non-violent battle and that therefore a diplomat with a judicial training is the best representative of the Sovereign. Lord Reading has declared his intention to do the right. I have no doubt that he means it. But the system which he is going to administer will not permit him to do what is right. That is India's experience. If he succeeds in doing the right, I promise he will also succeed in destroying the system or radically reforming it. Either he will swallow the system or the system will swallow him.

This could not have been put better. All the same it was kinder to Reading than he perhaps deserved as subsequent events were to prove. The new Viceroy had not the slightest

intention to destroy or even radically reform the system. Like Montagu he was an outsider to the British establishment. But unlike Montagu he was alien to any radical impulses and was keen to prove his unquestioning loyalty to the establishment which had so well rewarded him by being plus *Royalist que le Roi*, or varying the expression to suit the context, more imperialistic than the most diehard Tory. This was demonstrated amply soon after his installation in the proconsular seat when the authorities began to be even more liberal with orders of restraint and prohibition of political meetings and tentatively extended these orders to the Congress and Khilafat leaders of All-India stature like C.R. Das, Lajpat Rai, Rajendra Prasad, and Mazhar-ul-Haq. Chelmsford in the twilight phase of his Viceroyalty had deliberately refrained from taking any action except against the local leaders.

However, there were veteran Congress leaders who thought that the opportunity of a change of Viceroy should not be allowed to be missed without an attempt to initiate a dialogue between the Congress and the new Viceroy. There were many well-meaning persons willing to act as go-between, but the most distinguished and indefatigable among them was Madan Mohan Malaviya. He arranged a rendezvous between Reading and Gandhi in mid-May seven thousand feet above mean sea level—at Simla. Gandhi arrived in Simla on May 12, 1921, and sent Reading a letter asking for an interview. This was a mere formality and the Viceroy who had indicated to Malaviya that he would like to see him (Gandhi), met him the next day—May 13. There was another meeting on May 14. Addressing a public meeting in Simla the next day, Gandhi did not tell his audience what had passed between the two men but merely said that he had met the Viceroy “with a view to put the case of the non-cooperation party before him.” He said that Reading had given him “a long, patient and kind hearing.” What he did not tell them was that Reading in his turn had complained of the violent drift of the speeches of the Ali Brothers, who had a style of their own, especially Mohamed Ali, the younger of the two, or that he had agreed to look at the speeches, as he did and persuaded the two Khilafat leaders to issue a disclaimer that they intended any incitement to violence.

In his speech at the Idgah ground in Simla he described his

meetings with the Viceroy as "both...successful and unsuccessful." As he was to explain in his "Notes" in *Navajivan* of May 22, 1921, the result of their encounter was that they "came to understand each other to some extent," but that it was not in the Viceroy's hands to give India what it wanted. Certainly, Gandhi had impressed Reading as, indeed, he rarely failed to impress the representative of the Raj at the higher echelons. While in his telegram to the Secretary of State for India on May 14 he said that he had not gathered much from Gandhi beyond vague generalisations and claims that Indians would have attained Swaraj when they had regained self-respect and carried out a policy of non-cooperation, five days later he painted what Judith Brown describes as "a striking picture of the non-violent revolutionary" to Montagu:

There is nothing striking about his appearance. He came to visit me in a white *dhoti* and cap, woven on a spinning wheel, with bare feet and legs, and my first impression on seeing him ushered into my room was that there was nothing to arrest attention in his appearance, and that I should have passed him by in the street without a second look at him. When he talks the impression is different. He is direct and expresses himself well in excellent English with a fine appreciation of the value of the words he uses. There is no hesitation about him and there is a ring of sincerity in all that he utters, save when discussing some political questions. His religious views are, I believe, genuinely held and he is convinced to a point almost bordering on fanaticism that non-violence and love will give India its independence and enable it to withstand the British Government. His religious and moral views are admirable...but I confess that I find it difficult to understand his practice of them in politics.

That was not the only difficulty for the first Marquess of Reading. He was in India as the supreme executive of imperial authority much as Pontius Pilate was in Jerusalem as the Roman Procurator in Judaea. He could no more allow himself to be influenced by his favourable impression of the "non-violent revolutionary" into changing his administration's policy of

containing and ultimately defeating the non-cooperation movement led by Gandhi than Pilate could let his private feelings about the young Galilean dissident who had outraged the priests and patriarchs of the Jewish community by his heretical words and deeds, go scott free. If anything even less, because Pontius Pilate was an insider while Reading, for all the laurels he had won through his high legal acumen and docility, was something of an outsider in a ruling establishment with a strong strain of anti-semitism. He had, therefore, to be even more wary than his predecessors and show himself to be ultra-loyal to the ruling race as he had, indeed, by turning up for the service on Sunday soon after his arrival in Simla in the Church on the Ridge as the representative of the Defender of the Faith.

The policy of selective repression was not only continued under Reading, but pursued even more vigorously, especially in some of the Provinces, like the U.P., the Punjab and North West Frontier Province. Between April and the end of July when the A.I.C.C. met again at Bombay for three days from July 28 to 30 to be followed by a meeting of the Working Committee lasting from July 31 to August 2, thousands of people were arrested with or without charge and there was frequent resort to firing by the police as, for example, at Dharwar, which led to the appointment of a Committee of Enquiry by the Congress Working Committee, constituting of Bhawani Shanker Niyogi, Abbas Tyabji and S.S. Setlur.

The resolutions passed at the Bombay meeting of the A.I.C.C. reflected satisfaction at the response to its Bezwada resolution relating to the collection of one crore of rupees for the All-India Tilak Memorial Swaraj Fund; urged the intensification of the boycott of foreign cloth and sale of "intoxicating liquors or drugs"; deplored "the excesses committed by crowds" in one or two places, including the city of Aligarh; extended "sympathy and congratulations to the families of those who have lost their lives by the unprovoked fire opened upon them by the local authorities at several places, and ... all those brave and innocent citizens who have been wounded or are suffering imprisonment"; saw the widespread repression "as a sign of the near approach of freedom"; and noted "the reasonable desire of workers in the United Provinces and other parts to take up civil disobedience in answer to the repressive measures of local Governments."

Paradoxically, however, in its main resolution—number four—the A.I.C.C. did not draw the logical conclusion of sanctioning civil disobedience.

On the contrary, it shied away from any such conclusion. It said:

...but with a view to ensure greater stability of non-violent atmosphere throughout India, and in order to test the measure of influence attained by the Congress over the people, and further in order to retain on the part of the nation an atmosphere free from ferment necessary for the proper and swift prosecution of *Swadeshi*, the All-India Congress Committee is of opinion that civil disobedience should be postponed till after the completion of the programme referred to in the resolution on *Swadeshi*, after which the committee will not hesitate, if necessary, to recommend a course of civil disobedience even though it might have to be adopted by a special session of the Congress.

This must have seemed an extraordinary decision to take to those who were expecting that the moment had arrived for the implementation of the next phase of the programme laid down by the Nagpur Congress. It was not only to give a semblance of plausibility to the latter-day Left-wing critics of Gandhi, like R. Palme Dutt, who were to claim that Gandhi had no intention of pressing his non-cooperation movement to the point of "the final struggle," but under cover of his "petty-bourgeois moralising speculations and reformist pacifism, which found its chosen expression in the innocent-seeming term "non-violent"" was trying to thwart even "the immediate struggle by the attempt to conciliate the interests of the masses with the big bourgeois and landlord interests which were inevitably opposed to any decisive mass struggle." But more serious, because truer, it was to be interpreted by the Government as a sign of dithering and hesitancy at the very centre of decision and confirm it in its delusive belief that it had only to persist in its tactics of the judicious and discriminating use of the carrot and the stick. The carrot, of course, was meant for the Moderates, some of them erstwhile Congress stalwarts, who, after a lifetime in the wilderness, like Surendranath Banerjea, were willing to be tempted

into the lush pastures of collaborationist politics by the prospect of portfolios under the Montford Reforms which they themselves had acknowledged contained little of substance. The stick was used against the Congress with progressive severity to exorcise what was seen from the heights of Simla and across the seas, from Whitehall, looked an evil spirit—the spirit of non-cooperation.

## CHAPTER VIII

### A DIGRESSION

At this point it is, perhaps, permissible to digress a little from the main theme to take note of and consider two developments which occurred just as the first phase of the battle of attrition between the Congress and the Raj was beginning to be joined. One of these developments was demonstrably positive and underlined the new spirit of self-assertion and self-reliance which was gradually permeating the Congress movement. Indeed, it was a kind of spin-off from not only the acceptance of Swarajya as the immediate goal of the Congress but setting by Gandhi of a deadline for reaching that goal—by the end of 1921. It was all very well for Palme Dutt in *India Today* to poke fun at Gandhi by saying:

Gandhi freely declared as a firm and certain prophecy (which, despite its naive character, was confidently believed by his followers in the flush of enthusiasm of those days) the rash promise that Swaraj would be achieved within twelve months.... He even went so far as to declare, at a conference in September 1921, "that he was so sure of getting Swaraj before the end of the year that he could not conceive of himself as living beyond December 31 without having won Swaraj...."



However, he had still many years of political activity before him, though not yet the fortune of seeing the realisation of Swaraj.

But Palme Dutt with his immense erudition could equally well have recalled many an example of Marxist revolutionary leaders and even himself prophesying the achievement of certain goals by deadlines which could not be kept and which nonetheless inspired people to deeds of heroism. At any rate, one consequence of laying down Swarajya as the objective of the Congress was to make Congressmen and women enlarge their areas of concern to matters which had hitherto been given perfunctory attention if at all. One of these fields of concern was India's foreign policy. It is true that the Congress had been taking some interest in international affairs since its early days and certainly since the closing decade of the 19th century. Beginning with resolutions defending the rights of Indian settlers or indentured labourers in the British colonies, especially South Africa, and embodying critique of the Indian Government's "forward policy," which in effect meant use of Indian treasure and man-power for the extension of British hegemony and imperialist interests in the Middle East, South East Asia and what was then dubbed as the Far East, by the closing years of the First World War some of the Congress leaders, like Tilak and Lajpat Rai, had begun tentatively to define an international role for India. Tilak, in particular, during his stay in England for more than a year between the Fall of 1918 and 1919, as already noted, had drawn up a memorandum for the Peace Conference in Paris staking India's claim as a peacekeeping agent in Asia and, rather less wisely, even as defender of the British imperialist interests in the region.

However, these sporadic sorties into the arena of international politics represented individual initiatives even if by highly influential leaders of Indian opinion. They were, moreover, undertaken mainly to reinforce India's claim to self-determination and not as part of a coherent framework, of a foreign policy for an independent India. However, at the Bombay session of the A.I.C.C. at the end of July 1921 for the first time the Congress took up the question of foreign policy seriously. Curiously, however, it was prompted to this somewhat belated effort by a resolution

passed at a public meeting "of the citizens of Bombay held on the 26th April, 1921, under the auspices of the Central Khilafat Committee." The resolution read:

In view of the fact that the destiny of the people of India is inevitably linked with that of the neighbouring Asiatic Nations and Powers, this public meeting of the Mussulmans of Bombay request the All-India Congress Committee to promote feelings of amity and concord with neighbouring States, and with a view to establish mutual good-will and sympathy, to formulate a clear and definite foreign policy for India.

The A.I.C.C. could hardly ignore this request from the Central Khilafat Committee with which it was working in close co-operation. It decided to record the resolution. It did more. It resolved "that the grateful acknowledgements of the All-India Congress Committee be communicated to Mr. Pickthall [a sympathetic writer on Islam and a translator of the *Qu'ran* into English], the chairman for the said meeting, and to the Central Khilafat Committee of India for inviting the attention of the All-India Congress Committee to a matter of such importance, and that the Working Committee be asked to frame a statement of such policy for presenting the same at the next meeting of the All-India Congress Committee for its consideration."

The Working Committee could hardly be expected to take up the matter at its meeting in Bombay on July 31 and August 2 which followed the A.I.C.C. meeting. When it met at Patna—and throughout 1921 it was meeting practically every month in view of the accelerating tempo of political developments in the country—on August 16, it passed a resolution—number five on the agenda—"that the question of formulating a clear and definite foreign policy for India be adjourned for special consideration at the next meeting of the Working Committee and in the meanwhile Mahatma Gandhi be requested to prepare a note on the subject for the consideration of the Working Committee." Gandhi duly produced a note when the Working Committee met at 148 Russa Road, Calcutta, for four days in the first and second week of September. It discussed the note fairly early in its proceedings and decided that the note which the Mahatma had

placed before the meeting "be recast in the light of the discussion by the members, and be circulated among the members of the Working Committee, and submitted for approval at the next meeting of the Working Committee."

The next meeting of the Working Committee took place on October 5 at Bombay at the house in Laburnum Road where Gandhi was staying. The fifth resolution on the agenda dealt with the foreign policy questions. But it could hardly be described as providing a detailed blueprint for independent India's foreign relations. It was more an act of dissociation from the policies being pursued by the British Government and its instrumentality in India rather than a positive and comprehensive affirmation of India's objectives as a sovereign and independent member of the international community. The categorical negatives, however, were necessary. And for the good reason that an inspired campaign of disinformation was being conducted by the British intelligence service to make out that an independent—and predominantly Hindu India—would constitute a threat to the independence and territorial integrity of the neighbouring Muslim states while at the same time rumours were being spread in India that Afghanistan was about to invade India and Hindu virginities were under imminent threat from the marauding Afghans, the purpose being to drive a wedge between the Congress and Khilafat movements and work on the historical psychopathology of the relation between the two major components of India's body-social in order to kindle mutual suspicions, mistrust and hostility.

The Working Committee in its resolution urged the Congress to "let it be known to the neighbouring and other states"—

- (1) that the Government of India in no way represent Indian opinion and that their policy has been traditionally guided by considerations more of holding India under subjection than of protecting her borders;
- (2) that India as a self-governing country can have nothing to fear from the neighbouring states or any state as her people have no designs upon any of them and hence no intention of establishing any trade relations hostile to or not desired by the peoples of such states;
- (3) and that the people of India regard most treaties entered

into with the Imperial Government by neighbouring states as mainly designed by the latter to perpetuate the exploitation of India by the imperial power, and would therefore urge the states, having no ill-will against the people of India and having no desire to injure her interests, to refrain from entering into any treaty with the imperial power.

The resolution, however, did not end there. It went on "to assure the Mussulman states that when India has attained self-government, her foreign policy will naturally be always guided so as to respect the religious obligations imposed upon Mussulmans by Islam." But the Working Committee seemed to be aware that these negative formulations were not enough and, therefore, did not want the A.I.C.C. to be committed to them. It wanted its draft not to "go forth as the opinion of the All-India Congress Committee without its being fully discussed by the public and adopted at a meeting of the latter." What is more, it wanted to initiate a wide national debate on the subject and to this end authorised "the Secretary to circulate the opinion [of the Committee] as a draft prepared for public criticism and for submission to the All-India Congress Committee for adoption."

It is not known how much public debate took place between the meeting of the Working Committee in Bombay early in October and the meeting of the A.I.C.C. at Delhi on November 4-5, 1921, when it adopted the resolution proposed by the Working Committee word for word. Strangely, however, nothing more was heard about the foreign policy resolution adopted by the A.I.C.C. at the plenary session of the Congress at Ahmedabad on December 27-28 and it seemed that the resolution and the ideas embodied in it were without a tomorrow. But it was not so and the seed had by no means fallen on stony ground. Rather the reverse : even if the plenary session of the Congress at Ahmedabad did not take up the foreign policy resolution of the A.I.C.C., partly because it had more urgent matters on its plate, before long India's concerns in the field of foreign affairs were to become an integral part of the Congress agenda, not only at its annual sessions but in between the sessions. In declaring Swarajya as its immediate objective it had, as it were, recognised India's

international responsibilities which went with independence and proclaimed to the world its acceptance of them.

The other development, however, was not so happy. During the summer of 1921 an argument, verging almost on controversy, developed between Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore over certain aspects of the non-cooperation programme in the process of its implementation which Tagore regarded as negative. As we know, Gandhi, eight years younger than the Poet, admired him greatly; admired him greatly not only as the authentic voice of India's cultural renaissance and for his literary contribution, but even more as an unfailing watchman—he was to call him the Great Sentinel—guarding those humanistic and spiritual values which are apt to be overlooked in the heat of the battle for political freedom so that nationalism is too often prone to degenerate into narrow-minded chauvinism and xenophobic philistinism. Soon after his return from South Africa, he had made it a point to visit Santiniketan and these visits were to be repeated at frequent intervals, partly because he needed to get away from his normal preoccupations and recharge his batteries, so to speak, through communion with a man who lived and moved and had his being in the realm of imagination and yet shared his total commitment to India and its heritage.

As related earlier, Gandhi before launching his movement of satyagraha against the Rowlatt legislation had been desperately anxious to secure Tagore's blessings. However, it was clear from Tagore's letter in reply that he had serious reservations on the subject and believed, with some justice, that passive resistance was "not necessarily moral in itself" and could be "used against truth as well as for it." Tagore's reservations regarding the non-cooperation movement had only been strengthened two years later as the movement gained momentum and he was particularly critical of certain items in the programme, like boycott of schools and foreign cloth. As excitement over the campaign for Swadeshi mounted, there was not only picketing of shops selling foreign cloth, but people lit bonfires of it and clothes made of it. This was fair game as a means of providing an added impetus to the campaign, but Tagore considered it to be wasteful and irrational. He also felt worried over a certain intolerance, if not a mild hysteria, which the campaign of non-cooperation generated an example of which had been reported to him from London where

certain Indian students heckled his friend and associate, W.W. Pearson, who had taught at Santiniketan, and made it impossible for him to speak. He was specially critical of the Mahatma, probably one of the most chaste writers in English in our times, over his rather excessive emphasis on the discarding of English learning and the use of the English language. On a deeper philosophic plane the Poet had grave doubts about the Mahatma's perfervid puritanism and asceticism. In his *Letters to a Friend*, he wrote on March 5, 1921:

The idea of non-co-operation is political asceticism. Our students are bringing their offering of sacrifices to what? Not to a fuller education but to non-education. It has at its back a fierce joy of annihilation which at its best is asceticism, and at its worst is that orgy of frightfulness in which the human nature, losing faith in the basic reality of normal life, finds a disinterested delight in an unmeaning devastation, as has been shown in the late War and on other occasions which came nearer to us. *No* in its passive moral form is asceticism and in its active moral form is violence. The desert is as much a form of *himsa* (negligence) as is the raging sea in storm; they both are against life.

I remember the day, during the swadeshi movement in Bengal, when a crowd of young students came to see me in the first floor hall of our Vichitra house. They said to me that if I would order them to leave their schools and colleges they would instantly oblige. I was emphatic in my refusal to do so, and they went away angry, doubting the sincerity of my love for my motherland. And yet long before this popular ebullition of excitement I myself had given a thousand rupees, when I had not five rupees to call my own, to open a swadeshi store and courted banter and bankruptcy. The reason of my refusing to advise those students to leave their schools was because the anarchy of a mere emptiness never tempts me, even when it is resorted to as a temporary measure. I am frightened of an abstraction which is ready to ignore living reality.... You know that I do not believe in the material civilization of the West just as I do not believe in the physical body to be the highest truth in man. But I still less believe in the destruction of the physical body, and the ignoring of the

material necessities of life. What is needed is establishment of harmony between the physical and spiritual nature of man, maintaining of balance between the foundation and super-structure. I believe in the true meeting of the East and the West. Love is the ultimate truth of soul. We should do all we can not to outrage that truth, to carry its banner against all opposition. The idea of non-co-operation unnecessarily hurts that truth. It is not our hearth fire, but the fire that burns out our hearth and home.

There was much truth in Tagore's critique of non-cooperation, or at least some of the forms it took as the movement developed, though the critique suffered from an intellectualism if not aestheticism which seemed hardly to connect with the harsh realities of India's predicament in the struggle to overthrow the stranglehold of a well-armed Empire. But quite apart from the fact that Tagore while highlighting the dangers inherent in non-cooperation did not indicate any alternative strategy for the winning of independence, he, too, seemed to be labouring under the spell of a perfectionism although of a different variety to that of Gandhi.

Gandhi did not seem to be keen to enter into controversy with the Poet, but he could not avoid it altogether either. Consequently, he joined issue with him in the pages of *Young India* of June 1, 1921. His answer to Tagore's criticism of non-cooperation came in two different places in the same issue : first in his "Notes" and then in an article entitled "The Poet's Anxiety." In the "Notes" he dealt with the incident in London in which Pearson had not been allowed to speak by certain student hecklers. He described Pearson whom he knew well as "the truest of Englishmen" but wished that Tagore

had not imputed the rudeness of the students to non-cooperation, and had remembered that non-cooperators worship Andrews, honour Stokes, and gave a most respectful hearing to Messrs Wedgwood, Ben Spoor and Holford Knight at Nagpur, that Maulana Mahomed Ali accepted the invitation to tea of an English official when he invited him as a friend, that Hakim Ajmal Khan, a staunch non-cooperator had the portraits of Lord and Lady Hardinge unveiled in his Tibbia

College and had invited his many English friends to witness the ceremony. How much better it would have been if he had refused to allow the demon [of] doubt to possess him for one moment, as to the real and religious character of the present movement, and had believed that the movement was altering the meaning of old terms, nationalism and patriotism, and extending their scope.

He then turned to the question of English learning, especially by women and was saddened that Tagore had not seen "with a poet's imagination" that he (Gandhi) was "incapable of wishing to cramp the mind of the Indian woman, and...could not object to English learning as such" and throughout his life "had fought for the fullest liberty for women." If Tagore had done that, he added, he would have been saved the injustice he had done to Gandhi. He went on:

The Poet does not know perhaps that English is today studied because of its commercial and so-called political value. Our boys think, and rightly in the present circumstances, that without English they cannot get Government service. Girls are taught English as a passport to marriage. I know several instances of women wanting to learn English so that they may be able to talk to Englishmen in English. I know husbands who are sorry that their wives cannot talk to them and their friends in English. I know families in which English is being *made* the mother-tongue. Hundreds of youth believe that without a knowledge of English, freedom for India is practically impossible. The canker has so eaten into the society that, in many cases, the only meaning of education is a knowledge of English. All these are for me signs of our slavery and degradation. It is unbearable to me that the vernaculars should be crushed and starved as they have been....

This was true at the time it was written as it remains true still by and large nearly forty years after independence. Even so there was a certain strain of exaggeration in Gandhi's argument. However, he was not exaggerating when he claimed that he was "as great a believer in free air as the great poet" and defined



his position on cultural nationalism as he conceived it in admirably restrained and finely phrased language:

I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all the lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any. I refuse to live in other people's houses as an interloper, a beggar or a slave. I refuse to put the unnecessary strain of learning English upon my sisters for the sake of false pride or questionable social advantage. I would have our young men and young women with literary tastes to learn as much of English and other world languages as they like, and then expect them to give the benefits of their learning to India and to the world, like a Bose, a Roy or the Poet himself. But I would not have a single Indian to forget, neglect or be ashamed of his mother-tongue, or to feel that he or she cannot think or express the best thoughts in his or her own vernacular. Mine is not a religion of the prison-house. It has room for the least among God's creation. But it is proof against insolence, pride of race, religion or colour. I am extremely sorry for the Poet's misreading of this great movement of reformation, purification and patriotism spelt humanity. If he will be patient, he will find no cause for sorrow or shame for his countrymen. I respectfully warn him against mistaking its excrescences for the movement itself. It is as wrong to judge non-cooperation by the students' misconduct in London or Malegaon's in India, as it would be to judge Englishmen by the Dyers or the O'Dwyers.

All the points Gandhi made in his "Notes" were fair and well made, without any descent into peevishness or rancour. But in the article headed "The Poet's Anxiety" in the same issue of *Young India* at some points an undertone of an incipient exasperation at being misunderstood by one from whom he expected understanding and who, he thought, would not judge a movement by its weaknesses, could be discerned. At the very start there was some ambiguity in the words of praise he had for Tagore. "The Poet of Asia, as Lord Hardinge called Dr. Tagore," he wrote, "is fast becoming, if he has not already become, the Poet of the world. Increasing prestige has brought to

him increasing responsibility. His greatest service to India must be his poetic interpretation of India's message to the world. The Poet is therefore sincerely anxious that India should deliver no false or feeble message in her name. He is naturally jealous of his country's reputation. He says he has striven hard to find himself in tune with the present movement. He confesses that he is baffled. He can find nothing for his lyre in the din and the bustle of non-cooperation." He then referred to his "three forceful letters" to a friend in which Tagore had tried to give "expression to his misgivings" and his view "that non-cooperation is not dignified enough for the India of his vision, that it is a doctrine of negation and despair...a doctrine of separation, exclusiveness, narrowness and negation."

Was Gandhi implying that Tagore in trying to live up to his "responsibilities"—and reputation—as "the Poet of the world" was being ultra-perfectionist and too critical of his countrymen because they did not conduct themselves in a manner "dignified enough for the India of his vision?" If so, then he was treading a ground on which he himself was all too vulnerable. For the standards of conduct he expected of his satyagrahis, or non-cooperators, were so impossibly high as to be not of this earth. But he could not have intended any such implication. At least he welcomed "the Poet's exquisite jealousy of India's honour" and thought it was good that "he should have sent to us his misgivings in language at once beautiful and clear." He was at pains to set Tagore's "fears" on non-cooperation—which he saw as the only choice for India apart from the path of violence—and its conception. It was not, he assured Tagore, "intended to erect a Chinese Wall between India and the West. On the contrary, non-cooperation is intended to pave the way to real, honourable and voluntary co-operation based on mutual respect and trust. The present struggle is being waged against compulsory co-operation, against one-sided combination, against the armed imposition of modern methods of exploitation masquerading under the name of civilization. Non-cooperation is a protest against an unwitting and unwilling participation in evil."

This argument could not be faulted. As for "the Poet's concern...about the students" and their education, he pointed out that it was no use making a fetish of "literary training" which "by itself adds not an inch to one's moral height." The schools

had made Indians "clerks and interpreters." Nor did he think that it a sound argument against his programme of boycott of schools to say that "the vast majority of the students went back [to schools] after the first flush of enthusiasm. Their recantation is proof rather of the extent of our degradation than of the wrongness of the step." But, he added, "the Poet's protest against the calling out of the boys is really a corollary to his objection to the very doctrine of non-cooperation. He has a horror of everything negative. His whole soul seems to rebel against the negative commandments of religion."

His argument at this point trailed off into metaphysics and he maintained that negation has its philosophic uses. "*Neti*," he remarked "was the best description the authors of the *Upanishads* were able to find for *Brahman*." The analogy was a little laboured. But what followed was wholly pertinent and politically cogent. Indians, he argued, "had lost the power of saying 'no'" which had become "disloyal, almost sacrilegious." Non-cooperation was to him "like the necessary weeding process that a cultivator has to resort to before he sows." And he concluded:

And if India is ever to attain the swaraj of the Poet's dream, she will do so only by non-violent non-cooperation. Let him deliver his message of peace to the world, and feel confident that India through her non-cooperation, if she remain true to her pledge, will have exemplified his message. Non-cooperation is intended to give the very meaning to patriotism that the Poet is yearning after. An India prostrate at the feet of Europe can give no hope to humanity. An India awakened and free has a message of peace and good-will to a groaning world....

This in a strange sort of way was true and remains true. But Tagore could not be convinced. At least he could not see any virtue in the burning of foreign cloth or even see in the *charkha* or the spinning-wheel India's economic salvation as Gandhi seemed to believe and preached. Their mutual friend C.F. Andrews was also at variance with Gandhi on these items in his non-cooperation programme. He wrote a series of articles in *The Modern Review* and sent them to Gandhi with a letter in which he said that the picture of Gandhi "lighting that great

pile, including beautiful fabrics," had shocked him intensely. So much so that, he added. "Do you know I almost fear now to wear the khaddar that you have given me, lest I should appear to be judging other people as a Pharisee would, saying, 'I am holier than thou!' I never felt like this before.... Do tell me what you mean. What you said in *Young India* about burning did not convince me a bit."

Gandhi published the letter from Andrews in *Young India* of September 1, 1921, under the heading "Ethics of Destruction." He described it as a "pathetic and beautiful letter." He answered it in his own way which did not induce either in Tagore or Andrews a willing suspension of disbelief. Five days after the publication Gandhi met the Poet in Calcutta. The meeting was in private and meant to sort out their differences. However, versions of what passed between the Mahatma and the Poet which appeared, especially the report in *The Statesman* of September 10, were not calculated to promote an understanding of what the argument between the two men was all about much less the logic of non-cooperation movement. Interviewed by a press representative, the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* reported on September 11 :

Mr. Gandhi...declined to make any statement whatsoever saying that though there was nothing secret about the interview, he questioned the right of the public to know all that happened at interviews between two public men. He declined to make any statement also because he said that an attempt was made in all the imaginary reports to discredit him and his cause, but he knew that both the cause and himself were absolutely safe in the hands of the poet, the reports notwithstanding.

But it is clear from a postscript to Gandhi's letter to Andrews written "On the Way to Madras" on September 14, that he believed someone close to Tagore had been the source of the leak to *The Statesman* which had naturally given the information its own anti-Gandhi slant. "I felt," he wrote, "that no relative of the Poet could have written such an untruth [as the report in *The Statesman* was based on]. No relative was present at the interview, and I took no notice of it. But evidently there is a

relative at the back. Or the *Bengalee* would not have taken it seriously. Will not the Poet read it and if it is an untruth will he not contradict it? Even you can [Andrews was present at the interview, it seems]. But please consult the Poet and do what you can."

It is not known whether Tagore or Andrews contradicted the reports that had appeared. However, it could not be said that the differences between them had been resolved. This is obvious from the fact that in the October (1921) issue of *The Modern Review* Tagore wrote what Gandhi described as "a brilliant essay on the present movement". Under the heading "The Great Sentinel" he said that the gravamen of Tagore's argument in the article entitled "The Call of Truth," was that we should "reject anything and everything that does not appeal to our reason or heart." Gandhi agreed with this and said, "The Poet deserves the thanks of his countrymen for standing up for truth and reason. There is no doubt that our last state will be worse than our first, if we surrender our reason into somebody's keeping.... I am quite conscious of the fact that blind surrender to love is often more mischievous than a forced surrender to the lash of the tyrant.... His essay serves as a warning to us all who in our impatience are betrayed into intolerance or even violence against those who differ from us. I regard the Poet as a sentinel warning us against the approach of enemies called bigotry, lethargy, intolerance, ignorance, inertia and other members of that brood."

But whilst he agreed with Tagore "as to the necessity of watchfulness lest we cease to think," he did not want his readers to think that he endorsed "the proposition that there is any such blind obedience on a large scale in the country today." As for the *charkha*, it was only "after laborious thinking, after great hesitation" that the country had come to believe in it "as the giver of plenty" and even so the "educated India" had not "assimilated the truth underlying the *charkha*." On the question of burning of foreign cloth, he sounded not only unrepentent, but deeply emotional. "In burning *my* foreign clothes," he said, "I burn my shame. I must refuse to insult the naked by giving them clothes they do not need, instead of giving them work which they sorely need." He also denied that non-cooperation was "an

exclusive doctrine." "Our non-cooperation," he argued, "is neither with the English nor with the West. Our non-cooperation is with the system the English have established, with the material civilization and its attendant greed and exploitation of the weak." And he concluded with some verses from the third chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita*, or rather its English translation by Edwin Arnold, *The Song Celestial*, which verge on didactic bathos.

So the argument between the Mahatma and the Poet continued sporadically and later extended to other matters such as, for instance, Gandhi's underestimation of Rammohun Roy's contribution to the movement of Indian reformation and regeneration, partly because he had not really given enough time to the study of his work. There were busy-bodies and mischief-mongers who, as Gandhi himself lamented, wanted to divide them though he was sure that they could not succeed because "the Poet is too great to be touched. . . . There are differences of opinion between us. They do not affect my regard for the Poet in any way whatsoever. The Poet is as good a lover of India as I claim to be, and that love is an all-sufficing bond between us."

This was abundantly true. Nevertheless, the argument, as it developed and touched other areas of mutual interest, could not fail to leave behind a residual sediment of mutual incomprehension which tended to make their exchanges on various issues at times very much like a dialogue of the deaf. This was a pity because both Gandhi and Tagore were right, each within his own premise and on the particular plane on which each lived and moved and had his being. What is more, the two planes were not only complementary, but absolutely necessary to each other and to India—first for its liberation and then the opening up of the possibility of its development as a humane polity and civilisation. Any differences between them which might have divided them, therefore, could not but have cast an adverse shadow on the destiny of India and its people.

Fortunately, however, that did not happen because of what Gandhi aptly described as "an all-sufficing bond" between him and Tagore—their love of India. Fortunately, too, that bond was soon to be reinforced by the emergence on the Indian political and intellectual scene of a much younger man who combined in himself the political passion and commitment of Gandhi

and Tagore's urbane aesthetics of living and who could serve as a living nexus between the two men because he loved them both and was fully sensible of the paramount importance of their two personalities for India's present—and future.

## CHAPTER IX

### "SOUL FORCE" ON TRIAL

After Nagpur the supreme authority for decision rested *de facto* with Gandhi even though the *de jure* investiture had to wait till the Thirty-sixth session of the Congress at Ahmedabad at the end of December 1921. Even for the Mahatma this was a most daunting burden of responsibility to carry. For the path of struggle for swaraj which lay ahead was through virtually uncharted territory and entailed an effort at organisation on a scale for which his previous pilot experiment in South Africa and the abortive satyagraha against the Rowlatt legislation did not provide a safe guide. The burden was certainly not lightened by the scepticism bordering on incomprehension which he was encountering regarding his non-cooperation and swadeshi movement and especially the boycott of foreign cloth and advocacy of the spinning-wheel as the vehicle of India's economic salvation. It was not only that "Moderate" leaders, like the Editor of the *Indian Social Reformer* and Srinivasa Sastri, were voicing their opposition to his programme, but even those whose opinion mattered much more to him, like Rabindranath Tagore and C.F. Andrews, had publicly joined issue with him.

However, as the sun moved from the summer solstice to the autumn equinox, he had plenty of other things to worry about



besides his differences with Tagore and Andrews over non-cooperation and the "ethics of destruction" of foreign cloth. The Government was not only busy gearing up its machinery of repression, but was giving it a trial run in certain selected areas to intimidate the people and pre-empt the build up of popular and grassroot support for Gandhi, particularly among the peasantry. This is clear from a note—one of his earliest exercises in political reporting—which Jawaharlal Nehru prepared on "Repression in U.P." and which was published in *Young India* of August 18, 1921.

"Repression in the U.P. has on the whole," he wrote, "not been of the flashy type—the arrest of prominent leaders, etc.—but it has been very thorough and there are few who have not felt the force of it." He classified it under three heads: first, its relation to the kisan or peasant movement; secondly, the trial and conviction of young workers; and thirdly, the use of security sections of the Criminal Procedure Code, like section 144, to nip any movement of protest in the bud. He added that "a very determined and persistent effort ... to kill this movement" had been mounted and "a considerable number of Congress and Khilafat workers have been proceeded against and sentenced." There was hardly any prominent worker, he recorded, who had not been served an order under section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code.

Chelmsford had favoured a policy of dealing toughly with local men and the rank and file Congress and Khilafat workers, particularly in rural areas, while turning a blind eye to political transgressions of national leaders. This kind of self-denial went very much against the grain of the bureaucratic hierarchy and especially the provincial authorities. Under Reading they soon abandoned it although for intricate and subtle reasons it was still considered politic not to touch Gandhi himself. The two Ali Brothers had been very much of thorns in the flesh of the Government, partly because of their popularity with the Muslim masses. They were the first All-India leaders to be rounded up. Curiously, the younger Ali, Mohamed Ali, was travelling with Gandhi to Madras when he was arrested at Waltair, "a beauty spot" as Gandhi described it, in Andhra. We have Gandhi's own report of Mohamed Ali's arrest on September 14, 1921, which appeared in *Young India* of September 22.

The much talked of arrest of Maulana Mahomed Ali took place at Waltair, whilst we were on our way to Madras. I am writing this in the train. . . . The train halted at Waltair for over twenty-five minutes. Maulana Mahomed Ali and I were going outside the Station to address a meeting. Hardly had we gone a few paces from the entrance, when I heard the Maulana shouting to me and reading the notice given to him. I was a few paces in front of him. Two white men and half a dozen Indian police composed the party of arrest. The officer in charge would not let the Maulana finish reading the notice, but grasped his arm and took the Maulana away. With a smile on his lips he waved good bye. I understood the meaning. I was to keep the flag flying. . . . I continued my journey to the meeting place. I asked the people to remain calm, and fulfil the Congress programme. I then retraced my steps, and went where the Maulana was being detained. I asked the officer in charge whether I could see the Maulana. He said he had orders to let his wife and secretary only meet him. I saw Begum Mahomed Ali and secretary Mr. Hayat coming out of the detention room.

Gandhi interpreted Mohamed Ali's arrest as "a good omen" and predicted that what had "happened to the younger is bound to happen to the elder brother"—a prediction which proved to be correct—and added that in arresting Maulana Mohamed Ali, the Government had "imprisoned the Khilafat." This also turned out to be the case. But he was wrong in thinking that the authorities intended to keep Mohamed Ali for long in that "beauty spot" and "sanitorium" of Andhra albeit in the local jail as His Majesty's guest so that he could have "a few days rest and complete his accounts of the deputation." The Maulana was immediately whisked away from Waltair on the coast of Coromandel to the city between the desert and the Arabian Sea more than fifteen hundred miles away—Karachi. There he was united with his elder brother, Shaikat Ali, who was already lodged in the jail with several other Khilafat and Congress leaders, including Dr. Kitchlew of the Martial Law fame and a full-fledged Hindu Shankracharya, to stand collective trial. The committal proceedings began before a rather feckless magistrate on September 26, 1921, and inevitably degenerated into some-

thing of "a farce" as Mohamed Ali described them in a letter to the Mahatma written from Karachi Jail on October 18 which appeared in *Young India* nine days later without "a single word" being expunged by the Editor.

If Mohamed Ali's arrest was seen by Gandhi as a good omen heralding the dawn of Swaraj for which he had set a deadline at the end of 1921, then during the next few months he was vouchsafed many more similar happy omens, especially after mid-November when the Prince of Wales landed in Bombay to begin his "good will" tour of India. For despite the official jamborees of "loyalists" which the Government staged for him, everywhere he went he was greeted with protest demonstrations and *hartals*, not because there was any animus on the part of the Indian people against the Prince personally or the Royal family, but because he was coming, as Gandhi said at a meeting in Lahore a week before the Prince's arrival, "to strengthen the present Government."

The demonstrations and *hartals* against the Prince of Wales' visit were a signal for the authorities not only to resort to mass arrests of the rank and file Congress and Khilafat workers, but wholesale rounding up of even top leaders throughout India. On December 2, for instance, Lajpat Rai, K. Santanam, Lal Khan, Gopichand Bhargava and many others were arrested at Lahore under the Prevention of Seditious Meetings Act. Four days later followed the arrest of the two Nehrus, father and son. In his *An Autobiography* Jawaharlal Nehru has recorded how it all happened:

I was sitting rather late one day in the Congress office at Allahabad trying to clear up arrears of work. An excited clerk told me that the police had come with a search warrant and were surrounding the office building. I was, of course, a little excited also, for it was my first experience of the kind, but the desire to show off was strong, the wish to appear perfectly cool and collected, unaffected by the comings and goings of the police. So I asked a clerk to accompany the police officer in his search round the office rooms, and insisted on the rest of the staff carrying on their usual work and ignoring the police. . . . Soon news came of other arrests in the city. I decided at last to go home and see what was happening there.

I found the inevitable police searching part of the large house and learnt that they had come to arrest both father and me.

Indeed, he tells us that the "U.P. Provincial Congress Committee was arrested *en bloc* (55 members) as they were actually holding a committee meeting." It seems that the charge against him was "distributing notices for a *hartal*" which was "no offence under the law then." But nevertheless he was sentenced though after three months in jail he was let off because "some revising authority" had come to the conclusion that he had been "wrongly sentenced." No such clemency was shown to Motilal Nehru whose crime was more serious and recognised as such—being a member of an illegal organisation, to wit the Congress Volunteers. To prove this, Jawaharlal Nehru writes:

...a form with his signature in Hindi was produced. The signature was certainly his, but, as it happened, he had hardly ever signed in Hindi before, and very few persons could recognise his Hindi signature. A tattered gentleman was then produced who swore to the signature. The man was quite illiterate, and he held the signature upside down when he examined it. My daughter, aged four at the time, had her first experience of the dock during father's trial, as he held her in his arms throughout.

The Punjab and the United Provinces were not singled out for the round up of Congress and Khilafat leaders. Much the same was happening in other Provinces. At the end of November, Congress volunteers in Bengal had been declared illegal. "I feel the handcuffs on my wrists and the weight of iron chains on my body," C.R. Das had declared at the time, "the whole of India is a vast prison." Within a few days he was to experience the weight of handcuffs on his wrists in a more than metaphorical sense. On December 7 his wife, Basanti Devi, and sister were arrested, though this turned out to be a mistake and they were freed even before Gandhi's congratulatory telegram reached them. On December 10, Das himself was arrested. While Gandhi himself was left alone by the authorities, many other Congress leaders in Gujarat were taken into custody. His eldest son, Harilal Gandhi, too was arrested in Calcutta.

C.R. Das' arrest was at once a highly provocative as well as an unkind act. It was provocative because he was the President-elect of the Congress session to be held at Ahmedabad only a fortnight later. He had been elected as long ago as mid-September and to put him in jail on the eve of the session was bound to be seen by the Congress and the Indian people in general as an insolent throwing down of the gauntlet. It was also an unkind, not to say a highly impolitic act. For although Deshabandhu Das, as he was popularly called, was a radical and a militant, who was prepared to go further than Gandhi, curiously he was a reluctant non-cooperator, particularly in so far as the boycott of the new councils was concerned. As a disciplined Congressman he had thrown himself heart and soul into the movement after the Nagpur session, but a residual ambivalence remained and the Government knew it. They tried to exploit it—and with some degree of success—even after he had been arrested as Jawaharlal Nehru has related in his autobiography:

An attempt was made by the Government in December 1921, soon after the mass arrests at the beginning of the month, to come to an understanding with the Congress. This was especially in view of the Prince's forthcoming visit to Calcutta. There were some informal talks between representatives of the Bengal Government and Deshbandhu Das, who was in gaol then. A proposal seems to have been made, that a small round table conference might take place between the Government and the Congress. This proposal appears to have fallen through because Gandhiji insisted that Maulana Mohamad Ali, who was then in prison in Karachi, should be present at this conference. Government would not agree to this.

This was to become a sore point with Das. "Mr. C.R. Das", writes Jawaharlal Nehru, "did not approve of Gandhiji's attitude in this matter and, when he came out of prison later, he publicly criticised him and said that he had blundered." But, again, we are anticipating.

For much of the time during the months leading up to the Congress session at Ahmedabad Gandhi lived in a strange trance of euphoria. The Government's policy of mass arrests, as Nehru argues, fitted well with the Congress programme and every new

arrest, Gandhi believed, brought the day of Swaraj nearer. Some thirty thousand people—including a fairly high proportion of women—were behind the bars which may not seem much in a population of 300 million, but nothing like that had happened before and Lord Reading publicly expressed his anxiety, or at least perplexity as well he might. For as Nehru has recorded:

Many people, who had so far taken no part in any Congress or political activity, were carried away by the wave of enthusiasm and insisted on being arrested. There were cases of Government clerks, returning from their offices in the evening, being swept away by this current and landing in gaol instead of their homes. Young men and boys would crowd inside the police lorries and refuse to come out. Every evening we could hear from inside the gaol, lorry after lorry arriving outside heralded by our slogans and shouts. The gaols were crowded and the gaol officials were at their wits' end at this extraordinary phenomenon. It happened sometimes that a police lorry would bring, according to the warrant accompanying it, a certain number of prisoners—no names were or could be mentioned. Actually, a larger number than that mentioned would emerge from the lorry and the gaol officials did not know how to meet this novel situation. There was nothing in the *Jail Manual* about it.

The mood of euphoria was not confined to Gandhi. It was shared by many others in the Congress. They may not have believed as Gandhi seemed to believe, that just by filling the jails by peaceful civil disobedience the stranglehold of British imperialism could be loosened and they would wake up on the New Year Day of 1922 to Swaraj or self-rule. But as one of the most authentic witnesses to the era who was also already one of the leading participants in the movement, Jawaharlal Nehru, tells us, "there was a strange mixture of nationalism and politics and religion and mysticism and fanaticism." He writes in his autobiography:

Many of us who worked for the Congress programme lived in a kind of intoxication during the year 1921. We were full of

excitement and optimism and a buoyant enthusiasm. We sensed the happiness of a person crusading for a cause. We were not troubled with doubts or hesitation; our path seemed to lie clear in front of us and we marched ahead, lifted up by the enthusiasm of others, and helping to push on others. . . . Above all, we had a sense of freedom and a pride in that freedom. The old feeling of oppression and frustration was completely gone. There was no more whispering, no round-about legal phraseology to avoid getting into trouble with the authorities. We said what we felt and shouted it out from the house-tops. What did we care for the consequences? Prison? We looked forward to it; that would help our cause still further. The innumerable spies and secret-service men who used to surround us and follow us about became rather pitiable individuals as there was nothing secret for them to discover. All our cards were always on the table. We had not only a feeling of satisfaction at doing effective political work which was changing the face of India before our eyes and, as we believed, bringing Indian freedom very near, but also an agreeable sense of moral superiority over our opponents, both in regard to our goal and our methods. . . .

The Government had been inclined at first to be sceptical about public response to Gandhi's call to the people to non-cooperation. Gulled by the soothing assurances of loyal support by the substantial body of Quislings and hangers-on of the Raj and their own propaganda, the authorities believed that the civil disobedience would never take-off the ground or at the worst would prove to be a nine-days' wonder. They ought to have been warned by the success of the boycott of the elections to the new councils in the November of 1920 which had impressed even their own independent informants like Valentine Chirol who had visited a number of rural areas around Allahabad on the election day and found the polling booths deserted. But the bureaucrats had their own comforting explanation for this phenomenon. They interpreted it as the Indian voters' lack of interest in the paraphernalia of democracy and their preference for the smack of firm paternalistic rule which the British offered.

However, as the non-cooperation movement seemed to be gathering momentum and the local jails were beginning to get

overcrowded, there was some rethinking at least at the higher echelons of officialdom. Jawaharlal Nehru was not exaggerating when he wrote retrospectively in his autobiography:

As our *moral* grew, that of the Government went down. They did not understand what was happening; it seemed that the old world they knew in India was toppling down. There was a new aggressive spirit abroad and self-reliance and fearlessness, and the great prop of British rule in India—prestige—was visibly wilting.... Was the Indian Army reliable? Would the police carry out orders? As Lord Reading, the Viceroy, said in December 1921, they were "puzzled and perplexed".

Their apprehensions about the reliability of the army proved to be unfounded and by and large the police carried out orders. The manifesto issued by the Congress and Khilafat leaders on October 4 after the prosecution of the Ali Brothers and others calling upon soldiers and civilians to sever connection with the Government did not evoke any significant response. Nor did the resolution passed by the All-India Congress Committee at Delhi to the same effect a month later produce dramatic resignations from the army or the civil service. But the bureaucratic establishment was still worried. Not only worried but in considerable perplexity and embarrassment because the Prince of Wales' tour, instead of producing any spectacular demonstration of loyalist sentiment, was providing grist to the mills of Congress movement in the shape of *hartals* and protests all along his route, though of varying intensity in different provinces.

The embarrassment was the more acute because, although the news of India which was allowed to reach the outside world was strictly doctored both directly through official manipulation and indirectly through the British agency—Reuter—which enjoyed virtual monopoly of its international distribution, the visit of the Prince of Wales was bound to attract media attention not only in Britain and its Dominions, but to a lesser extent also in Europe and the United States. Adverse Indian reaction to the Royal tour could not be altogether blacked out as the Jallianwala Bagh tragedy had been for many months; and this, in turn, could not but spoil the image of a contented India and cast doubt on the



legitimacy of British rule in India. At any rate, the British establishment both in London and Delhi was sufficiently anxious on this count to mount a systematic propaganda campaign to offset any adverse publicity that boycott of the Prince's visit by the Indian people might engender.

One of its many familiar ploys was to enlist the services of plausible Indians among the Moderates who in the past had been associated with the Congress but had severed their connection with it after it changed its creed and defined the attainment of Swaraj as its immediate goal at the Nagpur session. The ploy certainly worked but only up to a point. For as Nehru rightly points out even the "Liberals [and Moderates] were far from happy" because "it is not a pleasant experience to be cut off from one's own people, to sense hostility even though one may not see it or hear it."

But Gandhi was not worried over the criticism of the Non-cooperation movement from eminent Moderates even though they included men like Srinivasa Sastri who had assumed the mantle of Gokhale and whom the Mahatma held in considerable esteem. As for the British propaganda against the Congress abroad, he had convinced himself that it could make little difference to the struggle which had been joined in India where alone it could be lost or won; and judging from the number of people who were willing to court imprisonment in implementing the programme of non-cooperation, he seemed reasonably satisfied that the struggle was going on well. If any shadow intersected his optimistic frame of mind during the months leading up to the Congress session at Ahmedabad it was the sporadic eruptions of violence here and there.

The most serious outbreak of violence had occurred in August 1921 in Malabar which in British times was a district of Madras Presidency but now forms part of Kerala State. It involved the Moplah community—a generic name given to the Muslims of the region most of whom were and still are, landless peasants and as such had long been subject to ruthless exploitation by the landlords, for the most part drawn from the higher caste Hindus, like the Nambudiris and Nairs, who moreover, could count on the complaisance of the officials in return for services rendered to the Raj. The intensity of exploitation, inevitably, bred discontent which at times overflowed into ineffectual acts of violence.

Indeed, a certain degree of tension between the landed gentry and the ryots had become endemic. Furthermore, the fact that the divide between the haves and have-nots was articulated along the confessional divide tended to give the conflict a communal twist. It is no part of this undertaking to go into the history and psychopathological analysis of the Moplah turbulence. For our present purpose it is sufficient to recall that during the summer of 1921 the unrest among them had reached a very high pitch. "The political situation in Malabar," wrote the Acting Chief Secretary to the Government of Madras to the Secretary of Home Department of the Government of India on August 18, 1921, "is at present causing grave anxiety to this Government . . . The whole of South Malabar is . . . in a state of grave ferment."

It was—and for a number of general as well as particular reasons. To begin with a vague but acutely felt sense of millenary expectancy was shared by the Moplah community. This had been heightened by Gandhi's conditional promise of Swaraj by the end of 1921. The fervent revivalistic rhetoric of the Khilafat leaders had still further served to whet apocalyptic anticipation of a sea change in their condition. Added to this were the rumours, almost certainly inspired by the British intelligence and propaganda services, of an imminent invasion of India by the Amir of Afghanistan—the young Amanullah who entertained dreams of modernizing his mountainous kingdom. The ostensible purpose of giving currency to such rumours was to stir up atavistic fears among the Hindus of a Muslim reconquest of the country and so drive a wedge between the Congress and the Khilafat movement. There is no reason to doubt that in some degree the ploy succeeded, especially among the more gullible sections of the Hindu community in the North-West. But, paradoxically, in so far as the Moplahs were concerned the propaganda had the effect of boosting hopes of an early end to British rule and the landlords' oppression.

What triggered off a chain reaction of rebelliousness among the Moplahs was a commonplace enough incident—the forcible eviction of a tenant by the landlord and the arrest of a local Khilafat leader on a charge of stealing a gun at Pookottoor. The people were angry and clashed with the police which was quite unable to cope with the situation. Clashes spread throughout the district and even beyond to the estates owned by European

planters one of whom was killed. The civil administration virtually collapsed in the region. In some sub-district headquarters courts were burnt down; official records destroyed; government treasuries looted. So were the houses of many Hindu landlords, not necessarily because they were Hindus, but because they were landlords and exploiters, and their wealth constituted the symbol and reality of their inequity. There were stories of forcible conversions to Islam, though these were highly exaggerated and, according to the Congress sources, there had been only three cases of forced conversion. Other sources put the figure much higher. But there was no impartial enquiry and nobody attempted to find out how far such conversions were instigated by *agents provocateurs* who were bent on turning what was in its origin an agrarian uprising into a communal mayhem and how far they were manifestations of Moplah confessional fanaticism which was certainly there, but only as a secondary undercurrent.

The late K.P.S. Menon in a Foreword to Sukhbir Choudhary's *Moplah Uprising* (1921-23), drawing a parallel with events in Hungary in 1956, suggests that "in the Moplah uprising, too, there were revolutionary as well as counter-revolutionary elements." But the parallel is a little misleading. Unlike what happened in Hungary, the Moplah insurgency was a spontaneous peasant revolt which had no external inspiration, much less underpinning and support. Nor had it any centralised direction and leadership or even a clearly defined objective beyond a vague notion of "extorting Swaraj from the White men" and ending landlord oppression. It could not have succeeded, although the popular support it had among the wretched of Malabar ensured that the authorities took months rather than weeks to put it down and then only by calling in the army, with a strong British component, which resorted to what in another context was described as "frightfulness".

If some of the acts committed by the Moplahs were brutal, they were more than outmatched by the ferocious repression with which the army and police suppressed the revolt. By the end of December 1921, 1,826 Moplahs and others were killed; another 1,500 wounded; and the arrests ran into several thousands. Indeed, in the three years up to July 1923, the toll was nearly nine thousand killed and five thousand wounded; those arrested numbered more than ten thousand. Some of the latter were let off

lightly; others received heavy sentences and some were deported to the Andaman Islands, then a penal colony and not a tourist resort, and notorious for its cellular jail. There were cases of incredible inhumanity as, for instance, the train tragedy which shocked the whole of India. Recalling the incident more than a decade later in his autobiography, Jawaharlal Nehru was to comment: "What a horrible thing was the baking to death of the Moplah prisoners in the closed railway vans."

It undoubtedly was horrible. On November 19, 1921, or two days after the Prince of Wales had landed in Bombay on his goodwill tour of India, 127 prisoners, not all of them Moplahs, were packed into a luggage wagon "18 ft. by 9 ft. and seven and a half ft. high" at Tirur. The doors of the van were sealed, the windows shut. Six hours later, when the train reached Podanur, it was found that fifty-six of the men were dead. The rest of them were in a state of acute distress and prostration and eight of them were to die later. Reports of the tragedy were so harrowing that there was an uproar in the Legislative Assembly in Delhi and resolutions were moved by non-official Indian members calling for a thorough enquiry into the atrocity and punishment of those responsible for it. The Government side resisted the demand at first. But it came under pressure from London where there was some embarrassment as the news took the shine off the stories of the "welcome" being accorded to the heir to the throne. On November 22, Montagu cabled to Reading that he was "shocked at the terrible consequences of what seems . . . to be culpable negligence." He wanted "urgent investigation by the local Government." Delhi, consequently, leaned on the Madras Government—over which, incidentally, Willingdon presided—and eventually it put on trial a British sergeant, Andrews, and a number of constables.

However, the case came to nothing. In so far as any blame was considered justifiable, it was placed on a railway traffic inspector who, conveniently for the authorities, had died in the meanwhile. Andrews and others charged with him were found not guilty. This led a writer in *The Modern Review*, edited by Ramananda Chatterjee and one of the most influential and respected monthlies in pre-independence India, to compare the Moplah train tragedy with "the Black Hole tragedy (supposing it to be historically true in its entirety)" and suggest with bitter

sarcasm that since neither Sergeant Andrews nor his men had any responsibility with the death of more than sixty prisoners, the luggage van itself must be considered as the real culprit and ought to be hanged, drawn and quartered.

The Moplah insurgency continued fitfully for two years, but it is arguable that the situation could have been brought under control much earlier if the authorities had allowed Indian leaders to go to the area and pacify the people. But, as two years earlier in the Punjab, the authorities would not allow such thing. Indeed, Maulana Mohamed Ali was on his way to Malabar when he was arrested and, after a brief cat and mouse game of being released and promptly re-arrested, whisked away to Karachi Jail to stand trial with others on a charge of sedition. Thus he was thwarted in undertaking what was to have been a pacifying mission among the Moplahs. For although both he and his elder brother had been inclined to resort to fiery rhetoric earlier that year, just then they were in a chastened frame of mind. Gandhi had remonstrated with them after his meeting with Reading in May at which the new Viceroy had complained of the incendiary tenor of the speeches of Ali Brothers; and the Mahatma had not only persuaded them to express regret, but even to furnish "public assurance and promise to all who may require it" that they had no intention of inciting anyone to violence.

This had annoyed Motilal Nehru as we know from a long letter he wrote to Gandhi at the beginning of June 1921 and which Jawaharlal Nehru included among his *A Bunch of Old Letters*. The elder Nehru considered it tantamount to apology which seemed to him unworthy of them at a time when thousand of their followers were joyfully courting arrest and going to jail. He was even sore with Gandhi and wrote to him: "The Viceroy's speech has now made this perfectly clear and we have the indisputable fact that the leader of the N.C.O. movement has been in treaty with the Government of India and has secured the suspension of the prosecution of the Ali Brothers by inducing them to give a public apology and an undertaking."

This was an obvious misreading of Gandhi's—and Ali Brothers'—motives. At all events Motilal Nehru had not long to wait for the Ali Brothers'—and his own—prosecution. Gandhi certainly saw nothing wrong about their expression of regret

and repudiation of any intent to incite people to violent acts. On the other hand, he did not think that the speech at Karachi at the Khilafat Conference and the resolution that the conference had passed which were among the incriminating evidence on which their prosecution was based, was in any sense an invitation to violent acts. He himself was to repeat the substance of that speech at Trichinopoly at a public meeting as Dr. Sitaramayya tells us, adding that he "felt so strongly on the matter as to call upon the Nation to repeat the resolution [passed at Karachi] on the subject...by a resolution of the Working Committee" of the Congress.

As for the Moplah turbulence, the authorities undoubtedly found it to be a nuisance rather hard to extirpate. But the British bureaucratic establishment would not have been British if, with their ingrained pragmatism, they had not seen in the Moplah insurgency, if not exactly a godsend, at least something that could be turned to the advantage of the Raj at a time when it was having a spot of bother with Gandhi's Congress and the Khilafat movement. Quite apart from the fact that the operations against the Moplah rebels offered the army and the security forces training and practice in combating guerrilla type of insurgency—and with live targets and live ammunition—which might serve them in good stead in other circumstances, there was the divisive potential of the Moplah violence. For its victims were mostly Hindu moneylenders and land-owners—there were a few casualties among the European planters, but these were negligible—and the atrocity stories could be exploited for propaganda against the Congress and, what is more, to drive a wedge between the Congress and Khilafat movements which, thanks to Gandhi's whole-hearted support for the Khilafat cause, had been acting in unison.

The Government, therefore, did not mind the prolongation of the Moplah troubles even if the military operations cost something and embarrassed London on the eve of the Prince of Wales' visit. It certainly did not want Mohamed Ali and Gandhi to poke their noses into Malabar to restore peace as they wanted to. The former had been arrested and while Gandhi continued to Madras and other places in the South, he was not allowed to go anywhere near the troubled districts. He could no doubt have ignored the prohibitory warnings and courted arrest by

defying them. But that would not have helped him in pacifying the Moplahs. Moreover, he was concentrating on the primary task before him—that of mobilizing support for the non-cooperation movement which was supposed to bring Swaraj before the end of the year and did not wish to be sidetracked from the main to a peripheral issue. It seems strange, indeed, that Annie Besant, in a fit of peevishness quite unworthy of her great past, chose that moment to attack Gandhi in her daily *New India* and wrote : “It would be well if Mr. Gandhi could be taken into Malabar to see with his own eyes the ghastly horrors which have been created by the preaching of himself and his ‘loved brothers’ Muhammad and Shaukat Ali.” That is precisely what he wanted to do, but the Government, as in the case of the Punjab two years earlier, did not allow him.

Curiously—and significantly—Gandhi displayed a remarkable *sang froid* over the Moplah rebellion even though he was under some compulsion from a section of the Hindu opinion even within the Congress to lose his head over it. He naturally condemned the acts of violence and atrocities by some of the Moplahs and in no uncertain terms. But he kept a sense of proportion about them. He did not over-react or get excessively exercised over them as he had done earlier in the year over the Malegaon incident in which a police sub-inspector and four policemen were killed or over the violence that erupted in Bombay at the time of the Prince of Wales’ arrival in mid-November 1921 which led to a fast by him as a kind of atonement. He was to sum up his reaction to the Moplah revolt in his speech at Trichinopoly on September 19. The speech was in English, but it was translated into Tamil “sentence by sentence” by Dr. T.S.S. Rajan. Towards the end of it he said :

I know that what has happened in Malabar has been preying upon all of us who have understood anything about the situation there. My heart bleeds to think that our Moplah brethren have gone mad. I am grieved to find that they have killed officers. I am grieved to think that they have looted Hindu houses leaving many hundreds of men and women homeless and foodless. I am grieved to think that they have endeavoured forcibly to convert Hindus to Islam and by all these acts they have done an injury... but all the same let us

have a due sense of proportion. Their acts are not the acts of all the Muslims of India even, nor, thank God, of all the Moplahs....

He did not play it cool because, as Francis Watson suggests in his *The Trial of Mr. Gandhi*, he was anxious "to maintain some influence and control over his Khilafat allies." He called "the Moplahs brave but misguided men" because he believed it to be true and, what is more, had some understanding of the conditions of harsh exploitation under which they had lived and which had goaded them into a hopeless revolt which could not possibly succeed. He certainly held the Government responsible for it even at the cost of courting disfavour of some of his friends in the Servants of India Society to which he referred in a piece headed "Moplah Tragedy" in *Young India* of December 8, 1921.

Despite the Moplah tragedy and sporadic outbursts of violence which were a gnawing concern and which the opponents of the non-cooperation programme were highlighting as evidence against the Congress movement, at the approaches to the Thirty-sixth session, Gandhi seemed to be in a fairly optimistic, if not euphorious, frame of mind. The non-cooperation movement had not only managed to take off the ground, but was gathering a degree of momentum. The people had cast off their fear and were cheerfully prepared to go to jail if not in hundreds of thousands, at least in thousands, including a very substantial number of women. If proof were needed of its relative success, it was provided by the authorities themselves. They paid it the highest compliment by arresting some of the tallest Congress leaders, including the Ali Brothers, the two Nehrus, Lajpat Rai and then, on the very eve of the Ahmedabad session, the President-elect—C.R. Das.

Gandhi was cheered up by these developments. However, what perhaps buoyed him up the most was the positive response of the people to certain items of social reform in the Congress programme—especially the eradication of untouchability. This can be judged from a speech he made at Bardoli—a taluka which was soon to earn a high place in the roll of honour of the non-cooperation saga—on December 3 and to which he referred in *Navajivan* a week later. In his speech he paid a high tribute



to the people of the area above all for having "gone such a long way in removing the bar of untouchability from their minds. . . ."

Meanwhile, notwithstanding its preoccupation with the day to day exigencies of the non-cooperation movement, the Congress in Ahmedabad had gone on in a very business-like fashion with the preparations for hosting the annual session. It was the second time that it had been chosen as the venue for the Congress session. But the last time Ahmedabad had the honour was nineteen years ago—in 1902. Much water had flowed down the Ganga and the Yamuna, the Cauvery and the Krishna since then. Many of the old stalwarts were no longer alive. Others had been unable to keep pace with it and some had deliberately taken their distance from it, including the man who had presided over its deliberations—Surendranath Banerjea—and delighted the small number of delegates which attended it (471 to be exact) with his oratory of which H.W. Nevinson was to write : "It was oratory such as, I suppose, Cicero loved to practise, and Pitt and Brougham—such oratory as few living Englishmen dare venture, out of fear of drowning in the gulfs of bathos. But Surendranath loved it, as Cicero might. To him it was evidently the sincerest pleasure of life to listen to the beat of marching phrases. . . ."

Surendranath was still indulging in the pleasure of listening to the beat of marching phrases, not least his own, but from the other side of a widening political divide. He had broken with the mainstream Congress and was now holding a ministerial portfolio in the Bengal Government, but it was a portfolio stuffed with odds and ends if not straw, and within two years he was even to lose that with his electoral debacle—a rather unheroic culmination to a political career that at one time held heroic promise. As for the Congress, it had moved on. It had, in fact, undergone a metamorphosis and almost been reincarnated. Nobody could taunt it any longer with just being a superior debating society. For it was fast becoming an effective vehicle not merely for challenging the might of a powerful empire, but social transformation of India. This had happened under the leadership of a man—Gandhi—who in 1902 was still conducting his pilot project of non-violent struggle in Southern Africa, and though a name to conjure with and admire in Congress circles, was largely an outsider far away from the levers of decision. But at Nagpur he had virtually moved on to the bridge.

That Ahmedabad had been chosen as venue for its annual session was itself significant. For soon after his return from South Africa he had decided to site his Ashram on the outskirts of the city on the banks of the Sabarmati, not as a retreat from the world where he could contemplate his own navel, but to make it a workshop, almost a kind of GHQ, where the strategy and tactics of his novel form of revolution could be planned. The Gujarat Congress, despite its preoccupation with the non-cooperation movement and its part in it, was therefore determined that the session should be a memorable one. It had decided to set up the Reception Committee at the end of March 1921 and its office-bearers were picked early in May, though the final choice was not made till middle of August. The Chairman of the Reception Committee was to be a man who had already proved his extraordinary talent for political organisation and who was ten years later to preside over the Karachi Session and make an historic contribution to the consolidation of Indian polity during the barely forty months that were left to him after the attainment of independence.

The practice of holding annual sessions of the Congress in structures of brick and mortar like conference halls and auditoria had been given up years ago. So, too, the habit of arranging accommodation for the delegates in hostels of various grades and private houses. Instead, the sessions were held in the open under an appropriately large marquee, or *Pandal*, and the delegates were for the most part accommodated under canvas. Indeed, as the gatherings grew larger and larger, it was found convenient to erect a whole temporary township of tents for the occasion in some open public ground for the Congress to conduct its business and for the delegates to live and move and have their political being in it for the duration. The tradition was maintained at Ahmedabad—but with some significant innovations.

An area of roughly hundred acres on the right bank of the Sabarmati about two hundred yards from the Ellis Bridge that connects it with the city of Ahmedabad on the left bank was chosen as the site of the Congress *Pandal*, the delegates' camp and other structures, and an elaborate system of sanitation, water supply, conservancy services and communications was set up. The Congress *Pandal*, we learn from official report of the

Congress, was erected in a spacious enclosure covering about 15 acres. The *Pandal*, covering about 8,000 sq.yds. was reached through an outer gate named "Lokmanya Darwaja" which itself was "a facsimile of the famous historical Three Gates of Ahmedabad" over which flew the national tricolour flag. The entrance to the *Pandal* which could accommodate 15,000 persons was about eighty-five yards away through "a beautifully laid out garden with an oval-shaped fountain in the middle." It was called the *Swaraj Dvar*—or the Swaraj Gate. The Delegates' Camp was sited four hundred yards away from the *Pandal* and covered an area of sixty acres. It was called the Khadi Nagar—or Khadi Town—and right in the middle was a special block where Gandhi was to take up his residence well before the inauguration date—on December 22, 1921, as we know from his letter to Mathuradas Trikunddas, "a social worker and author" who had been a co-worker of Gandhi and was to be the Secretary of the Bombay Congress Committee in 1922-23.

The Delegates' Camp had been named Khadi Nagar, or Khadi Town. And for good reason. It was not only that a *charkha*, or spinning-wheel, had been placed under the Tricolour which flew over the Lokamanya Gate, but everything inside the *Pandal* as well as the Delegates' Camp was covered with true khaddar so dear to the Mahatma's heart because for him it represented the cure to India's economic ills. What is more, the Reception Committee had taken great pains to mount an ambitious exhibition in a nearby bungalow, complete with a demonstration section, a museum section, a competition section and a sales section devoted largely to the encouragement of khaddar manufacture which was intended to be the *piece de resistance*, as it were, of the many sideshows which usually accompanied the Congress session. It opened on Xmas eve and went on till January 2, 1922.

Indeed, any unwary visitor to the *Swaraj Dvar*, the Delegates' Camp and the Exhibition might have been forgiven if he or she formed the impression that the whole show was a high pressure khaddar promotion exercise rather than the annual deliberations of India's national liberation movement at a most critical juncture when it was already engaged in a major battle with the British power even if it was being fought by non-violent means. The bewilderment of the hypothetical visitor would have

been further compounded by the thought that the khadi promotion campaign was being launched from a city renowned as one of the main centres of the Indian textile industry many of whose inhabitants owed their prosperity and livelihood to machine made textiles.

Another innovation at Ahmedabad was less paradoxical and more understandable. It concerned the seating arrangement for the 4,728 delegates who attended the session. No chairs were provided in the *Pandal* as had been customary since the advent of the Congress. This was an economy measure. Hiring of thousands of chairs was a costly item added to which was the charge for breakages which ran into thousands of rupees at a time when the rupee was still worth something. There was, perhaps, another advantage in dispensing with chairs and the delegates having to squat on the floor, Indian fashion although the thought probably never crossed the mind of the organisers. It obviated the risk of chairs coming in handy in the heat of controversy and argument as an effective critique of weapon as had happened at the abortive session at Surat. It was an innovation that came to stay.

Within hailing distance of the Congress *Pandal* and Khadi Nagar, another temporary canvas township had sprung up simultaneously. It was on a more modest scale and was called Muslim Nagar where the Muslim League and the Khilafat Conference were to hold their deliberations. The sitting of the two camps and *Pandals* so close to each other was intended to make it easy for delegates and visitors to move from one gathering to another since a number of them were participating in both. For it was still the high noon of fraternisation and political unity between the two main communities of India. Strangely, for once, the Government unwittingly ensured not only that the unity should continue and be strengthened, but that it should be seen to continue. By arresting the President-elect, C.R. Das, on the eve of the session, it had given the Congress an opportunity to fill the presidential chair with a distinguished Muslim—Hakim Ajmal Khan, a renowned physician who practised the *Unani* (Greek) system of medicine in Delhi. He had already been the Chairman of the Reception Committee at the first session of the Congress to be held in Delhi—in 1918—within six weeks of the ending of the First World War.

The session began at 3.30 P.M. on Tuesday, December 27; and it was clear from the start that it was not going to be a wordy session, partly because it had barely a day and a half in which to get through its business and partly because many of those who might have provided the rhetorical afflatus were locked up behind prison bars. The Chairman of the Reception Committee, Sardar (though this title became associated with him later) Vallabhbhai Patel, a man of action rather than words, himself set the fashion in brevity in his address of welcome delivered in Hindi. It was the shortest speech from the Chairman of the Reception Committee ever heard at a Congress session before—hardly a thousand words in length. He wanted the delegates to judge their hosts not by the inadequacy of the arrangements for their comforts and entertainment which the Reception Committee had been able to make, but rather by Gujarat's "response to the Creative Programme of non-cooperation with its life-giving and central fact of non-violence".

He made no tall claims of what the Congress in Gujarat had been able to accomplish. He admitted that as far as "the renunciation of titles and practice by lawyers" was concerned, they could "show nothing of which we can feel proud." He was even humble enough to acknowledge that they had "not passed through the fire of suffering that Bengal, Punjab, United Provinces and the other provinces are passing through." But their record, he said, on education was creditable. Not only had "some of the best schools and high schools" had "given up their connection with the Government and are none the worse for it," but they had "a National College and a National University" to which institutions were affiliated, the number of boys and girls "in the affiliated and other national schools" receiving instruction being 31,000. Equally, whereas two years earlier "there was hardly a spinning-wheel" working in Gujarat, in the period under review something like "1,10,000 spinning-wheels" had come into operation and they had produced "no less than two lacs of pounds" of khaddar and spent five lacs "in organising *Swadeshi* [presumably he meant the Exhibition and other activities in connection with the promotion of khadi]."

On two other counts, he suggested Gujarat had lived up to what was expected of it. Hindu-Muslim unity, for example. "Whereas hitherto," he said, "we have distrusted and considered

ourselves as natural enemies, we have begun to love each other and live in perfect friendliness." He proudly informed the delegates that the relations between the two communities and with other communities, like the Parsis, the Christians and others, had been not merely negatively friendly but positively so in that they had been all "actively working together for the advancement of the national cause," which may sound incredible in the light of present-day conditions in Gujarat but was true at the time.

He was also proud of Gujarat's achievement in another vital field of the Congress programme. Non-violence—not originating in "helplessness" but as a "self-imposed restraint"—had been observed both in the letter and the spirit. They had even maintained friendly relations with those "who have differed from us," recognising that "toleration is the essence of non-violence." They were making "elaborate preparations...for mass Civil Disobedience" at least in two *tahsils* or sub-districts—Bardoli and Anand. But he also assured the delegates that they would "do nothing reckless, nothing that...as peaceful and peace-loving human beings" they may not do "for the preservation of the national self-respect or safeguarding of national rights."

Having reported soberly on the state of the movement and its prospects in Gujarat, Vallabhbhai Patel lost no time in asking the Acting President to take the chair. He described Hakim Ajmal Khan as "one of the greatest and noblest of our countrymen" and "an embodiment of Hindu-Muslim unity" who "commands the confidence and the affection of Hindus and others equally with our Musalman brothers." Coming from him this was, indeed, high praise and wholly well-merited. It was certainly in part due to the ambient climate of sentimental fraternisation in the country at the time that even an overtly sectarian body like the Hindu Mahasabha at its conference in Delhi, as Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya tells us, had elected the Hakim as President. But it was also because of the reputation he enjoyed as a man of great catholicity of the mind and spirit.

His presidential address reflected it. It was one of the shortest speeches from the chair—perhaps the shortest—ever to be heard from a Congress President before or after. It ran to under fifteen hundred words and was delivered in Urdu and read out also in its English rendering by Shuaib Qureshi. A man of genuine modesty, he was aware that he was only "the *locum*

*tenens* of the Deshbandhu," as Dr. Sitaramayya puts it. But while admitting that and thanking the Congress for the trust it had reposed in him, he assured the delegates that he would not be found wanting, when the time comes, "to make, for my country and my God, the sacrifice that it has been the good fortune of many of our noble brethren to make."

He gave another reason why he was not going to give a long speech. Apart from the fact that the time at his disposal was short, he said, he felt that "the time for long speeches is gone. We all are called upon to solve the most serious problem in the history of our country and the present is the time for decision and action." But the brevity of his speech did not mean that it was thin in content. On the contrary, while he refrained from offering "a detailed survey of the progress of the non-cooperation movement" in the twelve months since the Nagpur session, he brought out an aspect of the impact of the movement which few Congress leaders had noted, or even if they had noticed it, had cared to stress. This was the impact which Gandhi's non-cooperation movement was having on international opinion, and especially on other subject or semi-subject nations. He, of course, claimed that "the spirit of the Non-co-operation pervades throughout the country", but went on to add:

It has received the highest tribute that a nation could pay to another from our sister nations across the Indian Ocean. Our Egyptian brethren have adopted it to fight their own political battle. It should be a matter of pride to all of us that India is showing the way to other sister countries. Non-violent non-cooperation has ceased to be an Indian movement. It is fast becoming an Asiatic movement and the day is not distant when the conscience of the world will adopt non-violent non-cooperation as the world-weapon against universal injustice and untruth.... Not only the conscience of Asia and Africa is awake and active but there are signs, feeble no doubt, yet full of hope and promise, that the conscience of Europe too is at last rousing itself from its long slumber.

This was, perhaps, seeing things through rose-tinted glasses, but the Hakim was right in assessing the anti-imperialist potential

of the Indian upsurge and the eventual repercussions which the Indian struggle was to have on other countries of Asia and Africa trying to overthrow the yoke of colonial bondage. Allowing for some rhetorical exaggeration, he was also not far wrong in his assessment of the growing momentum of the non-cooperation movement:

Who can deny the success of the spirit of the non-co-operation movement in India after witnessing the cheerful spirit with which our workers have made and are making willing sacrifices for the cause of their country and are going to jail in ever increasing numbers with a smile on their lips? What is still more is that not even this intense repression has provoked violence. . . . A ceaseless pilgrimage to the jail is kept up in vindication of the primary rights of citizenship in all the northern parts of India as also in Maharashtra and Andhra. The nation to-day realizes the grimness and gravity of the great struggle it is engaged in and is behaving with the cool determination worthy of heroes fighting for a noble cause.

That this was in essence a true picture of the state of the non-cooperation movement at the end of 1921 is acknowledged even by the ranks of Tuscany. Thus Dr. Judith Brown in the penultimate chapter in her *Gandhi's Rise to Power* remarks that "his vision (non-cooperation as a way of involving the whole spectrum of Indian society in a political movement) was achieved on a scale far beyond that of the Rowlatt satyagraha," but adds, characteristically, "because for the first time he made contact with groups of subcontractors who found in the techniques he offered ways of defending or promoting their local interests." It is well to remember that she is referring to the Nehrus, to C.R. Das, to Rajagopalachari, to Lajpat Rai *et hoc genus omne*. But whatever the undertones of condescension if not contempt implicit in the term "subcontractors", the admission of the success of the non-cooperation remains significant.

Hakim Ajmal Khan's claims regarding "the success of the spirit of the non-cooperation movement" carried conviction with the delegates at Ahmedabad because he did not turn a blind eye to its shortfalls. "Our critics say," he observed, "that the non-cooperation movement has failed and in support of that statement



point to the Government educational institutions, the ranks of the title-holders, the members of the new Legislative Councils and the Bars of the various High Courts." He referred his audience to what the Vice-Chancellor of the Calcutta University had said about the effect of non-cooperation movement on Government-run educational institutions. As to the title-holders and the members of the Legislative Councils, he said:

Where is their prestige to-day? It has fallen lower than Czarist ruble[sic]. . . . As to the lawyers, it is true that with some noble exceptions they have not as a class, responded to our appeal as they ought to have done. But as we develop our Panchayat system, a work to which we have not been able to devote much of our time and energy, the legal practitioners would soon fall in with public opinion.

This was obviously being oversanguine. But right at the end of his speech he dealt with an issue which he was aware was causing a great deal of unease—and among some Hindu Congress leaders from Maharashtra and the Hindi belt the unease bordered on bitter resentment—namely, stories of the atrocities perpetrated by the Moplahs upon the Hindus in Malabar. His view of "the tragic events...in Malabar" was almost identical with that of Gandhi. Like Gandhi, he saw the question in its two aspects: "one with reference to the Government in the country and the other with reference to the treatment by the Moplahs of their Hindu brethren." As for the first aspect, like Gandhi, he placed "the responsibility of provoking these disturbances...entirely on the shoulders of the Government." As for the second aspect, again almost paraphrasing Gandhi, he fully sympathised with the Hindus who had suffered but maintained that "these deplorable incidents" were "the acts of a few misguided individuals" and there would be "no Muslim worthy of the name" who would not condemn them as "entirely un-Islamic in the strongest possible terms." As for the "terrible convulsions" the country was experiencing, he saw in them "the birth-pangs of young India."

The delegates to the Thirty-sixth session of the Congress, meanwhile, experienced something which nobody connected with the Indian National Congress had experienced before—or since.

They were treated to two presidential addresses; one from the Acting President and the other by proxy written by the President-elect, C.R. Das, who since December 10, 1921, had been lodged in one of India's most famous, one might almost say five-star, prisons—Alipore Jail at Calcutta. C.R. Das had evidently sent it to Gandhi "in fragmentary condition with instructions to revise it and put it in shape" as Gandhi told readers of *Young India* of January 12, 1922, in a prefatory note to the text which he published virtually unaltered but for "restoring one sentence which had been ruled out and adding one to complete a thought and . . . light verbal immaterial alterations. . . ."

Predictably, C.R. Das' address was much longer—more than thrice the wordage of the Acting President's address. It was also much more argumentative, at times arguing the obvious. It posed a series of rhetorical question as, for instance, when it asked the question: What is our aim? Where are we going? It posed an even more fundamental if largely supererogatory question: What then is freedom? He did not pause to answer, or rather said that it was impossible to define the term, and then went on immediately to define it "as that state, that condition, which makes it possible for a nation to realise its own individuality and to evolve its own destiny." Whether the delegates at Ahmedabad were any the wiser for listening to C.R. Das in *absentia*, they had the rare treat of listening to Sarojini Naidu who, Dr. Sitaramayya records, read out the speech "with all the eloquence which the speech itself possessed in language and sentiment." But the address, in retrospect, is interesting more as an historical oddity rather than for its intrinsic intellectual merit or any political perspicacity or insight that it communicated. In a way the Government by arresting C.R. Das a fortnight before the session when he had probably already drafted his speech, had made sure that events should bypass what he was going to say. But he was to catch up with them a year later, when on his release, he was again elected President and delivered a more weighty, certainly more memorable and even moving address at the Thirty-seventh session of the Congress held at Gaya—a place even richer in historical associations than Ahmedabad.

An incident during the Ahmedabad session must have raised some eyebrows. Certainly, it provided Palme Dutt in his *India Today* yet one more proof of Gandhi's bourgeois cloven hoof

behind the cloak of saintliness. "Gandhi," he wrote, "introduced an English clergyman at the opening of the proceedings to deliver a religious message to the Congress, who took the opportunity to deliver a homily against the burning of foreign cloth." Nobody reading this would suspect that Dutt was referring to the appearance of C.F. Andrews, a life-long friend and comrade of Tagore and Gandhi—and the Indian people. He was no stranger to the Congress platform. However, hitherto he had appeared in Indian dress made of khaddar. At Ahmedabad he came dressed in European clothes. As we know, he disagreed with Gandhi on the question of burning of foreign cloth and, when Gandhi asked him to attend the Ahmedabad session "to give a religious message," he had agreed but on condition that he wanted to make his dissent to this aspect of non-cooperation very clear. Any fair-minded person would have interpreted Gandhi's insistence on Andrews appearance, despite his disagreement with him, as evidence of his and Congress' tolerance of dissent. For as Dr. Sitaramayya tells us, Andrews was "received with the utmost respect and affection by the audience." Among other things, Andrews told them that the Mahatma had asked him to leave that very night by train for Malabar on a peace mission among the Moplahs—a subject on which there was a resolution on the agenda.

For the rest, Gandhi wanted it to be a business-like session and business-like it turned out to be. The time at their disposal was short, but the resolutions listed for debate were also fewer—thirteen in all. Of these the last three concerned organisational matters like changes in the Congress constitution, the most important among which was the lowering of the qualifying age for membership from twenty-one to eighteen; the appointment, or rather reappointment, of Motilal Nehru, Dr. Ansari, and C. Rajagopalachari as General Secretaries, and since two of them were in jail, appointment of V.J. Patel and Dr. Rajan to act for them; the reappointment of Jamnalal Bajaj and Seth Chhotani as Treasurers. Ironically enough, at a time when the Congress was whole-heartedly committed to the Khilafat cause, it passed a resolution—number eight on the agenda—congratulating Ghazi Mustafa Kamal Pasha, the rising star on the Anatolian horizon and, of course, the Turks, on their "successes" and assuring them "of India's sympathy and support" in their

struggle for preserving their nationhood and independence. The irony was that the Ataturk's success was to spell the complete and final extinction of the whole concept of Caliphate and the emergence of Turkey as a nation-state with a secular framework of polity which, however, dented by subsequent periods of retrogression and reaction, has remained essentially intact to this day.

There were two other congratulatory resolutions. Resolution number five congratulated "all those patriots" who were "undergoing imprisonment for the sake of their conscience or country" which had "hastened the advent of Swaraj." The tenth resolution congratulated not only Baba Gurdit Singh of the *Komagata Maru* fame who had managed to evade arrest for seven years after landing in Calcutta and had recently voluntarily surrendered to the authorities "as a sacrifice for the nation," but also "the other Sikh leaders who have preferred imprisonment to the restriction of their religious rights and liberty"—and, in fact, to the Sikh community as a whole—"on their non-violent spirit at the time of the Babaji's arrest and on other occasions in spite of great provocation by the police and the military." This was obviously a reference to the Akali movement for wresting the control of Sikh shrines from the corrupt *mahants* and bringing them under democratic control of the Sikh community as a whole which had already begun and in which the Akalis were to display remarkable self-control and non-violence against the combined forces of the *mahants* and the Raj as C.F. Andrews was later to testify.

There were also two condemnatory resolutions. In the ninth resolution the Congress deplored "the occurrences that took place in Bombay on the 17th November last" when the demonstrations in Bombay against the Prince of Wales' visit had degenerated in some instances into acts of violence and arson against those who were considered to have collaborated with the authorities in welcoming the Prince, notably a section of the Parsi community. The resolution assured "all parties and communities that it has been and is the desire and determination of the Congress to guard their rights to the fullest extent."

In the seventh resolution the Congress deplored "the acts done by certain Moplahs by way of forcible conversions and destruction of life and property." But this condemnation was

framed in a comprehensive resolution which began by repudiating the propagandist stories that Moplah disturbances were "due to the Non-cooperation or the Khilafat movement." It pointed out that "Non-cooperators and the Khilafat preachers were denied opportunity of carrying on effective propaganda of non-violence in the affected parts by the district authorities for six months before the disturbance" which therefore must be "due to causes wholly unconnected with the two movements." Indeed, it claimed that the outbreak "would not have occurred had the message of non-violence been allowed to reach them." And it concluded by maintaining that the prolongation of the trouble could have been prevented if the Government had accepted the services of Maulana Yakub Hassan—a noted non-cooperator—or allowed Gandhi to go to Malabar. It described the treatment of the Moplah prisoners as evidenced by the "asphyxiation" tragedy as "an act of inhumanity unheard of in modern times and unworthy of a Government that calls itself civilised."

The sixth resolution was an appeal to those who were not wholly with the non-cooperation movement and even those who did not believe in the principle of non-cooperation, but regarded it as necessary "for the sake of national self-respect to demand and insist upon the redress of the Khilafat and the Punjab wrongs, and for the sake of full national self-expression, to insist upon the immediate establishment of Swaraj." They were asked to promote unity between the various religious communities, to support the khadi programme as a cottage industry and as an economic measure to improve the livelihood of the agriculturists "living on the brink of starvation," and if they were Hindus, to help in the removal of untouchability—in other words, help in the implementation of the non-political aspects of the programme even if they objected to the directly political items.

However, the focus of interest at Ahmedabad was on the first resolution on the agenda—and the fourth. The second and third resolutions were either corollaries of the first resolution or consequential upon it. Little wonder then that Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya treats them as part of the first resolution, or the main resolution as he calls it, and adds : "The main resolution was really a thesis on Non-cooperation, its philosophy and programme alike, so much so that Gandhi pointed out in

moving it that it had taken him 35 minutes minutely to read it in English and Hindustani...."

As usual all the resolutions were debated twice—first in the Subjects Committee and then in the plenary session of the Congress. The Subjects Committee was only the All-India Congress Committee functioning under another name to prepare and sift the agenda to be discussed by the Congress. It met on December 24th, 25th, 27th and again, until 11 a.m. on the 28th. There were also two meetings of the Congress Working Committee before the inaugural session of the Congress, one on December 23rd and another on the 26th. According to the *Encyclopaedia of the Indian National Congress* edited by A.M. and S.G. Zaidi, at its meeting on December 23rd, the Working Committee "discussed and finally settled the resolutions that were to be placed on its behalf before the meeting of the Subjects Committee on the 24th December." Ms. Judith Brown, basing herself on the diary of M.R. Jayakar and the Bombay Police Abstract, 1922, speaks of "Kelkar's bitter attack in the Working Committee...against the proposal to invest Gandhi with virtually dictatorial powers." How bitter was the attack which N.C. Kelkar mounted against the fourth resolution on the agenda cannot be said for certain. M.R. Jayakar was not a member of the Working Committee at the relevant time and was not present at its meeting on December 23rd; and police informers, especially in India and even in British times, tended to exaggerate to earn their keep. The only reference to Kelkar in the *Encyclopaedia of the Indian National Congress* (Volume 8:1921-24) is that he offered to settle a minor financial dispute between the Bombay Provincial Congress Committee and the Maharashtra Provincial Committee.

It is, however, true that a section of the Maharashtrian leadership, Kelkar among them, was never quite on the same wavelength as Gandhi though Gandhi was to go out of his way to woo them at the Subjects Committee meeting on December 25 when he was reported by the *Hindu* (Dec. 26) to have said: "I am perfectly sure that when the time comes for sacrifice, Maharashtra will not be behind Bengal, or rather it is likely to come at the top." This and other compliments he paid to "the admirable spirit" of "toleration" of the Maharashtra party were not meant to be flattery, but were intended to create the maximum possible unity within and outside the Congress at a time when

the Congress was about to engage in a decisive phase of the non-cooperation movement which he still believed might clinch the issue. At all events, even Judith Brown admits that "Gandhi did not need to fear the Maharashtrians in Congress even if they united with men from Bengal and Madras. This was the first Congress held under the new constitution, and consequently voting power was spread throughout the subcontinent, giving weight to areas like Bihar, U.P., Andhra and the Punjab, which were unlikely to drag their heels."

A significant challenge did develop to Gandhi's policy and strategy and tactics as approved at Nagpur, but it did not come from those whom Judith Brown calls "Tilak's heirs" and some of whom were gradually to drift away from the Congress into the twilight zone of acrid sectarian politics. The challenge came from Maulana Hasrat Mohani, for the most part of his life a Nationalist Muslim poet, politician and journalist who had founded *Urdu-e-Moalla* in 1903, and had sided with the "extremists" at Surat but was to part company with the Congress in the late 1920s over the Nehru Report. It came on a matter of principle rather than tactics when the A.I.C.C. met as the Subjects Committee on the Christmas Day for the whole day to discuss the main resolution—that is, the first four resolutions which Gandhi presented as a composite resolution.

According to the *Hindu*, the President, Hakim Ajmal Khan "was flooded with amendments from all sides," but it was Hasrat Mohani, the President-elect of the All-India Muslim League, who "persistently led the opposition demanding the deletion of those phrases in the resolution which excluded the possibility of resort to violence, or even the thought of it, so long as the pledge was in force...on the ground that his religion allowed him to take to violence in case non-violence failed. The debate revealed differences of opinion on this point among Mahommedan members themselves. Some expressed the opinion that the adoption of Maulana Hasrat's amendments would be a change in the Congress creed itself...."

This view was shared not only by Gandhi but the President of the Congress. For when the Subjects Committee met on December 27th in the morning for four hours, at the very outset, Hakim Ajmal Khan, according to the *Hindu*, "announced that

he had received notices of amendments to Mr. Gandhi's resolution, which in their real meaning came into conflict with the Congress Creed itself. He, therefore, ruled them out of order, but suggested that if the movers so desired they could bring them forward as substantive propositions. As the position looked somewhat confused, Mr. Gandhi made a short speech in course of which he analysed the contending issues and placed them clearly before the House.... The speech over, Mr. Gandhi's resolution was put to vote and carried amidst acclamation, only 10 voting against."

But it was not the end of the affair. Hasrat Mohani did not give up. He duly moved his first amendment to the Creed, "proposing the attainment of swaraj by all possible and proper means in place of peaceful and legitimate means." But the Maulana could find few buyers for the change he wanted and withdrew his amendment. He then brought forward another amendment declaring swaraj outside the British Empire as the goal of the Congress and India. This was a more serious proposition. It was an idea which was beginning to take roots in many Indian minds, including perhaps that of Gandhi himself. For, as the *Hindu* reported the next day, in a short speech he said that "he wanted to make it clear that today his hope of getting redress of Punjab and Khilafat through the British Government was ever so much greater than it was at any time 15 months ago" which seemed rather incredible, but added something which was partly credible—that "within the Congress Creed there was still a chance for two parties who wanted swaraj within or without the British Empire, but there could be no room for those who wanted to resort to violence, because the moment anyone joined the Congress, he must sign a pledge of non-violence in terms of the Creed." The *Hindu* report continued: "Mr. Gandhi emphasized that the attainment of swaraj would by itself break imperialism. India even then would be certainly free."

This was true and has been proved to be true. His opposition to declaring swaraj outside the British Empire, or complete independence, as the objective was clearly qualified and dictated by the need he felt of carrying the Moderates with him. The *Hindu* reported: "Concluding, he warned all against estranging from them the Moderates and others who were sympathizing with them, by taking steps which make the present easy task one of



great difficulty." This was a fond hope as the Mahatma was soon to discover. Hasrat Mohani's motion was defeated by 200 votes to 52 (altogether 269 persons were listed as A.I.C.C. members, but not all were present at Ahmedabad and a few must have abstained). Complete independence was an idea whose time had not yet come, though it was to come soon enough and the Maulana must be given the credit for projecting the future shape of things.

The next day the Subjects Committee met again at eight in the morning before the plenary session. Hakim Ajmal Khan was unable to come to preside over the Committee's deliberations and in his absence Gandhi was voted to the chair. There were apparently two propositions before the Committee as Gandhi, according to a report in the *Leader* of Allahabad two days later, informed the members:

The Madras members including Messrs Vijayaraghavachariar, Kasturi Ranga Iyengar and Satyamurti had been pressing upon him the desirability of the passing of a resolution in reply to the Viceroy's Calcutta speech, emphatically pronouncing on the part of the Congress that the destinies of India were not in the hands of the British Parliament but in the hands of the Congress and that the British Parliament could merely ratify the wishes of the people of India. On the other hand, he said Pandit Malaviya and Mr. Jinnah [Jinnah was not on the Committee and had, in fact, virtually dissociated himself from the Congress, but must have come to Ahmedabad to attend the session of the All-India Muslim League] were pressing that the Congress should definitely state its position with regard to the suggestion for a round table conference.

Gandhi, said the *Leader* despatch, "left it to the committee to adopt motions on the lines suggested by the two parties for he had not himself been able to draft resolutions which could meet their wishes." He explained to the committee the background to the Round Table Conference idea; how "telegrams had passed between him, Pandit Malaviya, Mr. Das [C.R.], Maulana Abul Kalam [Azad] and Mr. Shyam Sunder Chakravarty on the subject of a round table conference;" and while "he had agreed with Messrs Das and Chakravarty to waive the hartal

on the 24th of this month [the Prince of Wales was scheduled to arrive in Calcutta on that day] provided the notifications regarding the disbandment of volunteers [that is, Congress volunteers] and the prohibition of public meetings were withdrawn and the prisoners undergoing imprisonment as a result of these notifications released," he wanted other demands to be added to these. He wanted, for instance, the Karachi prisoners (among them the Ali Brothers) also to be released "because it was from the time of the Karachi trial that Government went mad."

Making his own position quite clear, the *Leader* quoted Gandhi as having said:

Personally, I have not attached the slightest importance to the question of a conference. I think that it will be inconsistent with the dignity of the Congress to pass a resolution about the conference when there is nothing in the Viceregal pronouncement to show that the Congress is called upon to make any response. On the other hand there is nothing in the main resolution...which bangs the door in the face of the Viceroy or anybody who wants a round table conference, but there is in that resolution something which is extremely dignifying, namely, that if they want a round table conference that can only be had if we have certain indications of a change of heart.... It will go hard with us if we go to a conference and come away from it with absolutely empty hands.... I say it is not for the Congress to make any such declaration upon the flimsy ground and upon the mere hope of catching a straw. And who catches a straw except a man who is about to be drowned? But not the Congress which is pulsating with life today. (Prolonged applause).

Having made his own position clear beyond any possibility of doubt, he asked Malaviya whom he described as "the noblest Indian" to state his point of view. This he did. But the Subjects Committee was in no mood to be persuaded that Congress should declare "its desire for a round table conference on reasonable terms" and to expunge from the resolution passed the previous day "that clause which advised aggressive civil disobedience." It rejected Malaviya's proposition by an overwhelming majority.

The arguments were to be repeated at the plenary session on

the last day of the Congress at Ahmedabad. Gandhi himself moved the main resolution which combined the first four resolutions on the agenda (see Appendix II). The President had allowed him half an hour, but he explained amidst laughter that this was exclusive of the time it would take him to read the resolution in Hindi and English. He hoped he would "keep within the limit prescribed," as in fact he did, if anything, completing his speech (delivered first in English and then the substance of it in Hindi) even before the thirty minutes he was given were over.

It was not a speech calculated to set the dry Sabarmati on fire. The Hindi version of the speech was overlaid with a certain banal religiosity and didacticism. But the English version, partly because, as he himself said, it did not dilate "over the religious subtleties" of the pledge that the volunteers have to take, was altogether more lucid and in parts even memorable. "This resolution," he said, "whilst it shows the indomitable courage and the determination of the nation to vindicate its rights and to be able to stare the world in the face, also says in all humility to the Government: 'No matter what you do, no matter how you repress us, we shall one day wring reluctant repentance from you; and we ask you to think betimes, and take care what you are doing and see that you do not make 300 millions of India your eternal enemies'."

Gandhi had spoken more memorable and moving words before, but there was here an accent of militancy, almost defiance which he had generally tended to avoid. But, as he had said earlier in his speech, the resolution was meant to intimate to the world that India had "outgrown the stage of helplessness and dependence upon anybody." Having made that clear, he went on to say that "if the Government sincerely wants an open door," the resolution "leaves the door open for it... If this Government is sincerely anxious to do justice, if Lord Reading has really come to India to do justice and nothing less—and we want nothing more—then I inform him from this platform, with God as my witness, with all the earnestness that I can command, that he has got an open door in this resolution if he means well, but the door is closed in his face if he means ill, no matter how many people go to their graves, no matter what wild career this repression is to go through."

There was, he said, every chance for Reading to hold a round

table conference. But, he insisted, "it must be a real conference... where only equals are to sit and where there is not to be single beggar." The resolution was "not an arrogant challenge to anybody but it is a challenge to authority that is enthroned on arrogance. It is a challenge to the authority which disregards the considered opinion of millions of thinking human beings. It is a humble and an irrevocable challenge to authority which in order to save itself wants to crush freedom of opinion and freedom of association.... God only knows, if I could possibly have advised you before to go to the Round Table Conference, if I could possibly have advised you not to undertake this resolution of civil disobedience, I would have done so." He would have done so because, he said:

I am a man of peace. I believe in peace. But I do not want peace at any price. I do not want the peace that you find in stone; I do not want the peace that you find in the grave; but I do want that peace which you find embedded in the human breast....

The only other matter that generated some excitement if not heat on the last day of the Ahmedabad session was Hasrat Mohani's proposition that the Congress should re-define its goal. He did not accept the defeat in the Subjects Committee as final and tried his luck in the plenary session. His motion read:

The object of the Indian National Congress is the attainment of swaraj or complete independence, free from all foreign control, by the people of India, by all legitimate and peaceful means.

Gandhi opposed the resolution, first speaking in Hindi and then in English. Both speeches were more in sorrow than in anger, though the Hindi version of his argument seems to have a sharper edge of asperity than the English version, but this could be because the English version had been revised by him before its publication in *Young India* of January 19, 1922. He said that "the levity with which that proposition [Hasrat Mohani's resolution] has been taken" had grieved him "because it shows a lack of responsibility." "As responsible men and women,"

he observed, "we should go back to the days of Nagpur and Calcutta and we should remember what we did only an hour ago. . . . Are you going to rub the whole of that position from your mind by raising a false issue and by throwing a bombshell in the midst of the Indian atmosphere?" He hoped that those who had voted for the previous resolution "will think fifty times before taking up this resolution and voting for it." Hasrat Mohani's resolution, he argued, would land them "into depths unfathomable." "Let us," he counselled, "first of all gather up our strength; let us first of all sound our own depths. Let us not go into waters whose depths we do not know."

All this sounded eminently reasonable and he carried the day. Mohani's motion was rejected in the plenary session as it had been in the Subjects Committee and as, indeed, it was rejected by the Muslim League two days later, both in the Subjects Committee of the League (by 36 votes to 23) and in the open session, although he was the President of the Muslim League session and had substantial support from the Muslim divines and clerics. But the question remains why Gandhi was so keen to defeat Mohani's proposition? Even Dr. Sitaramayya is somewhat puzzled and writes: "At this distance of time [circa 1935], one is apt to look upon it [the Maulana's resolution] as the most natural sequence of all that had happened, and may even wonder why it should have been resisted at all by the Congress or by Gandhi. . . . The language employed by Gandhi may strike us now, as we read it, as strong, but strong it was meant to be. Was it also too strong, is the question."

That undoubtedly is the question. Dr. Sitaramayya answers it in his own rather amiably circuitous way. "Gandhi", he says, "had evolved a new movement, shaped a new creed and planned a new attack. It was a perfect campaign in which the objective and the strategy were all clearly defined. The troops were in the midst of skirmishes and engagements. A huge battle was about to take place. Just then for a soldier to come up to the General and the army and say that the objective should be redefined was to disturb the forces arranged for battle. There was no doubt that the time chosen was utterly inopportune and the spirit displayed unhelpful." He also adds that Gandhi, unlike the Maulana and his supporters, was aware of the limitations of the forces

he commanded. After all, though it was the high tide of national unity, he was aware that the unity was brittle if not fragile.

All this is true. But even so Dr. Sitaramayya is compelled to admit that "some of the arguments employed by Gandhi on this occasion sound very much, it was pointed out at the time, *mutatis mutandis* like the arguments of the opponents of the existing creed at the time of its evolution at Nagpur." But, strangely, he does not mention another factor which entered into and determined Gandhi's thinking and which probably clinched the issue. He opposed a hard and fast definition of the term *swaraj* not only because he wanted to carry all those who were not against the non-cooperation idea but had reservations about it, and some even of those who were opposed to it, with him, but because he was utterly serious when he said in his speech moving the resolution that if the Government sincerely wanted an open door, the door was left "wide open for it." He still hoped to parley and all the mustering of forces, or arming himself with the supreme power of decision, and even the decision explicitly embodied in the resolution to suspend "all other Congress activities... whenever and wherever...found necessary" in order "to concentrate attention upon civil disobedience, whether mass or individual, whether of an offensive or defensive character, under proper safeguards," were intended to bring about parleys as between "equals" if at all possible. This is clear from what followed immediately after the Ahmedabad session.

## CHAPTER X

### THE GREAT RETREAT

The signal from the Ahmedabad Congress, and especially what Gandhi said and did during the days following the session, at any rate, were rather Delphic if not equivocal. They could be interpreted either way—as signifying that he had foreclosed his options or that he was keeping all his options open. A new Working Committee was elected on December 28. It met on the two succeeding days. But the business it transacted was for the most part what had been left over by its predecessor and concerned organisational matters such as enquiries about the Tilak Swaraj Fund [ornaments] or applications for increased representation on the All-India Congress Committee. There was also the question of the winding up of the British Congress Committee and the weekly *India* which had ceased publication in January 1921, but evidently the winding up had proved more complicated than had been imagined.

For instance, the late Fenner Brockway (later Lord Brockway) in his youthful enthusiasm on his own initiative had set up an Information Bureau on behalf of the A.I.C.C. “in contravention of specific instructions given to Mr. Ben Spoor;” and the Working Committee at its meeting on May 10, 1921, had decided to inform him and Mr. Ben Spoor firmly but

regretfully that "it cannot sanction the establishment of the said Bureau or the payment of any expense that Mr. Brockway might have incurred." But even that was not the end of the matter. It seems that a representative of the winding-up committee was in India. This was none other than Dr. C.B. Vakil, a colourful figure among the Indian community in London, who remained active well into the 1930s in expatriate Indian politics in Britain which, in effect, was a microcosm of politics in India—at least till 1947. N.C. Kelkar who during his stay in London with Vithalbhai Patel had editorially supervised *India* for a few months to bring it into closer alignment with Congress policy was asked to meet Dr. Vakil for the "final disposal" of the affairs.

However, certain consequential matters relating to, or arising from, the fateful resolution which the Thirty-sixth session of the Congress had passed were attended to. This included instruction to the Working Secretary to issue fortnightly reports of the Congress work in the country; to the Provincial Congress Committees to replace the previous volunteers' pledge with the one adopted at Ahmedabad and to get the new text translated into the language of the provinces for which they were responsible; and most important of all, for them to proceed without delay with the further enrolment of all available men and women within their respective provinces of the required age and qualifications." However, they were advised "that care should be taken to confine enlistment only to men and women of proved character" and "that pending enlistment of volunteers throughout the different provinces, offensive civil disobedience should not be taken up and in no case before the 15th day of January next [1922]." Offensive civil disobedience was defined by the Working Committee as:

...deliberate and wilful breach of the State-made non-moral laws, that is laws the breach of which does not involve moral turpitude, not for the purpose of securing the repeal of or relief from hardships arising from obedience to such laws but for the purpose of diminishing the authority of or overthrowing the State. For example, picketing of liquor shops or shops for the sale of intoxicating drugs, although prohibited, has not for its object the overthrow of the State and therefore, does not fall within this definition.



The Working Committee further wanted the Provincial Congress Committees "to send from time to time, and at least once a week, a report of progress made in enlistment to the Working Secretary of the All-India Congress Committee" and also publish the names of enlisted volunteers from time to time in the press.

The meetings of the Working Committee after the session concluded were part of the normal routine. However, a significant departure from the routine was the meetings which Gandhi had with several provincial delegations. "The delegates," Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya tells us, "were not willing to disperse soon after the conclusion of the sittings. Gandhi walked up to each camp and explained the technique of Civil Disobedience." Obviously, they were not very clear in their minds about certain details of the programme and what was expected of them and only the Mahatma could clarify the position for them. After all, he had been invested by the Congress with "the sole executive authority of the Congress" and "the full powers of the All-India Congress Committee including the power to convene a special session of the Congress or of the All-India Congress Committee or the Working Committee ... and also with the power to appoint a successor in emergency," although it must be noted that, with its instinctive, almost Anglo-Saxon, caution it took care to circumscribe the executive authority with which it was investing the Mahatma and any successor whom he was empowered to appoint in an emergency. In a revealing rider to the resolution the Congress had clearly stipulated:

...that nothing in this resolution shall be deemed to authorise Mahatma Gandhi or any of the aforesaid successors to conclude any terms of peace with the Government of India or the British Government without the previous sanction of the All-India Congress Committee to be finally ratified by the Congress specially convened for the purpose, and provided also that the first article of the Congress constitution shall in no case be altered by Mahatma Gandhi or his successors except with the leave of the Congress first obtained.

For his part the Mahatma seems also to have been anxious

to curb rather than fuel the enthusiasm of the delegates for plunging headlong into the civil disobedience movement on all fronts and without careful preparation. He apparently wanted the movement to develop gradually and step by step. This is clear from the instructions he issued to the delegates from Andhra. Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, already a member of the A.I.C.C. from Andhra, records : "In the Andhra camp, he took pains to point out how, in any area where a No-tax campaign was contemplated, volunteers must go about the villages and take the signatures of the ryots agreeing to the campaign. This was of course to be done in addition to the enforcement of the conditions of mass and individual Civil Disobedience."

This must have been because he was aware that the Andhra Congress had shown signs of straining at the leash as we learn from Dr. Sitaramayya who writes that the Executive Committee of the Andhra Pradesh Congress Committee "had passed a resolution a fortnight before the Congress, on 15-12-'21, at Guntur calling upon the Andhradesa to withhold the payment of taxes. This step was taken in advance of the Congress decision, but in anticipation of it." Indeed, despite his cautionary talk with the Andhra delegates, Guntur was to jump the guns and "declared a No-tax campaign outright on the 12th January, 1922." This, in turn, was to lead to a rather stern letter by Gandhi to the President of the A.P.C.C. and a back and forth "between Gandhi and friends in Guntur" followed. But while other districts in Andhra under instructions from Gandhi paid up the taxes, in Guntur the No-tax campaign was continued and "pressing requests for permission" from Congress workers in the District at last elicited from Gandhi a telegram saying:

If the conditions of mass Civil Disobedience are satisfied, and if you think that Guntur has reasonable chances of success, then all that I can say is I do not wish to stand in your way. God help you.

This conditional acceptance of a *fait accompli* was ambiguous enough, but, according to Dr. Sitaramayya, it was "interpreted into [sic] assent incorrectly." A committee was, however, set up "to tour the District and investigate how far the Delhi conditions were fulfilled and to report on the advisability of continuing

the campaign," which "took the form of withholding the payment of revenue taxes in the plains, and of grazing fees in the forest areas." The Government, for its part, was not at all so cautious in applying the instruments of repression and intimidation to dissuade people from joining the no-tax and non-cooperation campaign. "The Military," adds Dr. Sitaramayya, "quartered themselves in Guntur (town) and the Governor's cavalry (bodyguard) visited villages where the men were gathered outside the village and taxes were attempted to be collected, though in vain, under threat of distraint and arrest."

Among other provincial delegates whom Gandhi met were those from the United Provinces. All the top leaders were, of course, behind the prison bars, including Motilal and Jawaharlal. But the women had stepped into the breach and both Jawaharlal's mother, Swarup Rani, and wife, Kamala, had attended the Ahmedabad session. Indeed, they did not leave Ahmedabad till January 4, 1922, as we learn from Gandhi's letter to his son, Devadas, in which he wrote, rather proudly, "Today members of the Nehru family left for Lucknow, all of them in third class." In his interview with the U.P. delegates Gandhi said that it was not necessary for them to start civil disobedience "just yet." Instead, he wanted them to concentrate on enrolling volunteers. He also did not favour the idea of setting up of "a national *Kotwali*," literally police station, but meaning in the context a national headquarters. Perhaps it smacked of setting up a parallel administration to him and which probably seemed to him adventurist at that stage. But since the U.P. Congress leaders had begun work on setting up a national *Kotwali*, he thought it right that it should be continued.

His longest interview was, predictably enough, with the delegates from Bengal. As the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, which reported the "interview" on January 14, 1922, stated, Gandhi spent two hours with the Bengal camp. He told them at the outset that they could ask him anything they liked and they took him at his word. The questions ranged over practical and procedural matters as well as political and abstract issues. For instance, one of the interlocutors, Ananga Mohan Ghose, wanted to know whether "sacrifices alone" would suffice as the qualification for leadership or whether intelligence was also needed. To this the Mahatma's answer was that he could not

"possibly imagine" that a man capable of sacrifice and honesty would not also be "intelligent enough to lead."

Gandhi's own worry, however, was not about the lack of intelligence in Bengal. His worry was that there might not be enough charity of judgement in dealing with the opponents of the movement. He, therefore, spent some time stressing the need for tolerance of opposition. He said:

In Bengal today I know that there is a great deal of impatience and, therefore, intolerance, and let me also tell you, you won't, I am sure, misunderstand me when I tell you that of all the places throughout India, I have not seen so much bitterness amongst ourselves as I have seen in Bengal, and therefore, so much intolerance.

He cited the case of Madras where there were "two schools", moderate school of non-cooperators being led by Kasturi Ranga Iyengar and the more radical group being represented by Dr. T.S.S. Rajan. Yet, he pointed out, that the relations between the two were "sweet". That was not the case in Bengal. "I had occasion," he said, "to remark that in Barisal... We in our impatience have believed that we ourselves are paragons of perfection and that those who differ from us are not only not well-wishers of the country, but its enemies." He referred particularly to Surendranath Banerjea and said: "Have I not seen what is written in the papers about him and what I have heard in private conversation—we seem to think, that he is an enemy of the country." And he went on to warn them, "If you are to be true to your non-cooperation and non-violence, not to be so uncharitable and not to think so ill of our own countrymen." Why? Because, he added:

Non-cooperation is not a doctrine of despair... it is a doctrine of love... I...want you to stretch your charity to your own countrymen—whether they are Moderates, whether they are in Government employ, in the police or in the C.I.D.—whatever they are, I ask you to be charitable towards them.

In times to come he was to have other difficulties with Bengal

than just want of charity of judgement among the Bengali political elite, whether moderate or radical. Meanwhile he seemed to be well satisfied at the way things had gone at the Ahmedabad session of the Congress. He wrote in a report headed "The Congress and After" in *Young India* of January 5, 1922:

The Congress week was a week of joy and celebration. None thought that swaraj was not attained. Every one seemed to be conscious of the growing national strength. There was confidence and hope written in every face. The Reception Committee had provided for admitting one hundred thousand visitors to the Congress *pandal*. But the lowest calculation puts down the figure at two lacs. . . . And this phenomenal attendance would have been still larger if all kinds of false rumours had not been started to scare away people. The imprisonment of leaders and workers and their courage has filled the people with a new hope and a new joy. There was a feeling in the air that the people had found in suffering the surest remedy for the attainment of freedom and breaking down the mightiest force that might be pitted against it.

All the same, despite this singularly optimistic assessment of the mood of the people, Gandhi was still hesitant about giving his army of volunteers pledged to non-violence order to go over the top, so to speak. Some inhibition still seemed to be at work within him and he was not in a hurry to go over to the more intensive forms of civil disobedience. Part of the reason for this hesitation probably was that some of his moderate friends, like M.R. Jayakar, and even a Congressman like Madan Mohan Malaviya, who had been active before the Congress session to bring about a "Round Table Conference" of sorts at which a settlement could be reached between the Government and the Congress, were still persevering with their effort to avert a confrontation and were hopeful that a compromise formula could be worked out acceptable to both sides.

So hopeful, in fact, that they called a conference of leaders of all parties in Bombay on January 14 to hammer out proposals which could be presented from the Indian side to the Government as the basis for discussion at a Round Table Conference. The Congress did not participate in the conference, but the Mahatma

"expressed his readiness to attend the Conference" because, as he explained in an interview with a representative of the *Bombay Chronicle*, he wanted to see "if he could bring round his Moderate friends on the narrow issue...of freedom of speech and freedom of association...to see eye to eye with the Congress on that issue." At the same time he stated "that there was no budging from the position that had been taken up by the Congress regarding the Round Table Conference and the conditions that he had defined in the Congress Subjects Committee as precedent to any such conference must be satisfied by Government before the Congress could be expected to fall in with the idea."

The Conference was opened duly on January 14 by Madan Mohan Malaviya who had been the principal sponsor of the idea of a Round Table Conference and had been negotiating with the Viceroy. He asked Sir Sankaran Nair to take the chair who, in turn, called upon Jinnah who, despite his differences with Gandhi over the question of swaraj and Non-cooperation was continuing to function well within the national consensus, to place the draft proposals on behalf of the conveners before the Conference for discussion in which later S.R. Bomanji, J.A. Wadia, J.B. Petit, S. Srinivasa Iyengar, Sheshagiri Iyer, Satyamurti, H.N. Kunzru, and Gokaran Nath Misra were to take part.

But inevitably it was Gandhi's reaction to the draft proposals which was crucial. Sankaran Nair had asked him to open the discussion immediately after Jinnah had spoken. And there came the rub. Sankaran Nair had never seen eye to eye with the Mahatma and he seemed to be irritated with the argument which Gandhi developed. So irritated, in fact, that he was unwilling to continue to chair the Conference and, instead, M. Visvesvaraya, former Dewan of Mysore State, took over. Sankaran Nair was not content with retiring from the chair and the Conference; he wrote a letter to the *Times of India* in which he gave his own and rather slanted version of the reasons why, as he put it, he could not "associate with Mr. Gandhi and his followers in asking for a conference [that is, the Round Table Conference] or in any other respect" and he also differed from the All Party Conference "on these vital questions, on which the Conference agrees with Mr. Gandhi."

His version of what had led to his break with the All Party

Conference was questioned by other participants in the discussion, including Jayakar, Jinnah and K. Natarajan, Editor of the *Indian Social Reformer*. Sankaran Nair, in the mood he was at the time, seemed to find most of the demands by Gandhi unacceptable and unreasonable. But, in particular, he considered the Mahatma's support for the Khilafat cause and his insistence on the release of the Khilafat prisoners, among them the Ali Brothers, untenable and to which the British Government could not possibly agree. For a South Indian, he appeared to display a singular want of sympathy with his Muslim fellow countrymen in their tribulations and almost justified the Government repression against them on grounds which were both laboured and legalistic as is clear from his letter to the *Times of India*. After saying that "with reference to the Khilafat matter, Mr. Gandhi said that the French must leave Syria—of course an impossible condition" and adding that "they [meaning the Khilafat leaders] want England to leave Egypt," he went on:

As regards Messrs Mahomed Ali and Shaukat Ali and others in that category the Government's position is stronger. It is within the knowledge of Mr. Gandhi and many of us that they do not accept the principle of non-violent agitation. In view of the promise of Mr. Gandhi that he would obtain swaraj within a year if his method of non-violent agitation is followed, they did not press for violence. That year has elapsed, and the Mussulmans feel that the pact with Mr. Gandhi is over.... The Mussulmans are not under the restraint of the self-imposed obligations of Mr. Gandhi... they will not hesitate to resort to violence not only against Government but also against others who may not join them in their agitation. Recent occurrences also support this.

That was obviously what was exercising Sankaran Nair. A native of Malabar, he had been upset by the Moplah rebellion and the violence associated with it. But to infer from this that the Ali Brothers immediately on their release would incite violent agitation all along the line as he did in order to justify their continued incarceration was irrational and absurd. Even more absurd was Sankaran Nair's "additional reason" for not supporting Gandhi's demand for unconditional release of the Khilafat

and other prisoners. This was his contention that "Mr. Gandhi and his friends and the accused themselves welcome the arrest and convictions." At all events, Gandhi could not possibly have abandoned his support for the Khilafat cause nor left the Ali Brothers in the lurch in prison even though as he told the all party conclave, they and other prisoners had never complained and borne the suffering "voluntarily and cheerfully" and even profited by it, like Maulana Shaukat Ali "who had lost 30 lbs in weight during his incarceration" as, indeed, "he had wanted to...."

Such a thing would have been impolitic in the extreme. For the Government, which had been straining every nerve to break the Congress-Muslim League compact, would have turned round and spread stories of the Congress—and Hindu—perfidy. Quite apart from being impolitic, it would have been most dishonourable to forget the Khilafat prisoners and to agree to participate in a Round Table Conference with the Government from which the Ali Brothers were excluded. Gandhi in his political career was to make many mistakes, some of them of "Himalayan" proportions as he himself admitted, but even his most severe critics would find it hard to identify anything in his public or private conduct at any time which could be considered dishonourable.

He was, understandably, pained by Sankaran Nair's distorted version of what he had said at the conference and especially his wholly unwarranted attack on the Ali Brothers. In an interview to the *Bombay Chronicle* of January 18, he said: "I have read Sir Sankaran Nair's letter to *The Times of India* with deep pain. It bears in itself traces of hurried draftsmanship and anger. I propose, therefore, not to answer seriatim the many misrepresentations it contains, but to give only broad facts."

This he did at some length, starting with the bold and justified claim that between him and the Conference "there was perfect harmony in spite of differences of opinion." He said that he had yielded on "matters that were not of vital importance" without hesitation. If he was adamant on asking the Government to be penitent, it was "not in order to humiliate it, but in order to set it right with the people." For, he added:

...there will, certainly, be no peace in the land and no settlement until the Government acknowledges its mistakes and



retraces its steps. The resolutions [of the All Party Conference, that is] are calculated to enable the Government to do so gracefully. Nobody questions the right of the Government to put down violence. . . . I could conceive even the existence of justifiable martial law, when it is introduced to protect people and has the endorsement of public opinion. The present proceedings of the Government, which bear all the characteristics of martial law, without the odium of the name, are intended neither to protect the people, nor have any public backing whatsoever. They are intended to consolidate the power of an utterly irresponsible bureaucracy.

This was broadly true. He was quite candid about his support for the Khilafat demands. Yes, he said, these included the "evacuation of Syria by the French." But Sankaran Nair had clearly put a wrong construction on what he wanted the British Government to do. "I declared in the clearest possible language," he said, "that I would be satisfied if Great Britain sincerely supported the Mussulman claim regarding Syria. I said that the Mussulmans, and I, in common with them, thoroughly distrusted Great Britain's intentions regarding the aspiration of Turkish Nationalists and the just claims of Indian Mussulmans. It is open in a round table conference to the Government to demonstrate to the satisfaction of non-cooperators that Great Britain is ready to do all in her power to satisfy the Mussulman claim." By a strange historical irony, almost a quarter of a century later, after the hecatombs of the Second World War, the British themselves were to be instrumental in ensuring the unceremonious expulsion of the French from the Levant and the Fertile Crescent, including Syria.

On the question of Egypt, again, he corrected Sankaran Nair's misrepresentation and in so doing laid down the basic line of the Indian National Congress—and India—regarding Egypt and the West Asian region generally:

Sir Sankaran Nair hardly does justice to himself, or to me, when he reports me as having said that I wanted the evacuation of Egypt, as a term of peace. In answer to an ejaculation about Egypt I remarked that although the Khilafat demand did not, and would not include the evacuation of Egypt, when

India had full swaraj she could certainly not permit a single Indian soldier to leave India in order to coerce the brave Egyptians into submission to a foreign yoke.

In others words, he was dissociating India categorically and wholly from imperialist policies of Britain in the Near and Middle East. He was particularly sharp with Sankaran Nair on the latter's "attack upon the Ali Brothers" which, he said, was "hardly worthy of him. The Ali Brothers do believe in the possibility and necessity of the use of violence for the vindication of religious or national rights. But, I know that they are absolutely at one with the Congress programme and that they are more than ever convinced that as India is circumstanced, non-violence is the only remedy open to her for the attainment of her freedom." He concluded his interview by stressing what ought to have been self-evident to Sankaran Nair:

It surprises me to notice that Sir Sankaran Nair imagines that a round table conference is possible without the presence of the Ali Brothers. That the Government might not see its way to release such formidable opponents as the Ali Brothers I can well understand, and they will release them only if Government desires to placate Indian opinion and substitute the force of public opinion for the force of arms.

The point was well made, though it is curious that he did not suggest the possibility that the motive underlying the Government's discriminatory treatment of the Ali Brothers and the Khilafat prisoners and unwillingness to release them could have been to drive a wedge between the Congress and the Khilafat movement—and Hindus and Muslims generally. It is hard to believe that he was not aware of this possibility. But it could be that with his usual generosity of the spirit he did not wish to impute any unworthy motives to his opponent, at least not unless he had foolproof evidence of it—and perhaps not even then.

Gandhi in his report in *Young India* of January 19 entitled "The Malaviya Conference" (that is how he designated the All Party Conference) wrote:

The Conference was both a success and a failure. It was a

success in that it showed an earnest desire on the part of those who attended to secure a peaceful solution of the present trouble, and in that it brought under one roof people possessing divergent views. It was a failure in that, though certain resolutions have been adopted, the Conference did not leave on my mind the impression that those who assembled together as a whole realised the gravity of the real issue. The mind of the Conference seemed to be centred more on a round table conference than upon asserting the popular right of free speech, free association and free Press which are more than a round table conference. I had expected on the part of the Independents to declare their firm attitude that no matter how much they might differ regarding the method on non-cooperation, the freedom of the people was a common heritage and that the assertion of that right was three-fourths of swaraj; that, therefore, they would defend that right even with civil disobedience, if need be.

This was a rather naive expectation. He was right, of course, in describing the Malaviya Conference as both a success and a failure. And this was true in another and less amiable sense, too, than the one in which he understood success and failure. It was a success for the Government and a failure for the Congress: success for the Government because it gave it more time to take up its dispositions to meet the challenge of the civil disobedience movement and prepare its plans for disrupting and sidetracking it; and a failure for the Congress because at and after Ahmedabad it was fully keyed up for the launching of a new phase of civil disobedience movement and postponement of the "D-Day", so to speak, could not but build up nervous tension and a sense of impatience among its ranks carrying within it the seeds of indiscipline.

In his piece in *Young India* he explained that his position was that he would "attend any conference as an individual, without any condition," adding that he agreed, too, "to advise the Working Committee to postpone general mass civil disobedience contemplated by the Congress to the 31st instant [January, 1922] in order to enable the Committee and the Conference to enter into negotiations with the Government." He felt this was essential to show their bona fides because they, the Congress that is,

"could not take up new offensives whilst negotiations for a conference were being conducted by responsible men." Accordingly, when the Working Committee met in Bombay on January 17, it passed a resolution—number four on the agenda among the eighteen, most of them concerned with organisational and financial matters—which deferred "the offensive civil disobedience...till the 31st day of January 1922 or pending the result of the negotiations undertaken by the Committee of the Malaviya Conference for a Round Table Conference whichever may be the first date."

The negotiations of the Committee of the Malaviya Conference with the Government were infructuous. As Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya puts it, "The attempts of well-meaning intermediaries failed. The Viceroy summarily rejected the terms offered by the Conference." He makes the point that Reading had held out the bait of a Round Table Conference because the "Government were anxious to see that the sojourn of the Prince [of Wales] was not disturbed by the hostile demonstration of Non-cooperators." There is something in this argument, though the Prince of Wales' visit was by no means over by the end of January and he was due to arrive in Delhi in the middle of February.

The reasons for dangling this particular bait were, perhaps, more subtle and complex. One of these almost certainly was to gain time in which differences on the Indian side would grow—as, indeed, they did. But there were divided counsels on the Government side, too; and, for once, the roles were reversed and the Man on the Spot, Reading, was dragging his feet while being pushed by the British Government, including Montagu who by the end of 1921 was almost on the way out, to act firmly against the Congress, including Gandhi, and show India who was the master.

However that may be, January 31, the deadline for the expiry of the period set by the Working Committee for launching the "offensive," came without any further concessions by the Government. The country's attention, says Dr. Sitaramayya, "was really rivetted on the campaign of no-tax, which Gandhi had decided to organize in the Bardoli Taluka in Gujarat." Gandhi had chosen Bardoli for this honour because, Dr. Sitaramayya

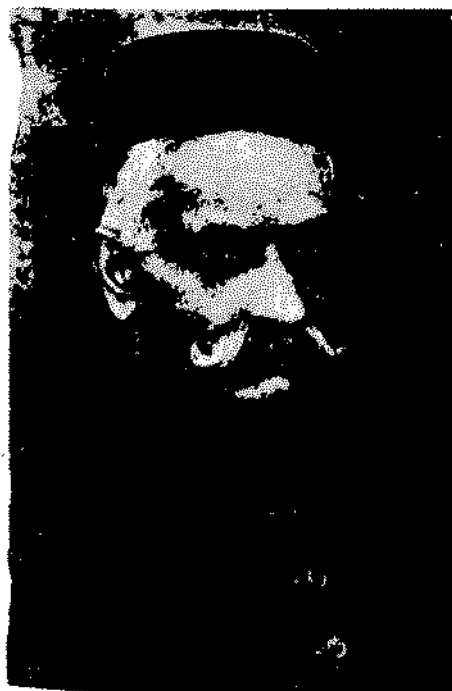
rightly observes :

He was anxious to make the first experiment in mass Civil Disobedience under his own direct supervision. In that Taluka there were many South-Africa returned emigrants who were familiar with the ways of Gandhi, and it was Gandhi's earnest wish that the rest of India should watch his experiment and infuse strength and spirit into him. He was anxious that nothing should be done to distract or disturb his attention or endeavours....

This certainly explains the rather curious resolution—number eleven on the agenda (there were altogether only twelve resolutions)—which the Working Committee passed when it met at Surat on January 31, 1922. It read:

The Working Committee having considered the resolution of the Bardoli Taluqa Conference regarding mass civil disobedience desires to congratulate the people of that taluqa upon their self-sacrificing resolve to offer mass civil disobedience and wishes them every success in their patriotic effort. The Working Committee advises all other parts of India to co-operate with the people of Bardoli Taluqa by refraining from mass or individual civil disobedience of an aggressive character except upon the express consent of Mahatma Gandhi previously obtained. Provided that, in no case shall there be any relaxation in the conditions laid down therefore either by the All India Congress Committee at Delhi or by the Congress at Ahmedabad. Provided further, that this resolution shall in no way be interpreted so as to interfere with the present defensive civil disobedience going on in the country whether in respect of notifications under the Criminal Law Amendment Act, or orders under the ordinary law of the country restricting the liberty of the citizens.

The Working Committee advises the people throughout the provinces to pay up the tax due by them to the Government whether directly or indirectly through Zemindars or Taluqdars except in such cases of direct payment to the Government where previous consent has been obtained from Mahatma Gandhi for suspension of payment preparatory to mass civil disobedience.



Motilal Nehru, President, Amritsar Congress session, 1919



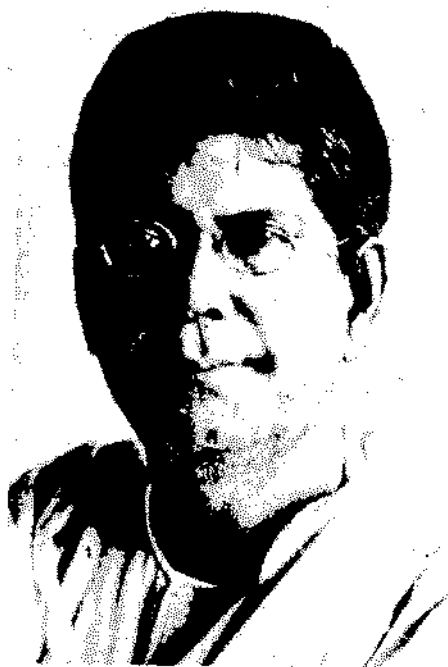
Lala Lajpat Rai, President, Calcutta Special Congress session, September 1920



V. V. Viharaghavachariar, President, Nagpur Congress session, December 1920



Hakim Ajmal Khan, President, Ahmedabad Congress session, 1921



C.R. Das, President, Gaya Congress  
session, 1922



Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, President, De  
Special Congress session, 1923



Maulana Mohamed Ali, President,  
Kakinada Congress session, 1923



Jallianwala Bagh, scene of massacre by Dyer, 13 April 1919



The lane in Amritsar where the residents were made to crawl in April 1919 during the Satyagraha against the Rowlatt Act





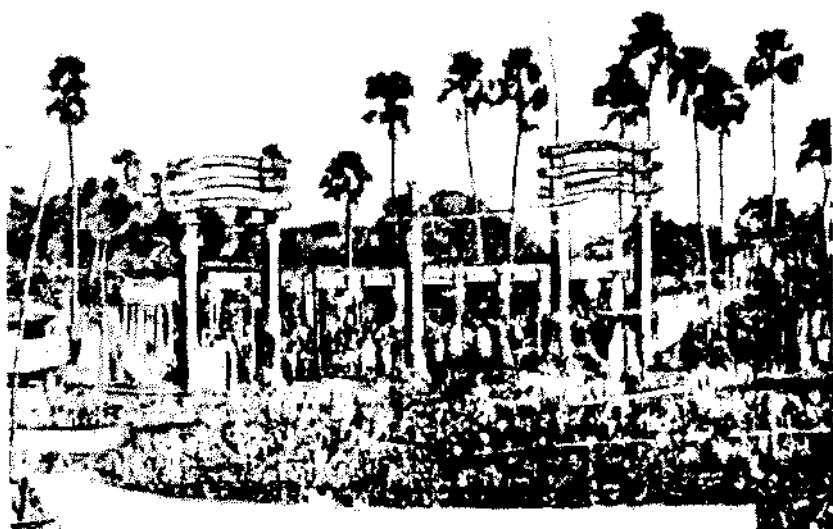
Amritsar Congress in session, 1919



Ahmedabad Congress in session, 1921



Mahatma Gandhi moving the main resolution  
at the Ahmedabad Congress session, 1921



Gaya Congress in session, 1922



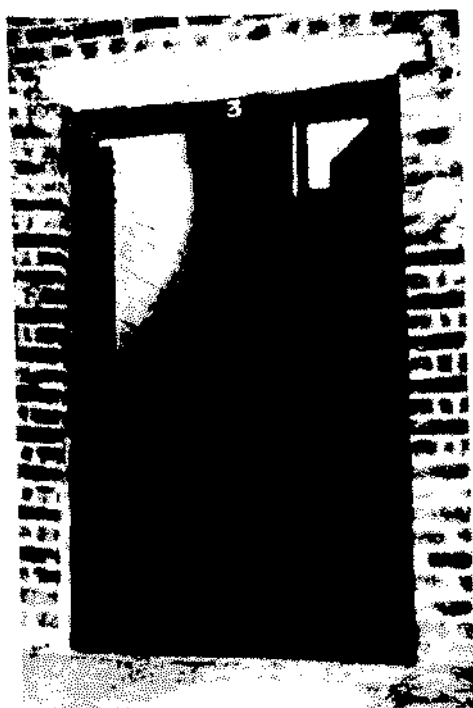
Mahatma Gandhi addressing a Khilafat meeting



A procession during the Non-cooperation movement



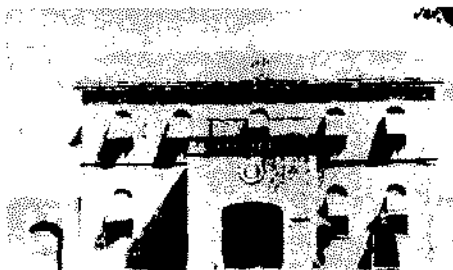
Trial of Gandhi—An Artist's Impression, 1922



The cell in Sabarmati prison where Gandhiji was kept as an under-trial in 1922



Mahatma Gandhi



Yeravda Jail where Gandhi served his imprisonment, 1922–24



Gandhiji at the reception given to Tagore at Vanita Vishram at Ahmedabad, April 1920



‘The De-Valera of India’: A prophet at the Spinning Wheel, 1921

One says "curious" because normally one would have expected the no-cooperators to engage the Government on a countrywide scale, or at least in a number of carefully selected areas, to maximize the pressure upon it and to make it difficult for it to cope with the movement of civil disobedience. But Gandhi seemed deliberately to make the task of the Government easier by ordering the suspension of mass or individual civil disobedience of an aggressive character, like non-payment of taxes throughout the country, thus making the success or failure of the movement hinge entirely on the outcome of the Bardoli campaign. It was almost as if he was adopting the strategy of the old Indian epics where the outcome of struggle is ultimately decided, not by clash of arms between massed forces on each side, but individual combats between leading protagonists of the parties in conflict.

However that may be, the reason given by Dr. Sitaramayya, that Gandhi was anxious for the crucial Bardoli campaign to be conducted under his own supervision, while certainly operative in his mind does not by itself suffice to explain his decision which was embodied in the Working Committee resolution. He was undoubtedly present on January 29 at Bardoli where he addressed the Bardoli Taluka Conference and moved the resolution on civil disobedience the text of which was published in *Navajivan* of February 2. But he was not there on the crucial day, January 31. On that day he was at Surat where he attended the Working Committee meeting which pronounced its benediction on the decision of Bardoli to take the plunge. He described the decision not only as "momentous", but "final and irrevocable." But was it as "final and irrevocable" as he had made it out to be?

There is some reason to doubt this. He wrote a piece on January 30 after attending the Bardoli Taluka Conference which was published in *Young India* on February 2. It was written in a congratulatory vein. He complimented the Government for acting "in a most exemplary manner" by not prohibiting the Bardoli Conference the previous day though they could have done it. He also complimented the people of Bardoli for taking a decision in full awareness of what the decision might entail for them in terms of sacrifice and suffering—and even more, giving up of their old habits and prejudices. "Both sides," he wrote, "have up to the time of writing behaved in a manner

worthy of chivalrous warriors of old. In this battle of peace, it ought not to be otherwise."

But then came the revealing concluding paragraph which indicated that the green signal to the No-tax campaign in Bardoli was not yet given. The Government was to be given yet one more opportunity to settle the matter without a non-violent challenge. "The Viceroy," he said, "has still choice and will have yet another choice given to him. No charge of hurry, want of preparation or thought, no charge of discourtesy will it be possible to bring against the people of Bardoli." Therefore, he added:

Lead kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom,  
Lead Thou me on;  
The night is dark, and I am far from home;  
Lead Thou me on.

The one more chance that he was prepared to give Reading was spelt out in a letter he wrote to him. It was dated February 1, but from Gandhi's letter to Jayakar we know that it was written the very night [apparently Tuesday] of January 31 on which the Working Committee passed its resolution seemingly giving all clear signal to Bardoli. He told Jayakar that he would "delay publication" [of the letter] till February 4—the fatal day, as it was to turn out. "That," he wrote to Jayakar, "meets your requirement also. I do not think I could do more. . . . It gives the Viceroy more than he could possibly require. He need not call a round table conference. The more I think of it, the more clear it is to me that he cannot call the conference but he can easily adopt my suggestion, if he wishes so."

The letter, dated February 1, 1922, copies of which he had sent to Jayakar and Madan Mohan Malaviya who, with Jinnah, were the principal go-betweens working to bring about a reconciliation between the Congress and the Government, was a long one—more than a thousand words. Gandhi stated at the very outset that as he was perhaps "chiefly responsible for Bardoli's decision [to embark on a non-payment of tax campaign]" he owed it to "your Excellency and the public to explain the situation" under which the decision had been taken. He recalled that it was as early as November 1921 that the All-India Congress Committee at Delhi had passed a resolution laying

down the conditions under which mass civil disobedience was to be launched—conditions which Bardoli had fulfilled; and it was only because of the "regrettable rioting on the 17th November last in Bombay," that the step contemplated by Bardoli was postponed. Meanwhile, the letter went on to say, "repression of a virulent type has taken place with the concurrence of the Government of India in Bengal, Assam, the United Provinces, the Punjab, the Province of Delhi and, in a way, in Bihar and Orissa and elsewhere".

The Viceroy had objected to the use of the word "repression" to describe what the authorities had been doing. But Gandhi maintained that "action taken which is in excess of the requirements of a situation" amply qualified to be judged as repression. "This official lawlessness," he argued, "cannot be described by any other term but lawless repression. Intimidation by non-cooperators or their sympathizers to a certain extent in connection with hartals and picketing may be admitted but in no case can it be held to justify the wholesale suppression of peaceful volunteering or equally peaceful public meetings under a distorted use of an extraordinary law...." He, therefore, felt that the "immediate task before the country...is to rescue from paralysis freedom of speech, freedom of association and freedom of the Press."

He said that though "non-cooperators were unwilling to have anything to do with the Malaviya Conference," he was anxious to avoid all avoidable suffering. Consequently, he "had no hesitation in advising the Working Committee of the Congress to accept the recommendations of that Conference." But, he added, "You have summarily rejected the proposal" although in his (Gandhi's opinion), the terms were quite in keeping with "your own requirements" as indicated "through your Calcutta speech." "In the circumstances," Gandhi wrote more in sorrow than in anger, "there is nothing before the country but to adopt some non-violent method for the enforcement of its demands including the elementary rights of free speech, free association and free Press ... this lawless repression (in a way unparalleled in the history of this unfortunate country) has made the immediate adoption of mass civil disobedience an imperative duty." Even so the Working Committee of the Congress, he added, "has restricted it to only certain areas"



to be selected by him from time to time and at present "confined only to Bardoli."

What is more, he continued, before even the people of Bardoli "commence mass civil disobedience," he was giving the Viceroy yet one more chance to change course and "set free all the non-co-operating prisoners who are convicted or under trial for non-violent activities and to declare in clear terms a policy of non-interference with all non-violent activities in the country whether they be regarding the redress of the Khilafat or the Punjab wrongs or swaraj or any other purpose and even though they fall under the repressive sections of the Penal Code or the Criminal Procedure Code or other repressive laws subject always to the condition of non-violence." If a declaration to this effect was forthcoming from the Government "within seven days of the date of publication of this manifesto [meaning, presumably, his letter]" he (Gandhi) was "prepared to advise postponement of civil disobedience of an aggressive character, till the imprisoned workers have, after their discharge, reviewed the whole situation and considered the position *de novo*."

The letter was not exactly a model of Gandhian draftsmanship, normally economical and carefully precise in use of words. It was not only long but somewhat long-winded; its construction was hardly logical; and its reasoning gave many a hostages to Gandhi's critics. Not least, the Viceroy and his entourage in Delhi. They lost no time in replying to Gandhi, not in a letter written directly to him, but in the form of a "communique" purporting to refute the charges made in his letter of February 1. The "communique" was as long—indeed longer—than the letter. Within its own terms, it was reasonably well-constructed, even logical, though it savoured of a kind of narrow-minded legalism rather than anything remotely connecting with statesmanship or even sensible statecraft.

The communique began by charging Gandhi with perpetrating "a series of misstatements" in his "Manifesto issued... on the 4th February" in order to justify "his determination to resort to mass civil disobedience" and said that the Government of India could not "allow them to pass unchallenged." It then set out to deal with them in detail. To begin with—or, as it put it in a rather *recherche* Latin tag, *in limine*—it pointed out that

the decision "to adopt a programme of civil disobedience" was taken "on the 4th November before the recent notifications relating either to the Seditious Meetings Act or the Criminal Law Amendment Act to which Mr. Gandhi unmistakably refers, were issued." What is more, "since the inauguration of the non-cooperation movement the Government of India... have restricted their actions in relation thereto to such measures as were necessary for the maintenance of law and order and the preservation of public tranquillity." So much so that "no steps, save in Delhi last year, were taken against the Volunteer Associations" up to November when "the Government were confronted with a new and dangerous situation." And it invoked the case of Bombay troubles which Gandhi himself had mentioned in his letter and which the communique claimed led to 53 persons losing their lives and "approximately 400" being injured.

As regards the Ali Brothers, it rubbed it in that at the time of their "apology" the communique had explicitly stressed that although the Government were refraining "from instituting criminal proceedings" against them, "it must not be inferred that promoting disaffection of a less violent character is not an offence against the law" and that they must make it "plain that they will enforce the law relating to offences against the State as and when they may think fit against any persons who have committed breaches of it"—a point which lent substance to Motilal Nehru's critique of both Gandhi and the Ali Brothers at the time, that is at the end of May 1921, when Gandhi had met Reading.

The communique further challenged Gandhi's contention that while the Congress had accepted the terms of the proposal formulated by the Conference at Bombay, the Viceroy had summarily rejected it even though these terms were in conformity with the latter's speech at Calcutta. This, it said, was far from the case:

His Excellency in that speech insisted on the imperative necessity as a fundamental condition precedent to the discussion of any question by a conference, of the discontinuance of the unlawful activities of the non-cooperation party.

No assurance on this point was, however, contained in the proposals advanced by the Conference....Further Mr. Gandhi also made it apparent that the proposed Round Table Conference would be called merely to register his decrees. It is idle to suggest that terms of this character fulfilled in any way the essentials laid down by his Excellency or can reasonably be described as having been made in response to the sentiments expressed by him.

Finally, after declaring the Government's confidence "that all right thinking citizens will recognize that this manifesto constitutes no response whatever to the speech of His Excellency at Calcutta and the demands made are such as no Government could discuss much less accept," it sounded a lapidary warning:

The issue is no longer between this or that programme of political advance but between lawlessness with all its dangerous consequences on the one hand, and on the other, the maintenance of those principles which lie at the root of all civilized governments. Mass civil disobedience is fraught with such dangers to the State that it must be met with sternness and severity. The Government entertain no doubt that in any measures which they have to take for its suppression they can count on the support and assistance of all law-abiding and loyal citizens of His Majesty.

This was a tall claim. It could have had some substance if the Government of India over which Reading presided had any representative character. But that, if one may quote a phrase in the communique, was "far from being the case." Nevertheless, it has to be admitted, that the arguments developed in it had a certain air of plausibility. That, judged by strictly legalistic criteria, could not have been said about Gandhi's letter, or "manifesto" as the Government's communique described it or "ultimatum" as it was being referred to, rather imprudently in Gandhi's entourage at Bardoli, although the Mahatma (as Krishandas records in his *Seven Months With Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. II*) seems to have considered the draft "faultless" and said that it had come to him "in this form automatically."

At all events it should have been clear that there was very

little meeting ground between the Government and Gandhi, a situation which was to repeat itself time and again in the years to come and at critical moments in the history of Indo-British political litigation and conflict. Virtually every attempt to establish a dialogue between the representatives of the imperial authority and the Congress—which almost to the end, in effect, meant Gandhi—tended to degenerate into a dialogue of the deaf. In the nature of things, this could not but accentuate the impasse. But Gandhi was never quite prepared to admit even to himself that his moral suasions were largely wasted on the British Government and its agency in India. That is why even in face of the categorical rejection of the argument he had developed in his “manifesto”—his letter to the Viceroy—by the Government of India, as soon as he read its “communique,” he began to draft a reply or “rejoinder.”

Apparently, the Government had released the communique to the Press and he first read it in the papers on the morning of February 7 at Bardoli where he was at the time. Its firm negative tone, it seems, surprised everyone around him, though it is hard to see why anybody was surprised. As Krishnadas in his *Seven Months with Mahatma Gandhi (Vol. II)* puts it: “Mahatmajji immediately began to dictate the rejoinder to the Government which was wired to the Associated Press at Delhi. One copy was sent to the *Bombay Chronicle* for publication and Mr. Bomanji who left for Bombay... took another copy with him.”

The dictation must have taken an hour or more. For the rejoinder to the Government’s communique was much longer than his original letter to Reading. Fortunately, he had the services of a qualified steno-typist available to him. For his friend Bomanji had three days earlier not only placed a car at the Mahatma’s disposal but also provided a stenographer for his use—a man named Golikere. This made it easier for him to cope with his vast amount of daily correspondence, journalistic writings and political and other work.

He began his reply by saying that he was “totally unprepared for such an evasion of the realities of the case as the reply [the Government’s communique] betrays.” He went on to underline how accommodating he had been by indefinitely postponing “the contemplated mass civil disobedience ... on

account of the regrettable events of the 17th November in Bombay." But there was no let up in repression on the Government's part. He listed a number of repressive measures which it had taken and named several eminent non-cooperators—C.R. Das, Motilal Nehru, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, and Lajpat Rai—who were arrested at a time when the mass civil disobedience was in abeyance. He justified his charge that the Government had embarked "on a policy of lawless repression" by citing nine items as sample of many "infallible proofs" of "official lawlessness and barbarism" and claimed that he had mentioned "not even a tithe of what is happening all over the country...." He charitably added, "For the sake of dignity of human nature I trust that Lord Reading and his draughtsmen do not know the facts that I have adduced or, being carried away by their belief in the infallibility of their employees, refuse to believe in the statements which the public regard as God's truth."

He seemed to be particularly pained at the assertion that he wanted the Round Table Conference just to rubber stamp his demands. "The Government communique," he complained, "does me a cruel wrong by imputing to me a desire that the proposed Round Table Conference should be called 'merely to register' my 'decrees'." He had only stated the Congress demands as he was duty bound to do. Neither he nor any Congressman was "impervious to reason and argument." "It is open to anybody to convince me," he observed, "that the demands of the Congress regarding the Khilafat, the Punjab and swaraj are wrong or unreasonable, and I would certainly retrace my steps and so far as I am concerned rectify the wrong." In fact, he pointed out, in his "Manifesto" he had not "asked for a round table conference at all." What he regarded as the first priority "for the people" was "to secure a reversal of this mad repression and then to concentrate upon more complete organization and more construction...."

He denied that the alternative before the people was, as the communique had it, "between lawlessness with the disastrous consequences on the one hand and on the other the maintenance of those principles which lie at the root of all civil-

ized Governments". For him, he concluded:

The choice before the people is between mass civil disobedience with all its undoubted dangers and lawless repression of lawful activities of the people. I hold that it is impossible for any body of self-respecting men, for fear of unknown dangers, to sit still and do nothing effective whilst looting of property and assaulting of innocent men are going on all over the country in the name of law and order.

However, this rather involved if not laboured exercise in vindication of the stand which Gandhi and the Congress had been compelled to take has in retrospect interest only as a wistful historical curiosity. And not only in retrospect. For the fact is that the Mahatma's rejoinder to the communique of the Government, painstakingly marshalling the reasons why he believed that he had no other option but to launch a mass civil disobedience movement though, admittedly, confined in the first instance to Bardoli and under his own direction, had become out of date within twenty-four hours of its drafting. It was, of course, widely carried by the national Press the next day and even the Anglo-Indian Press published extensive extracts from it. But before the printer's ink was quite dry on these reports, it had been bypassed by events, or rather, one particular incident which happened in a remote minor township, in fact more a large village than a township though having the dubious honour of being blessed with a local police station or *thana*, in Gorakhpur district of the U.P., namely Chauri Chaura.

## CHAPTER XI

### QUESTION-MARKS OVER CHAURI CHAURA—AND AFTER

Strange to relate that Gandhi almost missed the news of the Chauri Chaura incident when it first broke upon his sight. Strange, because it was to lead to one of the most controversial political decisions he took in his life; one, indeed, which was not only to throw the whole Congress movement into great confusion and disarray that, for quite a while, immobilized, if not paralysed, it, but had the most deleterious effect on Indian polity from which it took years to recover—and even then but partially. Certainly, it was to make him the target of bitter criticism from all sides—left, right and centre—and not only from those who had little use for his style of political leadership and his faith in satyagraha as a mode of political struggle, but even many of those in the Congress who were devoted to him and had thrown themselves heart and soul into the civil disobedience campaign and had actually been jailed for it.

We have the testimony of someone who was with him at Bardoli on that fateful day—February 8, 1922. Fateful because it was only 72 hours away from the day which he had set as the deadline for giving the go ahead to the people of Bardoli to start their “aggressive” civil disobedience if no satisfactory

declaration was forthcoming from the Viceroy along the lines which he had suggested in his letter to Reading written on February 1 with the drafting of which he seemed rather pleased with himself as we learn from Krishnadas' *Seven Months With Mahatma Gandhi*. The previous day he "had hurled defiance at the Government in his rejoinder to Lord Reading's communique," writes Krishnadas and adds:

When the newspapers of the day arrived at about 10 in the morning, the report about the gruesome incident at Chauri Chaura at first escaped Mahatmaji's notice. But subsequently, perhaps in the course of a conversation with Mr. V.J. Patel, his attention was drawn to it. Then, he sent for the papers again, and read the brief telegraphic report of an excited mob attacking the police station at Chauri Chaura, setting fire to it, and burning to death a body of about twenty-one policemen. Mahatmaji was very much agitated when he read the news....

One can well understand Gandhi's distress at the news. Equally, it is not at all surprising why he did not notice it when he first read the newspapers that morning. Those were the days before banner headlines became fashionable. What is more, at least in so far as the English language newspapers were concerned, whether owned and edited by Indians or controlled and edited by the British and serving largely as propaganda and publicity arm of the Raj. They were not generally in the habit of publishing the news of the day on their front page which, for the most part, carried a wide range of diverting announcements and advertisements. But the interesting, perhaps the significant, thing about the Chauri Chaura happening was that it was not considered sufficiently important by the news editors to merit being carried as the lead story of the day on one of the main news pages. This can be judged from the treatment which it received in the *Bombay Chronicle* which was probably among the Bombay newspapers which reached Gandhi at Bardoli on the morning of February 8, since there was no air mail delivery and papers from Lucknow and Allahabad could not have reached him until a day or two later. It relegated the news of the incident to page 10—and that, too, not to the top of the page,



but way down in column three, under the relatively unexciting headline: "Chauri Chaura Affair" which gave but a dim idea of the seriousness of what had happened and was to cast its long shadow on the course of Indian politics in the months and years ahead.

The story was about a quarter of a column in length. It was datelined Lucknow, February 7, and bylined Associated Press—the Indian filial of Reuter which enjoyed virtual monopoly in the field of news gathering and news-dissemination within India. The report quoted verbatim a press communique issued by the authorities which, in turn, was based on a telegram sent by the Commissioner of Gorakhpur, though the despatch did not indicate when exactly he had sent his telegram. It referred at the start to some trouble that had erupted on the "previous Wednesday," that is February 1, when some persons had tried to picket "a bazar" where drugs and liquor—and fish—were sold. But on that occasion the police had intervened successfully and prevented any interference with the sale of narcotics and liquor.

The next "bazar day" apparently, was three days later—on Saturday, February 4. This time "the Volunteers"—and throughout the first report, and subsequent despatches there was emphasis on the term "Volunteers" for a reason which is not hard to understand—made a more determined attempt to stop the sale of drugs and liquor the licence for which was held by a "loyal zamindar". The Commissioner estimated the strength of the volunteers and their supporters at between fifteen hundred to two thousand. Later estimates, and especially the testimony furnished by the one surviving constable, Sadiq Ahmed, put the figure much higher—at three to four thousand. However, the figure given in the Commissioner's telegram seems nearer the truth. His telegram went on to say:

The volunteers proceeded to the bazar through the police station grounds. They attacked the police station with *kunkars* [stones] and bricks. Eventually the police fired in the air [The surviving policeman said they were ordered to fire a "blank volley", which is scarcely credible in the context]. The attack was renewed with greater forces. The mob rushed the police and they fled, some into the fields

and some into the buildings. A few police must have fired on the mob . . . but whether it was before the rush or not I cannot say. Buildings were set on fire . . .

However, the story widely circulated at the time—and believed even in the Congress circles, including Dr. Sitaramayya—that the policemen were burnt alive was an exaggerated embroidery by overheated imagination of those who visited the scene several days after the tragedy. The Commissioner in his telegram did not suggest any such thing though the details he gave were ghastly enough. He spoke of the police and their retinue being "brutally beaten to death and then burnt," and put the number of dead at 21, police personnel and chowkidars, and "a little boy servant of the Sub-Inspector" who was also murdered. Only one police constable and chowkidar escaped, he claimed, and added:

Resistance to the mob, I fear was badly organised. Then the mob tore up two rails on the line, cut telegraph wires and scattered . . . I have just returned from Chauri Chaura. It is impossible to give more details at present. The military has arrived and the police force of the district has been strengthened. There is nervousness in other thanas [police stations] and requests for reinforcements have been received. Investigation is proceeding.

During the next few days further details of what had happened at Chauri Chaura on the afternoon of February 4 were published by the newspapers, including a two-column report in the *Pioneer* of the account given by the sole surviving policeman. There were also statements issued by several local leaders—among them a barrister Ajudhya Das, and Syed Mohammed Subhan Ullah, President of the District Congress Committee, not to mention Devadas Gandhi, the Mahatma's son who was at the time at Allahabad and had been helping Mahadev Desai in the task of bringing out a manuscript or written edition of Motilal Nehru's paper, *Independent*, and trying to carry it on after Mahadev's arrest and conviction on Christmas Eve, 1921, under the Criminal Law Amendment Act against which the Congress had been agitating. They had visited Chauri Chaura but nearly a week after the

event and had been appalled beyond words by the tales of horror they had heard and implicitly believed without much verification.

However, the curious—and in some sense intriguing and even puzzling thing—about what the *Pioneer*, the mouthpiece of Anglo-India and bureaucracy, blandly headlined as “Chauri Chaura riots” in its first brief report which appeared on page seven on February 8, was the slowness with which the news of the terrible incident reached the public at large. Admittedly, Chauri Chaura was a small *Kashah* and *thana*, but it was not the back of the beyond or even a frightfully isolated part of the United Provinces. It was connected by railway with the rest of India. The killings and arson had taken place early in the afternoon on Saturday, February 4. It seems that before the crowd made its murderous assault on the police a sub-inspector had attempted to wire a message of alarm to the headquarters; that, indeed, part of the message had actually been transmitted when, for some inexplicable reason, he decided to cancel it. It may have been because of that throttled message that the military and police reinforcements which the Commissioner mentions in his telegram, had arrived at Chauri Chaura. It is not quite clear when the Commissioner reached the scene of the crime. But presumably it was the next day which was a Sunday or at the latest on Monday. Yet the earliest report of the incident to appear in any newspaper in India was four days later—on February 8.

Of course, those were not the days of instant “investigative” journalism. All the same, it is surprising that the Associated Press did not send a correspondent to Chauri Chaura to report first hand and instead chose the lazy alternative of quoting the press communique based on the Commissioner’s telegram on February 7. What is even odder is that the *Pioneer* could not spare a reporter to send to Chauri Chaura though it was the kind of news which was very much up its street and over which it could normally have been expected to go to town. It did not even consider the episode worth a direct editorial comment though it did, over the next few days, not only publish further details of the scenario as it had unfolded on that Saturday afternoon at Chauri Chaura, but used it as a convenient illustration of the “criminal” nature of the civil disobedience campaign

which Gandhi was leading in its editorial observations on the subject. Partly, this may have been because its anxiety was divided between the "riots" at Chauri Chaura and the troubles at Bareilly at the same time in which the Collector, a man called Stubbs, had received serious injuries—a fractured upper jaw and a ruptured vein on the left side. It even found space for a message of sympathy from the highest authority in the Province to Stubbs which said: "No officer in the Province has enjoyed more fully the confidence of the people and of the Government, and I deplore that you should have been the victim of a movement which is as bad as it is mad"—a phrase which has the true Butlerian family ring. If any such comforting message was sent by the Governor—Sir Harcourt Butler—to the families of the armed and civil police victims of the mob fury at Chauri Chaura, the *Pioneer* did not think fit to record it for the posterity.

What is even stranger is that Delhi was as much in the dark—or at least a kind of penumbra—about what had happened at Chauri Chaura. At any rate it pretended so to be. The Legislative Assembly was having its usual winter session at the time and on February 10 the Home Member, Sir William Vincent, was tackled by a white knight of British Commerce, Sir Frank Carter, whether by prior arrangement or on spontaneous impulse it is hard to say. But Vincent could not vouchsafe much enlightenment to Carter on the matter. In fact he said the Government had no information beyond what members of the Assembly had seen in that day's *Pioneer*. A telegram, he added, had been sent for further particulars. The incident had come as a great surprise to the Government and reports received had suggested that the activities of the Congress Volunteers had been "technically peaceful" except in one or two places where the police had to intervene. He did not have any news of disturbances in other places in the U.P. and assured the Assembly that supplementary police had been sanctioned.

All this sounded rather sporadic and certainly there was no disposition in the Government circles to make too much of the Chauri Chaura affair by unduly publicizing it or creating the impression that the law and order situation in the United Provinces was grave. True, Lord Ronaldshay (later Zetland), Governor of Bengal, speaking at the Trade's Dinner at Calcutta

on February 10 raised the bogey of "orgies of violence" in a lengthy passage and referred to Chauri Chaura. But for the most part it was not only business, but pleasures of life as usual for the British community—and that not only in Delhi, Calcutta, Lucknow or Allahabad, but even in the mofussil. In Gorakhpur, not a thousand miles away from Chauri Chaura, for instance, according to the *Pioneer*, Spring Gymkhana Race Meetings advertised for February 15 and 17 were duly held.

This may have been partly the proverbial British *sang froid*. But there were probably other reasons for the authorities to avoid giving the impression that they were in any way ruffled by these little local difficulties and that there was any crisis. One of these, inevitably, was that the Prince of Wales was to arrive in the capital of India on February 14 for what was to be the high point of his "good-will" visit to India. The Government did not want alarmist reports to appear in the Press in Britain which might cause anxiety among the Island Race about the safety of the heir to the Throne. But there was, perhaps, another and subtler reason for taking the Chauri Chaura incident in their stride and not encouraging suspicion and apprehension of its being the tip of some larger conspiratorial iceberg. In any case, it was probably considered impolitic to suggest that there was more to Chauri Chaura than met the eye and thus raise inconvenient questions.

The relative sobriety of Government's reaction to Chauri Chaura stood in sharp contrast to the over-reaction on the Indian side. Not only the Moderates, but the Congress leadership registered a shock that almost knocked it off balance. Maulana Azad Sobhani, Chandrakant Malaviya, Jagjivan Lal, Keshav Dev and Devadas Gandhi, according to a report in the *Bombay Chronicle* on February 9, had arrived at Gorakhpur; and Devadas Gandhi on his return from Chauri Chaura was quoted as having stated, "The facts as stated in the Government [press] communique though mainly correct, are misleading in some respects. Making sufficient allowance of the peculiar circumstances, doubtless the Nankana tragedy is repeated, frustrating the highest hopes. We owe our safety to timely help" and the support of police and Deputy Magistrate.

The "Nankana tragedy" parallel which Devadas Gandhi

invoked may not have seemed very apt to dispassionate observers at the time and seems even more inappropriate in retrospect, especially as he could not have had much time to investigate what led up to the confrontation between the volunteers and the police. It is true that he was to conduct an unofficial inquiry into the Chauri Chaura incident on the instructions of his father and submitted a four-page report on it. But that was to come later. The statement issued after his first hurried visit to Chauri Chaura was somewhat onesided and did not take into account the fact that there had been some provocation on the part of the police. Even the official accounts of the sequence of events admitted that the police had fired into the crowd and killed one or two persons—a story reminiscent of what had happened at the Hall Bazar Gate at Amritsar almost three years earlier.

However, Devadas Gandhi's statement was a model of circumspection compared to the statements made by some other local Congress leaders, prompted more by their hearts than by their heads. A special Correspondent of the *Leader*, for instance, quoted at some length the statement issued by Ajudhya Das, Bar-at-Law, and Syed Mohammed Subhan Ullah, President of the District Congress Committee. It said:

We cannot help observing these acts of violence, brutal and fiendish murders and roasting to death of living human beings can on no account be justified and are the results of carrying on a propaganda among inflammable masses with the avowed object of destroying respect for law and authority by persons posing as apostles of non-violence. The incident should open the eyes of all if they have not already opened to the grave danger with which the country is confronted.

No government propagandist could have put it more strongly. Indeed, Ajudhya Das, it appears, wrote to A.P. Collett, Collector of Gorakhpur, that he had arranged photographs of the outrage to be taken to publish them in order that the eyes of the thinking portion of his countrymen and countrywomen be opened and suggested the opening of a fund for the family of the victims to which he offered to "contribute his mite." Syed Subhan Ullah, who was very "visibly moved" according to the

Correspondent, hastened to send wires to Gandhi and the Congress President Hakim Ajmal Khan "not to start the campaign of civil disobedience, at least not in the District (meaning Gorakhpur) if not in the Province." He was by no means alone among the local Congress notabilities who felt that Gandhi should abandon all plans for mass civil resistance. Another "leading non-cooperator," Mushir Hussain Kidwai, lost no time in wiring to the Mahatma warning him that either he must postpone civil disobedience or be prepared for outbreaks of violence.

And it was not only the lesser fry among the Congress leaders who were for calling off the planned campaign of civil disobedience. Some of the All-India Congress leaders, who had serious reservations about the wisdom of Gandhi's satyagraha movement, saw in the Chauri Chaura incident an excellent peg on which to hang their essays in dissuasion. Madan Mohan Malaviya sent an urgent message to Gandhi immediately to convene a meeting of the Congress Working Committee to re-examine the whole situation in the light of "the excesses committed at Chauri Chaura." Clearly, for the Government and the still sizeable body of Moderates within the Congress, not to mention those outside it, Chauri Chaura was the kind of incident which, if it had not happened, would need to have been invented or engineered.

But how far was the incident a spontaneous eruption of mass violence against the police at Chauri Chaura and how far was it instigated or engineered by some agents provocateurs? That is one of the great unresolved question-marks of the Congress history during its Gandhian phase—and one, moreover, which, paradoxically enough, has been the most neglected by its historians, though lately some peripheral research into the episode has been undertaken. This is not the place to probe into this tantalizing mystery. But only the naive would rule out the possibility of some Indian equivalent of Father Gapon having had a hand in the Chauri Chaura affair.

The telegraph office at Bardoli must have been kept busy on February 8 with telegrams pouring in for Gandhi to draw back from the brink and hold his hand over his plans for satyagraha. Not that he needed any frantic efforts at dissuasion by the Congress leaders who had always been sceptical about his

political method and honestly believed that it would lead to disaster. We know of his reaction to the news when he first read the news of what had happened at Chauri Chaura. According to Krishnadas who was close to him at the time, the Mahatma "immediately decided that he should have to suspend all activities towards civil disobedience going on along the length and breadth of the country." This was evidently even before he received a telegram from Madan Mohan Malaviya in Bombay urging Gandhi to convene a meeting of the Congress Working Committee to reconsider the position although Malaviya then was not himself a member of the Committee. It is important to stress this because it was said at the time and later that it was Malaviya who persuaded the Mahatma to abandon all thought of satyagraha. Gandhi denied this publicly in his "Notes" published in *Young India* of February 23 and wrote:

I assure the public that Pandit Malaviyaji had absolutely no hand in shaping my decision. I have often yielded to Panditji, and it is always a pleasure for me to yield to him whenever I can and always painful to differ from one who has an unrivalled record of public service and who is sacrifice personified. But so far as the decision of suspension is concerned, I arrived at it on my own reading of the detailed report [*sic*] of the Chauri Chaura tragedy in the *Chronicle*. It was in Bardoli that telegrams were sent convening the Working Committee meeting and it was in Bardoli that I sent a letter to the members of the Working Committee advising them of my desire to suspend civil disobedience.

This is confirmed by Krishnadas who records that before leaving for Bombay the same evening—that is February 8—by train to consult Malaviya and others, he wrote to the members of the Working Committee telling them how he felt on the whole question and summoning them to a meeting to be held at Bardoli on February 11 to consider it. The letter was marked "Confidential (not for publication)" and Krishnadas tells us that Gandhi did not reveal his mind except to one or two persons, including, it seems, Krishnadas. The confidential letter to the Working Committee members began by saying that this was the third time he had received "a rude shock" when he had been



"on the eve of embarking upon mass civil disobedience," the first being in April 1919 (meaning the outbreak of violence in the Punjab) and then again the previous November when there was violence in Bombay soon after the arrival of the Prince of Wales. He spoke of his "violent" agitation over the events near Gorakhpur and at Bareilly and Saharanpur "where volunteers have been attempting to take possession of Town Halls." This had shaken him. He went on:

The Civil disobedience of Bardoli can make no impression upon the country when disobedience of a criminal character goes on in other parts of the country, both for the same end. The whole conception of civil disobedience is based upon the assumption that it works in and through its completely non-violent character. I may be a bad student of human nature to believe that such an atmosphere can ever be brought about in a vast country like India, but that would be an argument for condemning my capacity for sound judgment, not for continuing a movement which is in that case bound to be unsuccessful. I personally can never be a party to a movement half violent and half non-violent, even though it may result in the attainment of so-called swaraj, for it will not be real swaraj as I have conceived it.

After informing them of the date and venue of the meeting of the Working Committee, he said that the main item on the agenda would be:

...first whether mass civil disobedience should not be suspended for the time being; and secondly, whether if it is suspended it should not be discontinued for a definite and sufficiently long period to enable the country to do organizing constructive work and to establish an indisputably non-violent atmosphere. I want to have the guidance of all the friends I can. I would like you to send me your opinion even though you may not be able to attend, either by letter, if it reaches in time, or by wire.

I am sending this letter only to the members of the Working Committee, but I would like you to consult all the friends

you meet and if any of them wishes to come to take part in the deliberations please bring or send him or them.

This letter was written on the spur of the moment and while the immediate shock of the news he had read was at its most acute. Nevertheless, it was by far the most coherently reasoned and succinct statement of the argument and rationale, as he saw it, for his seemingly instant decision to suspend the civil disobedience campaign which, on the face of it, could hardly be considered politic, much less rational, however magnificent as a moral gesture dictated by his ethical scrupulousness. For although during the days ahead, and indeed for a long time to come, in the controversy that raged over the decision, he was to return again and again to it and explain why he had made it, his explanations and arguments never appeared consistent and logical enough to induce a willing suspension of disbelief and at times even savoured of rather Jesuitical exercises in self-justification against all comers. And there were to be plenty of them in the days ahead.

This is true even of the long article headed "The Crime of Chauri Chaura" which he wrote in *Young India* of February 16 and which, somewhat surprisingly, won applause even from Maulana Mohamed Ali with whom non-violence was not an article of faith but a matter of political tactics, and another, at once more characteristic and idiosyncratic, entitled "Divine Warning" which appeared three days later in his Gujarati weekly *Navajivan*. In both of them Gandhi was at pain to expand and elaborate the argument he had developed briefly but with some effect in his letter to the members of the Congress Working Committee. But the elaboration of his argument had not necessarily made it more compelling even though the piece in *Navajivan* was illuminated at points by touching Gandhian syllogisms which belonged to a universe of discourse that is beyond logic. He wrote, for instance:

Atonement should not be advertised. But I have publicized mine, and there is a reason. My fast is atonement for me but, for the people of Chauri Chaura, it is a punishment. The punishment inflicted by love is always of this nature. When a lover is hurt, he does not punish the loved one, but

suffers himself: he bears the pangs of hunger and hits his own head. He is unconcerned whether or not his loved ones understand his suffering.

The "atonement" he was referring to was the five days' fast which he began on February 13 on the day after the Working Committee meeting. What his readers made of the explanation of his self-chastisement we do not know although Freudian psycho-analysis would have something to say about this classic instance of turning inwards of aggression. Not that the psycho-analytical explanation would leave us much wiser on the strange ways in which Gandhi's mind worked.

Gandhi spent only one day in Bombay. He returned to Bardoli by the morning train on February 10. Bomanji, Vallabhbhai Patel, and Mathuradas Trikumdas travelled with him by the same train. Malaviya, K. Natarajan and Jayakar, whom he had invited to take part in the meeting of the Working Committee, came later as also Jinnalal Bajaj who was in Wardha. Kelkar also came the next day. According to Krishnadas, a messenger from Gorakhpur had arrived "with detailed information about Chauri Chaura and described the whole incident to Mahatmaji." Shuaib Qureshi was asked to take down the statement of the man who had come from Gorakhpur. Armed with these details, some of them horrific, Gandhi called a meeting of his co-workers in Bardoli in his room that afternoon. These, it seems, included not only veteran Congressmen like V.J. Patel, Dayalji, S.R. Bomanji, but also two young boys who, writes Krishnadas, "had come into the room perhaps out of childish curiosity, but they were also asked by Mahatmaji to express their views" on whether or not to begin the civil disobedience campaign "in the face of the terrible happening at Chauri Chaura."

An overwhelming majority of those present thought that the point of no return had been reached; "that it was unthinkable to suspend the fight at that stage; that if Mahatmaji retreated after throwing out a challenge to Lord Reading in the manner he had done by his rejoinder to the government communique, the whole country would be disgraced before the world." Apparently, only three persons dissented with this majority

view and said that to start mass satyagraha in the prevailing conditions would be to court "catastrophe". Gandhi, says Krishnadas who was almost certainly with the dissenters, "gave a very patient hearing to all the views and opinions brought forward before the meeting." But he was not impressed by the majority view. Rather the reverse. For he said:

I regard those who have assembled here as some of the best workers in the country. In fact I can see the condition of India at the present time truly reflected by this small assembly. What I have heard now confirms me in the belief that most of those who are present here have failed to understand the message of non-violence. This convinces me that country at large has not at all accepted the teaching of non-violence. I must, therefore, immediately stop the movement for civil disobedience.

He was obviously upset by the views expressed by those who were close to him and Krishnadas remarks: "As soon as he finished this observation, Mahatmaji adopted a grave, and somewhat stern attitude, which made the workers quietly leave his room, one by one." But his co-workers were no less upset by what seemed to them a volte face on the part of the Mahatma. One case of indiscipline, no matter, how grave, to them hardly justified calling off the whole campaign. Convinced that Gandhi had made up his mind and that nothing would alter it, Krishnadas writes: "They began to feel that their hopes and dreams had been shattered to pieces. The shock had been so great that it seemed to have temporarily unhinged one prominent gentleman, who began to move about the whole camp, shouting at the top of his voice. 'Why should violence be so much deprecated', 'what harm if there was a little justifiable violence, here and there'. These were the words constantly on his lips, and he stopped every one, who happened to come near him, to argue the point with him. Seth Jammalal Bajaj, who had arrived by the evening train, found the whole camp in a state of confusion and disorder...."

This one can well believe. Gandhi himself was in a state of anguish which worried those who were close to him. "Whispers," says Krishnadas, "were going round the camp that he had

been contemplating a two weeks' fast in expiation of the crime of Chauri Chaura. This frightened us considerably, as we did not know whether his frail body was capable of sustaining the effects of such a prolonged fast." Indeed, Mathuradas Trikumdas asked the Mahatma "whether he was seriously thinking of giving up his body" to which Gandhi's reply was: "No; I imagine God has yet some purpose to serve with this body. I have no desire to give up the body immediately."

Such was the almost incredible atmosphere of soulfulness combined with an ambient neurasthenic tension, if not mild hysteria, at the Supreme Command Headquarters of the Congress on the eve of a momentous decisions being taken by its leadership which was to affect the politics of India for several years to come. One can well appreciate the difficulty which Western historians of whatever school, must experience in comprehending this peculiar Gandhian context and fitting it into the categories of understanding known to them and in which they think. Even some of his close associates found Gandhi's frame of mind at the time hard to understand.

Krishnadas, for example, records that 'the first thing Mahatmaji did in the morning [of February 11] was to draft a resolution suspending the projected civil disobedience at Bardoli, and all other aggressive activities going on throughout the country. He then asked me to give the draft to Mr. Shuaib [Qureshi] for his opinion. A little while later I saw Mr. Shuaib coming to Mahatmaji's room very much alarmed and agitated. Meeting me on the way he said that he knew it was impossible to dislodge Gandhiji from a position once he...had made up his mind; but still he must try. He, indeed, tried his best to persuade Mahatmaji to tone down the terms of the resolution, but without any effect." So did others, including Mian Mahomed Haji Jan Mahomed Chhotani, Moazzam Ali, Zahur Ahmed and some others who represented the Central Khilafat Committee and had arrived by the morning train on February 11 to take part in the deliberations. "Some of them," Krishnadas who was present at the general informal meeting which preceded the Working Committee meeting, writes, "tried to induce Mahatmaji not to suspend civil disobedience in a hurry. But Mahatmaji was adamant."

Of course, Gandhi had support from Malaviya and

Jayakar for the stubborn stand he had taken. They even flattered him. Malaviya, for instance, said (according to Krishnadas) that by this "one act of his, Mahatmaji had established his title to greatness for all time, and would be remembered as a great benefactor of India." Jayakar spoke in similar adulatory even hyperbolic terms and said that "it was his firm belief that except Mahatmaji there was no one else in this world who could have ventured to suspend civil disobedience in that situation." All this may have been true. But true or false, it was not quite germane and relevant to the issue. The issue was simply whether the eruption of violence in Chauri Chaura a week earlier justified indefinite suspension of the planned campaign of mass satyagraha in Bardoli which was to be conducted under strict supervision by the Mahatma and his trusted lieutenants and the consequences for the country as a whole of such a negative decision.

Doubtless those who were opposed to the suspension of civil disobedience argued their case in this sense. We do not know. For the Working Committee meeting was held in camera, presumably to allow fuller and franker discussion. At all events, the really powerful voices against the suspension were not and could not be raised at Bardoli—and for the good reason that they were under lock and key in far away prisons. The only Working Committee members who were present at the Bardoli meeting were Chhotani, Jamnalal Bajaj, Vithalbhai J. Patel (Sardar's brother), N.C. Kelkar—and Gandhi who presided. Madan Mohan Malaviya, M.R. Jayakar and K. Natarajan, according to the official report of the Working Committee proceedings, gave the Committee the benefit of their views. After hearing them, it adds, the Committee deliberated for about three hours—which suggests that the discussion was fairly full. At the end of the day, however, the resolution drafted by the Mahatma, was adopted. It was a lengthy resolution, but its key operative part was in paragraph three which read:

In view of Nature's repeated warnings every time mass civil disobedience has been imminent some popular violent outburst has taken place indicating that the atmosphere in the country is not non-violent enough for mass civil disobedience, the latest instance being the tragic and terrible events

at Chauri Chaura near Gorakhpur, the Working Committee of the Congress resolves that mass civil disobedience contemplated at Bardoli and elsewhere be suspended and instructs the local Congress Committees forthwith to advise the cultivators to pay the land revenue and other taxes due to the Government and whose payment might have been suspended in anticipation of mass civil disobedience, and instructs them to suspend every other preparatory activity of an offensive nature.

The suspension of mass civil disobedience shall be continued till the atmosphere is so non-violent as to ensure the non-repetition of popular atrocities such as at Gorakhpur or hooliganism such as at Bombay and Madras respectively on the 17th November 1921 and 13th January last.

There was more to the resolution than just the decision to suspend the civil disobedience on a mass scale which was to have begun within seven days of the publication of his letter to the Viceroy—or what Gandhi called “this manifesto” and the *Pioneer* editorially described as “impudent ultimatum.” People in various parts of the country, understandably, were interpreting the civil disobedience movement in their own way and stretching its scope to encompass purposes dictated by their particular needs. Any other political leader would, within limits, have taken a latitudinarian view of their transgressions and even made a virtue of necessity in turning a blind eye to them. But not so Gandhi as he then was. The resolution severely admonished those who wanted to enlarge the purpose of the mass civil disobedience beyond what he had laid down. It also sharply pulled up those who were being very lax in the selection of volunteers, and enjoined strict adherence to “the full Congress constitution.”

However, it is indicative of the rigorous democratic norms which the Congress scrupulously observed in those days that although Gandhi had been vested with virtually dictatorial powers at the Ahmedabad session of the Congress, the Working Committee's resolution was to be effective “only pending the meeting to be specially convened of the All India Congress Committee and thereafter subject to confirmation by it, the

secretary to call such meeting as early as possible after consultation with Hakim Ajmal Khan," the President of the Congress who, for some reason, did not attend the Working Committee meeting at Bardoli. That seems to have been the only business conducted by the Working Committee on that day.

However, according to Krishnadas, Gandhi's friend, Shankerlal Banker, that evening brought to his notice a problem which the Mahatma had not considered. Shankerlal may or may not have invoked the parallel of the famous Duke of York who marched his men up the hill and then marched them down again, but he did suggest "to Mahatmaji that all aggressive activities having been suspended, the people might feel that they had been left suspended in mid-air and that there must be some programme which would harness their energies and direct them towards some constructive effort." The suggestion did not fall on stony ground and Gandhi agreed to think over the problem. Next morning he drafted a constructive programme and the Working Committee readily adopted it (see Appendix III) before adjourning after agreeing to meet again "on the day on which the forthcoming session of the All-India Congress Committee meets."

"The excessive strain of the last three days has greatly told upon Mahatmaji's health," we read in Krishnadas' *Seven Months With Mahatma Gandhi*. This was hardly surprising. Apart from his inward anguish over the brutal Chauri Chaura killings, he could hardly remain unaffected by the sense of gloom and depression around him. Everybody had been keyed up to engage in the non-violent struggle and at the last minute almost they had been told by their leader that there was not going to be any struggle and they had been asked to disperse in their various directions. Even N.C. Kelkar was "much depressed," Krishnadas tells us, and in vain did Gandhi try to cheer him up that morning when he came to take leave of him before taking the train to Bombay.

However, Gandhi was nothing if not an "athlete of the spirit," as the *Gita* felicitously phrases it. His remedy for depression often was to take upon himself a penitential burden that would test his strength to the limits of endurance—and even beyond those limits. The next day—February 13—was his weekly "day of silence"—a discipline which he strictly adhered to though



few of the Congress leaders in his time or since, including those who claimed to be Gandhian, ever followed his example and even though it is a discipline much to be recommended, especially to politicians in India or elsewhere. But the previous evening he had given Krishnadas who seems to have been acting as his Man Friday at the time, "instruction in writing that as a penance for the Chauri Chaura disaster" he had that evening—February 12—begun a five-day fast. Krishnadas touchingly adds that, because he was fearful that the Mahatma might decide to fast as an act of atonement, "for the last two days I had been asking people who generally surrounded him, not to discuss anything about fast or penance, hoping that the question might thereby receive burial. But it was, as events proved, an idle hope." The Mahatma's inner voice, or reflexes, were not so easily to be bypassed.

However despite the fragile state of his health, Gandhi not only survived the fast, but was able during those five days to attend to a vast amount of his journalistic chores for *Young India* and *Navajivan* and all his correspondence as well, though, as Krishnadas has recorded, by the last day, February 17, when at five in the afternoon he broke his fast in the presence of Rajendra Prasad, Jammalal Bajaj and Anasuya Sarabhai by taking "a small quantity of milk, a few grapes and a cup of orange juice" from Krishnadas, he was close to a state of "exhaustion and prostration." But as usual he had enormous reserves of resilience and the next day, when a train carrying Maulana Mohamed Ali and Dr. Kitchlew from Karachi Jail to the jails at Bijapur and Dhulia to which they had been transferred, halted at Bardoli, and they expressed a strong wish to see Gandhi, he did not disappoint them. Krishnadas writes:

The train...was detained for a while and, Dayalji bhai ran post-haste, and engaged a horse carriage to bring Mahatmaji quickly to the station. Mahatmaji arrived. He walked the platform with slow and tired steps, leaning on the staff in his hand. The sight that ensued when he approached the compartment occupied by the Maulana and the Doctor, is beyond my power to describe.

Indeed, four days later—on February 22—Gandhi was able to start for Delhi to attend the meeting of the All-India Congress Committee which had been fixed there for February 24-25. And not only to attend the meeting, but face the music. For Gandhi's fast had by no means disarmed the critics of his decision. In the ten to twelve days between the meeting of the Working Committee at Bardoli and the A.I.C.C. meeting at Delhi, the storm of criticism had been gathering strength and letters of protest, even personal abuse, were pouring in by every post in the days immediately following the announcement of the decision to suspend mass civil disobedience movement at Bardoli on February 12. This can be judged from his journalistic writings during the period in *Young India* and *Navajivan* a great part of which was devoted to answering his critics, whether polite or rude, who were exceedingly angry with him over the decision that the Working Committee had endorsed. It was clear that it was not going to be smooth sailing for him at the A.I.C.C. meeting at Delhi.

In fact, there was some objection to having the meeting at Delhi. Mrs. C.R. Das, whose husband was still in jail, according to Krishnadas, pressed the Mahatma to change the venue to Calcutta. But this was not possible at such short notice, but Gandhi offered to go to Calcutta after the meeting if she so desired. He was not afraid of facing his critics in Bengal. Dr. Mahmud had been to Calcutta and he had wired to Gandhi from Patna that "the leaders of Bengal were very much displeased with the Bardoli decision, and that they were even contemplating open defiance of that decision." But Bengal was not the only province which was opposed to the decision to call off the mass civil disobedience. So was the Punjab—and not only the Punjab. Most of the leaders in the U.P. were unhappy about it and in Maharashtra, those claiming to be the devotees of Tilak, who had never been wholly reconciled to Gandhi's leadership, found in the Bardoli resolution solid ground for mounting a critical fusillade against him.

He arrived in Delhi on February 23 where, Krishnadas writes, he "had to pass through a veritable ordeal of fire." He stayed with Dr. Ansari at his house in Daryaganj, which in those days was a most agreeable residential area under the shadow of the Red Fort and within sight of the great Jama

Masjid. The excitement was at high pitch and apparently, Krishnadas records, a Delhi friend "jokingly remarked...that the Bengal people would come and break our heads with their *lathis*." Bengali people are not experts at wielding the *lathi*, but it was no joking matter either and the representatives from Bengal argued furiously with him for two hours and did not depart till midnight. He did not convince them, nor was he prepared to yield and "make any compromise on the fundamental issue of non-violence." After the Bengali representatives had departed, Gandhi was handed by a messenger "a very long letter from a distinguished Indian leader, who was also in gaol at the time, and who was equally with the others disgusted with Mahatmaji on account of the Bardoli decision, and criticised the latter in terms of bitter reproach." Gandhi was evidently affected by the letter. For although Krishnadas does not reveal the identity of the writer, he records that "Mahatmaji kept reading that letter far into the night, even after we had retired."

The next morning a meeting of the Congress Working Committee was held at eleven. It was not only attended by the members of the Committee but also "on invitation by representatives of the provinces." The Congress President, Hakim Ajmal Khan, presided and it was clear from the start that it was going to be somewhat different from the Working Committee meeting at Bardoli which had adopted Gandhi's resolution without much ado. The President at the outset read out "an important communication from another leader of all-India repute, who also criticised the Bardoli decision as sounding the death-knell of non-cooperation." Gandhi followed with placing before the Committee several other letters he had received from various persons all over India. There were some from people in jails for their part in the Non-cooperation movement. Most of them were in a critical vein, and even those which accepted the calling off of mass civil disobedience, saw no reason why all other items in the satyagraha campaign should be abandoned.

But the Mahatma seemed to be in an unyielding mood, at least on the surface. He rejected the arguments of his critics, particularly those in prisons on the rather feeble almost legalistic and quibbling ground that, as Krishnadas puts it, "it was no

business of those who were undergoing imprisonment to express their opinion on things happening outside, and that similarly it was no part of the duty of those who were outside to pay any heed to those opinions." Later he was even dogmatically to maintain that those behind the prison bars were "civilly dead." This was not only an irrational argument, but like rubbing salt into the wounds of those who had gone to jail in pursuance of a programme which Gandhi and the Congress had drawn up. It was, of course, permissible to argue that those in jail were not in possession of full facts of the situation outside and therefore their assessment of the situation outside the prison walls was bound to be in some degree defective. But to decree that their opinion could be "summarily rejected" was manifestly unfair and bound to cause deep offence to those who were not exactly having a picnic in their places of incarceration and, according to his own version in his articles in his two weekly journals and his letters to the Viceroy, were being subjected to all forms of severe and even humiliating punishments. It is surprising that the Mahatma was unaware that in declaring them as "civilly dead" he was culpable of an enormity of unfairness and injustice. But, then, saints can at times be even more insensitive to other people's feelings than most sinners would dare to be.

However, he was on much firmer ground when he argued that he could not agree with those who were paying lip service to non-violence, but had no conviction about it and were "following the programme of non-cooperation...while all the time working for a violent revolution in India under cover of non-violence." In fact, he told them, Krishnadas writes, that "if after a full and fair discussion of the subject, the Congress adopted a programme based on the theory of violence, he would welcome it. It would be, indeed, a source of happiness to him if he was defeated at the meeting of the All-India Congress Committee on the definite issue of non-violence *versus* violence." In that case he would go his own way "with a band of small but select and sincere body of workers, untrammelled by any artificial majority such as that dogged him at every step."

This was a perfectly fair point to make and it seems that Gandhi made the point "with such deliberation and cool composure, weighing every word as he uttered it, that they

produced an immediate effect upon the audience." What he was saying, in effect, was that he was willing to step down from leadership of the Congress but that if they wanted him to lead it then that could only be on his terms and they must learn to take the rough with the smooth. Faced with this choice, the opposition to him melted away, and even Swami Shraddhanand who had mounted the assault on Gandhi from the Right, admitted that in the conditions in which the struggle had to be waged there was no option but to accept the guidance of the Mahatma. Others also fell into line, although some insisted that while they were prepared to abandon mass civil disobedience, they could not forego the right of picketing liquor and foreign cloth shops and "defensive civil disobedience... in respect of the Punitive Police Tax, wherever such tax had been imposed upon the people" and other acts of Government high-handedness.

However, having won his main point and one which was a matter of principle with him, Gandhi was willing to soften his apparently intransigent stand and give the opposite side some satisfaction. Indeed, if Krishnadas is to be believed—and his testimony most of the time has a ring of truth—relates that the Mahatma "had already guessed the mentality of those who were opposing the Bardoli decision, and what would satisfy the Non-cooperators generally under the situation. He had on his way from Bardoli to Delhi, prepared a draft resolution restoring the very rights for which the representatives [from the provinces] pressed in the course of their discussion with members of the Working Committee, namely, the right of defensive civil disobedience and the right of picketing foreign cloth. This draft Mahatmaji placed before a second sitting of the Working Committee held in his room at two in the afternoon." The Committee adopted it and authorised him "to place this resolution before the All-India Congress Committee as the main resolution on behalf of the Working Committee."

The battle in the All-India Congress Committee was going to be considerably tougher. It was to have met at two in the afternoon. But because the Working Committee was unable to complete its business in the morning and had to have a second session in the afternoon, the A.I.C.C. did not begin its session till 7 P.M. There was a problem even before the proceedings

properly began. There was objection by some members to the presence of reporters at the meeting. Dr. B.S. Moonje, who had made up his mind to oppose Gandhi and the Working Committee resolution, argued, perfectly reasonably, that since they were going to discuss "matters of life and death to the nation" and it was vital that they should "speak out their minds without any reservation," the presence of outsiders was not desirable. The President, Hakim Ajmal Khan, wanted "to know the sense of the House." However, before he could put the issue to vote, representatives of the Indian Press who, with but rare exception in those days did not see their role as a schematically "adversarial" one, "voluntarily withdrew from the meeting." Members could, therefore, give expression to their feelings and views without any inhibition.

After the minutes of the last meeting of the A.I.C.C. had been duly read and approved, Gandhi moved the resolution which the Working Committee had adopted. As the official summary of the proceedings of the meeting of the Committee, from which the Press had been excluded, has it:

He began by giving the genesis of the Bardoli resolutions and made it clear that Pandit Malaviyaji had no hand whatever in those resolutions. He asked the members to bear in mind that if they accepted non-violence whether as a creed or a policy, they must also be prepared to accept certain corollaries that followed from it. In the same connection he said that so long as they claimed to be non-violent and so long as they claimed to have the country with them, it was impossible for them to disown responsibility for acts of violence committed out of sympathy for them in any part of India such as those committed in Gorakhpur or at Bombay. He also added that it was open to them to give up non-violence if they considered it unworkable or ineffective. He explained that by the resolution it was not intended to go back upon the Nagpur Non-cooperation resolution in any way. He urged the members to be clear on the point of principle and not overconcerned with details.

This is a fair summary of his argument which he presented more succinctly and coherently than he had done in the Working

Committee and without trailing any red herrings about the opinion of non-cooperators who were in jails being *ultra vires*, as it were. According to Krishnadas he repeated what he had told the Working Committee: that he was "prepared to renounce his leadership;" that he wanted them "to ponder seriously whether they should continue to follow him as its [Congress'] leader;" but that if they still accepted his leadership, then they must put up with "other and greater occasions of insult and suffering" which they might have to undergo because of his decisions. He described himself as "incorrigible," and if they chose to follow him "whenever the circumstances demanded it, they should have to beat a retreat even when they were in sight of the desired goal." He also made it clear that although "the proposed resolution had restored to the Provincial Congress Committees the right of picketing, they must be very cautious in the exercise of that right" and not resort to tactics which involved "a form of violence."

All this must have sounded rather egocentric and tantamount to placing his own judgement over and above the collective wisdom of the Congress and its decision-making organs. But at least he could not be accused of deceiving the Congress and trying to secure its leadership under false pretences. If anything, the contract under which he was prepared to lead it was not only spelt out by him in clear but rather harsh terms. It had the option to reject its terms and find another leader. But as Vithalbhai Patel, who seconded the Mahatma's motion in a speech which was distinctly pedestrian and even lackadaisical, said, "The strategy of mass civil disobedience was known only to Mahatmaji" and he alone was qualified to conduct it "with any chance of success."

There followed a procedural wrangle. Dr. B.S. Moonje stood up and argued, with some justice, that if the resolution was passed by the A.I.C.C., then it would rule out the possibility of taking into consideration his censure motion against Gandhi (there was also another censure motion in the name of J.M. Sen-Gupta, C.R. Das' lieutenant). But, as the rules of procedure stood, the Working Committee's resolutions had precedence over those of other members of the A.I.C.C. It was characteristic of Gandhi that he recognised the legitimacy of the point made by Dr.

Moonje and withdrew his resolution so that Moonje's vote of censure could be taken up.

And so it was. Moonje wanted a Committee of Enquiry to assess the harm which had been inflicted on the country by "the policy and programme of non-cooperation." He accused the Congress leaders—and he meant Gandhi above all—of "playing ducks and drakes with the honour and prestige of the country, and the Bardoli resolution had brought them to the lowest depth of degradation." The country, he declared, should not allow its own representatives to heap insults upon it. His motion was supported by Swami Satyadeva, M.V. Abhyankar and Maulana Hasrat Mohani. They were no less bitter against the Mahatma, but they formulated their criticism in less crude and more reasoned terms. As Krishnadas records, they demanded "a clear definition of non-violence; they demanded to know the exact line of demarcation between non-violence and violence." They wanted to know where precisely non-violence ended and violence began.

All this was fair polemical game. But it proved too much for Hakim Ajmal Khan who was rather unwell. He decided to vacate the chair and Gandhi took the presidential seat. Krishnadas has it that this "worked a miracle.... The atmosphere of the meeting had become highly tense and somewhat poisonous due to the violence of the attack [on Gandhi], and had gathered volume and force from the opposition to it from some of Mahatmaji's supporters." The key to the miracle that he worked was simplicity itself. He ruled from the chair that only those who supported Dr. Moonje's motion of censure would be allowed to speak. His own supporters naturally protested, but whenever anyone among them interrupted Dr. Moonje's men Gandhi sternly asked the interrupter "to sit down and keep his peace." "It was," writes Krishnadas, "an object-lesson in tolerance, patience, humility as well as love and respectful consideration for the feelings of the adversary...." Certainly, by the end even Moonje, a most combative and even aggressive personality, was sufficiently mollified as to get up and say that he wanted "to hear the arguments on Mahatmaji's side." But on this Gandhi did not oblige him. He refused to defend himself.

At all events, Dr. Moonje and his contingent, for all their sound and fury, were in a minority. The motion of censure was



defeated by an overwhelming majority. So, too, the other vote of censure moved by J.M. Sen-Gupta which, although somewhat differently phrased, had the same essential thrust. The A.I.C.C. then adjourned. But despite the defeat of the two censure motions, Gandhi was not happy over the way things had gone. Unlike latter-day Gandhians, arithmetic and head-counting meant little to him. He was aware, as Krishnadas has recorded, that many of those who had voted the censure motions down had done so because of their personal regard for him, not out of conviction. Also, perhaps, he was unimpressed by the argument that the Congress had no option but to accept his leadership because there was nobody else who could lead them successfully and effectively in any campaign of non-cooperation. They were supporting him, as it were, *faute de mieux*—for want of somebody better. Krishnadas records:

He passed the whole night without any sleep, and tossed about his bed in a state of restless agitation. Finding us somewhat alarmed on his account in the morning, he only heaved a deep sigh, and in a voice choked with emotion exclaimed—"What am I to do? I do not clearly see my way."

This was probably true even in a deeper sense than he was willing to admit to himself. Immediately, however, he had to face his critics again the next morning—February 25—when the A.I.C.C. met to consider and scrutinize the Bardoli resolution. The Maharashtra contingent which, like the one from Bengal, had never quite taken to Gandhi and his ways and perhaps never did, were allergic to the idea of dragging God into politics and excessive use of theological and didactic phraseology in political resolutions. Gandhi expressed his willingness to delete the references to God and Truth from the resolution. But, on the other hand, according to Krishnadas, there were others, including Sri Prakasa of Benaras, who wanted the Mahatma to stand firm on the original resolution adopted by the Working Committee at Bardoli and even reject the modifications which the Working Committee had accepted at its Delhi meeting. This, it seems, is what he did and the undiluted Bardoli resolution, that is minus the clauses which permitted defensive civil disobedience, was passed by the A.I.C.C. with a decisive majority.

However, this called forth a very sharp protest from Dr. M.A. Ansari. "At this stage," writes Krishnadas, "Dr. Ansari got up and delivered a speech criticising the last decision of the Committee and described it as a most unfortunate decision. For, by that decision, he believed that the Committee had put its signature to the doom of the present national movement, and also of other national activities in India for some time to come." Gandhi held Dr. Ansari in high esteem, but even more, as Krishnadas puts it, "the pathos and grief which the speech revealed exposed to Mahatmaji's view the real state of feelings of the country's best and trusted leaders. As soon, therefore, as the speech was over, Mahatmaji made a short statement in which he explained that he had no idea that the opposition to the Bardoli proposals was so very strong even amongst those whom he regarded as the true custodian of the country's interests. He did not want to carry the proposition in the teeth of opposition of those without whose co-operation he could not hope to carry on work in the country." He, therefore, asked leave to withdraw his previous motion. Instead, the members were asked to vote on the amended resolution which the Working Committee had adopted and which restored the right of individual civil disobedience and picketing to the Provincial Committees. "This," says Krishnadas, "was also adopted by an equally large majority, and the meeting dispersed at about 9 P.M."

The work of the A.I.C.C. was over and it was not to meet again till the first week of June in very different circumstances and minus Gandhi. However, the Working Committee did meet the next day to discuss diverse matters, like propaganda for the Congress cause in foreign parts and modalities for implementing the new constructive programme on the initiative of Jamnalal Bajaj who actually suggested the creation of "portfolios" by setting up "departments for carrying on the different items" of the Congress work in the difficult period ahead. Gandhi, it seems, liked Jamnalal's suggestions and asked him to take charge of the department for the promotion of khaddar. He also wanted Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, the future historian of the Congress, who was not a member of the Working Committee but had attended its meeting as a visitor, to be ready to take over "the duties of Director of National Education throughout India." For Gandhi and his generation of Congress leaders seemed

passionately to believe in education, but an education oriented to the needs of the nation and attuned to its genius.

However, important as these organisational proposals and plans for strengthening the Congress were, they were relatively minor footnotes to the historic decision which the A.I.C.C. had endorsed, entirely on the Mahatma's advice, to suspend the mass civil disobedience movement *sine die*. Long ago, in India's legendary past, "on the holy field of Kurukshetra," Krishna had managed to persuade a reluctant Arjuna to go into battle against his own kith and kin. Gandhi, on the other hand, had persuaded the Congress movement all ready to engage an alien Government and, indeed, eager to do so, to accept his order of a general and voluntary retreat even before the battle had been really joined. It must remain an everlasting question whether it would not have been better for India if the two great dramas of our destiny had been enacted the other way round....

## CHAPTER XII

### FROM THE JAWS OF DEFEAT

Krishnadas was not exaggerating when he spoke of "the pathos and grief" which Dr. Ansari's speech at the All-India Congress Committee meeting at Delhi, as it were in a flash, revealed to Gandhi's view as characterising the true state of feelings into which his decision to abandon the plans for mass civil disobedience had plunged "the country's best and trusted leaders." The pathos and grief were certainly there. But there was more to it than that. There was a sense of being let down if not betrayal. Even those closest to him who believed in him almost without ever questioning accepted his decision with what the French call *mort dans l'ame*—death in the heart.

There was also something else—anger and resentment. Not just the anger and resentment which Dr. Moonje had voiced in his rather truculent vote of censure. That could be shrugged off relatively easily. After all, Moonje had never been—and was never to be—on the same wavelength on which Gandhi operated. That could be said even of C.R. Das who had been a reluctant convert to certain aspects of the civil disobedience programme, especially boycott of the councils. He had good reason for being angry with the Mahatma. And he was. As Subhas Chandra Bose records in his *The Indian Struggle*, "I was with the Deshbandhu

at the time [in jail] and I could see that he was beside himself with anger and sorrow....” But anger and sorrow were felt no less acutely by Jawaharlal Nehru who was still in jail although he was soon to be released because some mysterious revising authority discovered that the crime for which he had been convicted was no crime under the law as it then stood.

He had seen in Gandhi and Gandhi’s satyagraha idea the way out of his doubts and despair at the state of Indian politics. Retrospectively, he was to describe his feeling about Gandhi in *An Autobiography*:

Gandhiji had pleaded for the adoption of the way of non-violence, of peaceful non-cooperation....His language had been simple and unadorned, his voice and appearance cool and clear and devoid of all emotion, but behind that outward covering of ice there was the heat of a blazing fire and concentrated passion, and the words he uttered winged their way to the innermost recesses of our minds and hearts, and created a strange ferment there. The way he pointed out was hard and difficult, but it was a brave path, and it seemed to lead to the promised land of freedom. Because of that promise we pledged our faith and marched ahead.

And now, just when a decisive stage in that march seemed upon them, he had ordered a retreat or at least an indefinite halt—and for a reason which did not appear to them at all self-evident and convincing. There was “amazement and consternation” at his decision to stop “the aggressive aspects of our struggle... at a time when we seemed to be consolidating our position and advancing on all fronts.” Writing several years later in the relative tranquillity of his cell (probably in its own way magnificent Naini Central Jail not far away from the confluence of the Ganga and the Yamuna), Jawaharlal Nehru was exquisitely to sum up his thoughts and feelings and which were widely shared in the Congress—and even outside it:

The sudden suspension of our movement after the Chauri Chaura incident was resented, I think, by almost all the prominent Congress leaders—other than Gandhiji of course. My father (who was in gaol at the time) was much upset by

it. The younger people were naturally even more agitated. Our mounting hopes tumbled to the ground, and this mental reaction was to be expected . . . Chauri Chaura may have been and was a deplorable occurrence and wholly opposed to the spirit of the non-violent movement; but were a remote village and a mob of excited peasants in an out-of-the-way place going to put an end, for some time at least, to our national struggle for freedom? If this was the inevitable consequence of a sporadic act of violence, then surely there was something lacking in the philosophy and technique of a non-violent struggle.

Nehru was to go on to raise a very pertinent issue which, surprisingly, has tended to be almost ignored in discussions of "the Chauri Chaura affair" as the *Pioneer* headlined the incident:

For it seemed to us to be impossible to guarantee against the occurrence of some such untoward incident. Must we train the three hundred and odd millions of India in the theory and practice of non-violent action before we could go forward? And, even so, how many of us could say that under extreme provocation from the police we would be able to remain perfectly peaceful? But even if we succeeded, what of the numerous *agents provocateurs*, stool pigeons, and the like who crept into our movement and indulged in violence themselves or induced others to do? If this was the sole condition of its function, then non-violent method of resistance would always fail.

We had accepted that method, the Congress had made that method its own, because of a belief in its effectiveness. . . . In spite of its negative name it was a dynamic method, the very opposite of a meek submission to a tyrant's will. It was not a coward's refuge from action, but the brave man's defiance of evil and national subjection. But what was the use of the bravest and the strongest if a few odd person—may be even our opponents in the guise of friends—had the power to upset or end our movement by their rash behaviour?

This was a very valid point and it must have been something along these lines that Jawaharlal and his comrades in Lucknow

Jail had written to the Mahatma as soon as they came to know of the Congress Working Committee's decision taken at Bardoli indefinitely to suspend the mass civil disobedience movement. It must have impressed Gandhi and even may be slightly upset him at a time when he was already in some anguish. For he sat down to write at length to Jawaharlal on February 19, that is two days after he had broken his fast and three days before leaving for Delhi to take part in the A.I.C.C. meeting.

Gandhi sent the letter to Jawaharlal through Jawaharlal's sister Sarup (Mrs. Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit) and in his covering letter to her wrote : "If you think that the above can give the prisoners in Lucknow any solace, please read it to Jawaharlal when you see him next. Do tell me otherwise how things are shaping there. Some one of you is I hope coming to Delhi. Ranjit [Mrs. Pandit's husband] sent me one of father's [Motilal's] letters to you to read." Apparently, as her post was being delayed because of its having to pass through the scrutiny of the intelligence service, he added a postscript to the letter saying that he was sending the letter through Durga.

The letter to Jawaharlal is distinctly on the defensive and begins almost on a note of mild asperity:

I see that all of you are terribly cut up over the resolutions of the Working Committee. I sympathize with you, and my heart goes out to Father. I can picture to myself the agony through which he must have passed but I also feel that this letter is unnecessary because I know that the first shock must have been followed by a true understanding of the situation. Let us not be obsessed by Devdas's youthful indiscretions. It is quite possible that the poor boy has been swept off his feet and that he has lost his balance, but the brutal murder of the constables by an infuriated crowd which was in sympathy with non-cooperation cannot be denied. Nor can it be denied that it was a politically-minded crowd. It would have been criminal not to have heeded such a clear warning.

His reference to Devadas is interesting—and significant. Presumably, Devadas' first statement after visiting Chauri Chaura must have rather irritated Jawaharlal and his fellow-prisoners

in Lucknow Jail. For there was undoubtedly a slight touch of hysteria about it, though later he was to produce a brief, but more balanced report to be found in Gandhi's Papers. Gandhi went on to add what most people must have guessed—that Chauri Chaura was the culminating incident in a chain of acts of violence which finally persuaded him, for good or ill, that the country was not ready for the kind of non-violent movement which he wanted to lead and which at the time was an absolute article of faith with him. As he puts it:

I must tell you that this was the last straw. My letter to the Viceroy was not sent without misgivings as its language must make it clear to anyone. I was much disturbed by the Madras doings, but I drowned the warning voice. I received letters both from Hindus and Mohammedans from Calcutta, Allahabad and the Punjab, all these before the Gorakhpur incident, telling me that the wrong was not all on the Government side, that our people were becoming aggressive, defiant and threatening, that they were getting out of hand and were not non-violent in demeanour.

He listed other cases of violence and hooliganism by the volunteers though he did not use the word "hooliganism." However, he also admitted excesses on the part of the authorities, like the shooting at Ferozepur Jirka at the end of December 1921. He described it as "discreditable to the Government." But he was more worried over the lapses on the Congress side and wrote about the complaint he had heard from the Congress President himself about Bareilly. He mentioned what had happened at Jajjar and Shahjahanpur—at the latter place there was an attempt to take possession of the Town Hall forcibly which, though not exactly a mortal sin, did not form part of his idea of a non-violent satyagraha campaign. To convince Jawaharlal that he had not been swayed by a single atrocity on the part of the Congress volunteers, but by the widespread indiscipline and unruliness among them, he piled instance upon instance of where they had transgressed:

From Kanouj too the Congress Secretary himself telegraphed saying that the volunteer boys had become unruly and were



picketing a High School and preventing youngsters under 16 from going to the school. 36,000 volunteers were enlisted in Gorakhpur, not 100 of whom conformed to the Congress pledge. In Calcutta Jamnalalji tells me there is utter disorganization, the volunteers wearing foreign cloth and certainly not pledged to non-violence. With all this news in my possession and much more from the South, the Chauri Chaura news came like a powerful match to ignite the gunpowder, and there was a blaze. I assure you that if the thing had not been suspended we would have been leading not a non-violent struggle but essentially a violent struggle.

At this point he turned back in his tracks and admitted that this was only one side of the picture and that "non-violence is spreading like the scent of the otto of roses throughout the length and breadth of the land, but the foetid smell of violence is still powerful, and it would be unwise to ignore or underrate it." There was no danger of his underrating it. Rather the contrary. Krishnadas relates a very significant incident which occurred on the day he broke his five-day fast—February 17. Just before he had partaken of some milk, fruit and fruit juice, he called Mathuradas Trikumdas to his side "and asked him to read the twelfth chapter of the *Gita*, himself sitting up on his bed with closed eyes and clasped hands, and hearing the recitation with great devotion and attention. A few tear drops escaped his eyes at the time."

Krishnadas asks rather in naive bewilderment: "What is it that Chauri Chaura has done, that he the very embodiment of self-restraint should today thus lose his balance?" The answer should have been obvious. In his letter to Jawaharlal he speaks tellingly of Chauri Chaura news having come to him "like a powerful match to ignite the gunpowder." Those who know their *Gita* would know that in Chapter eleven Krishna vouchsafes Arjuna with a vision of his true "mystic" and "in exhaustible form" for which Arjuna had himself asked, indeed craved. And that form was one of a cosmic reality of terror without pity and without end, of a universe really red in tooth and claw. By contrast, Chapter twelve of the *Gita* is almost an anticlimax, but a soothing one after the apocalypse that Arjuna had witnessed and which was to terrorise his mind into submission to Krishna's

will. For Gandhi, too, Chauri Chaura had been something in the nature of a terrifying apocalypse—or the bitter foretaste of it. He had seen the nightmare vision of India dissolving into violence, not necessarily because of the counter-violence and retaliation of the British Raj as had happened three years earlier in the Punjab, although, naturally, as the supreme leader of the civil disobedience movement, he could not ignore that possibility and the responsibility that rested on him. What worried him most, however, was what Indians might do to each other once the inhibitive discipline of non-violence was lifted or broke down. This was certainly an over-reaction on his part. Indeed, there was an element of hallucination about it. But that did not mean that it was less real to him. Rather the reverse. Imagined nightmares tend to be more, not less, terrifying than the real ones. That is why he must have experienced what the French call a sense of *soulagement* which brought tears to his eyes when he heard the comforting verses of Chapter twelve of the *Bhagavad Gita*.

Gandhi was desperately anxious that Jawaharlal should see the reason why he had acted as he had and sounded the call to retreat, or at least to mark time till they could conduct a truly disciplined satyagraha campaign. He told the young Nehru that "the cause will prosper by this retreat" and therefore not to be unduly upset by it: "We have come back to our moorings," he wrote, "and we can again go straight ahead." And then he rehearsed an argument that he was to develop at the Working Committee meeting at Delhi. But in putting it across to Jawaharlal he was mild and almost ingratiating while at Delhi he was to be harsh if not brutal in formulating it. After telling Nehru that he (Jawaharlal) was in a "disadvantageous" position compared to him (that is Gandhi) for "judging events in their due proportion" being in jail, he added:

May I give you my own experience of South Africa? We had all kinds of news brought to us in South Africa in our jails. For two or three days during my first experience I was glad enough to receive tit-bits, but I immediately realized the utter futility of interesting myself in this illegal gratification. I could do nothing, I could send no message profitably, and I simply vexed my soul uselessly. I felt that it was impossible

for me to guide the movement from the jail. I therefore simply waited till I could meet those who were outside and talk to them freely, and then too I want you to believe me when I tell you that I took only an academic interest because I felt it was not my province to judge anything, and I saw how unerringly right I was. I well remember how the thoughts I had up to the time of my discharge from the jail on every occasion were modified immediately after discharge and after getting first-hand information myself. Somehow or other the jail atmosphere does not allow you to have all the bearings in your mind.

Up to this point there was much that was valid in his argument that people in jail could not form an accurate assessment of what was going on outside the prison walls and, therefore, should be very much on their guard against pronouncing dogmatic judgement on matters of policy to be pursued by the freedom movement. But, in the mood in which he was, he was inclined to stretch his arguments beyond the point to which they could reasonably be stretched without losing their efficacy. He did so in the letter by telling Jawaharlal, "I would therefore like you to dismiss the outer world from your view altogether and ignore its existence." This was asking too much and sounded even a trifle ridiculous. He must have realised this. For he went on immediately to add:

I know this is a most difficult task, but if you take up some serious study and some serious manual work you can do it. Above all, whatever you do, don't you be disgusted with the spinning-wheel. You and I might have reason to get disgusted with ourselves for having done many things and having believed many things, but we shall never have the slightest cause for regret that we have pinned our faith to the spinning-wheel or that we have spun so much good yarn per day in the name of the motherland.

This again may sound rather bewildering if not downright ridiculous to political observers and scholars of revolutionary movements as must the suggestion that followed. "You have," he wrote "*Song Celestial* with you. I cannot give you the inimitable translation of Edwin Arnold, but this is the rendering of the Sanskrit text: There is no waste of energy, there is no

destruction in this. Even a little of this dharma saves one from many a pitfall. "This dharma" in the original refers to Karma Yoga, and the Karma Yoga of our age is the spinning-wheel."

Jawaharlal, of course, did not need any invocation by the Mahatma of the *Song Celestial* to be persuaded of the political and economic importance of the spinning-wheel or even its value as a psychological and spiritual discipline in the context of the Indian struggle for freedom. But what he made of the rest of Gandhi's rather forced arguments justifying his decision to abort the whole civil disobedience campaign because of the atrocity perpetrated by the crowds at Chauri Chaura and some relatively minor acts of indiscipline at other places must remain a matter for speculation. They could hardly have disarmed his disbelief and he probably shared his father's view who had written to Gandhi from his prison cell and asked why a town at the foot of the Himalayas be penalized because of the failure of a village at Cape Comorin to observe non-violence? Isolate Chauri Chaura and Gorakhpur, he had urged, but go on with civil disobedience individual and mass.

But while Jawaharlal Nehru may have found Gandhi's arguments for abandoning his civil disobedience plan altogether because of sporadic outbreak of violence in some places less than convincing he could not have remained untouched by the last sentence in Gandhi's letter. "I want a cheering letter from you," he had written, "after the freezing dose you have sent me through Pyarelal [presumably, Jawaharlal had used Pyarelal as the courier for the letter which he and his fellow-prisoners had sent Gandhi from Lucknow Jail]." Its seeming playfulness barely concealed the strong undertow of pathos in it which almost made it sound like a *cri de coeur*. For here was an older man—and one, moreover, who had already won major laurels in a novel form of struggle against the racist regime in Pretoria—asking a man twenty years his junior to send him words of good cheer. But then already a deep and complex relationship was developing between Gandhi and Nehru.

Certainly, the Mahatma recognised in Nehru a sincerity and purity of purpose which was rare even in those days. But it was not that alone; and it is by no means fanciful to suggest that Gandhi saw Nehru as the bridge to the younger generation—and the future. Censure of men like Moonje, or even criticism by

C.R. Das and Motilal Nehru, did not upset him as much as the "freezing dose" which Jawaharlal had administered to him. Hence his moving plea to the young Nehru to try to understand the reasons which had led him to call off the mass civil disobedience movement almost on the very day that it was to have been launched at Bardoli.

It is clear from the chapter in Nehru's autobiography entitled "Non-Violence and the Doctrine of the Sword" that while he was willing to give the Mahatma the benefit of the doubt—though, in the context, it would be more appropriate to call it the benefit of the faith he had in Gandhi—he was not wholly convinced by the arguments which Gandhi advanced to justify his decision. Nehru seemed even willing to concede that probably the decision itself was right under the circumstances. As he wrote:

The people generally were not strong enough to carry on the struggle for long and, in spite of almost universal discontent with foreign rule and sympathy with the Congress, there was not enough backbone or organisation. They could not last. Even the crowds that went to prison did so on the spur of the moment, expecting the whole thing to be over very soon. It may be, therefore, that the decision to suspend civil resistance in 1922 was a right one, though the manner of doing it left much to be desired and brought about a certain demoralisation.

But this was quite a different argument based on purely pragmatic considerations and not on any moral categorical imperatives. Nehru admired Gandhian doctrine of non-violence which, he said, "was not a coward's refuge from action, but the brave man's defiance of evil and national subjection." But he was also quite positive that for him "and for the National Congress as a whole the non-violent method was not, and could not be, a religion or an unchallengeable creed or dogma. It could only be a policy and a method promising certain results, and by those results it would have to be finally judged. Individuals might make of it a religion or incontrovertible creed. But no political organisation, so long as it remained political, could do so." This precisely was the ground on which critics of Gandhi's decision, men like

Motilal Nehru, C.R. Das, and Lajpat Rai took their stand and questioned it.

Yet, perhaps, the important question is not whether Gandhi was able to convince men like Jawaharlal Nehru and others of the validity of the reasons which persuaded Gandhi to suspend his Satyagraha campaign when all was set for its launching. The really important question—and one which has rarely been debated—is whether Gandhi himself was wholly convinced that he had done the right thing. Outwardly, this question might seem superfluous and irrelevant if not frivolous. The vehemence with which he defended his decision not only against critics whose judgment he did not particularly value but even those whose opinion carried much weight with him, the forceful way in which he argued against his opponents in the Working Committee and the A.I.C.C. might be regarded as evidence of his strong conviction that he had acted rightly in withdrawing the mass civil disobedience. But the very vehemence which led him at points to overstatement of his case and resort to forced arguments wholly uncharacteristic of him suggested, perhaps, that a fierce argument was going on within him and that he was trying to grapple with his own inward doubt whether he had done the right thing.

This is not to suggest that there were not strong reasons for calling off the civil resistance campaign. Jawaharlal Nehru stated some of them very lucidly in his autobiography. Quite apart from the sporadic acts of violence culminating in the ghastly tragedy of Chauri Chaura, there was evidence that in several areas local leaders were giving their own twist to the movement and stretching its scope to include activities which were not sanctioned by the Congress. Krishnadas has related that about the same time as he heard the news of Chauri Chaura, he had received several letters from small and big landholders in U.P., Bengal and other parts of India that their tenants were withholding payments of their dues and even "threatening them with violence."

There was nothing surprising about such local excesses and it was, perhaps, unrealistic of the Mahatma that he expected strict observance of the letter and the spirit of his instructions. It was natural that the participants in the civil disobedience campaign should bring to the movement their own immediate preoccupations. Professor Ravinder Kumar in his introduction

to the second volume of *A Centenary History of The Indian National Congress* (1885-1985) has quoted the views of a worker in Bombay Textile Industry about what the movement meant to him. He said:

At that time we workers understood the meaning of this demand for swaraj to be only this; that our indebtedness would disappear, the oppression of the moneylender would stop, our wages would increase, and the oppression of the owner on the worker, the kicks and blows with which they belabour us, would stop by legislation, and that as a result of it, the persecution of us workers would come to an end. These and other thoughts came into the minds of us workers, and a good many workers from among us, and I myself, enlisted ourselves as volunteers in the non-cooperation movement.

This is a revealing—even touching—extract from the statement which A.A. Alwe, President of the Girni Kamgar Union, made at the mass trial at Meerut of the leading members of the working class movement, mostly Communists but including a few radical Congress and Khilafat leaders, who were arrested by the Government in a countrywide sweep in March 1929. It serves to underline that parallax effect which seems ineluctable in any progressive political movement which makes those participating in it wishfully to read more into its scope and possibilities than its objective limitations allow. This was to happen time and again during the Indian freedom struggle, the more so, perhaps, because of the Messianic expectancy which Gandhi tended to impart to it. Those who volunteered for the satyagraha in 1921-22 could not help putting a subjective gloss upon it dictated by their own heartfelt economic and political desires and preoccupations which were clearly no part of the aims which it was intended to achieve. Nor can they be criticised for so doing and Gandhi was being less than Gandhian when at times he dealt severely with those who naively imagined that he was about to launch a full-scale agrarian revolution, like the young man from the U.P. who, according to Krishnadas, asked the Mahatma at Bardoli on February 10: "Sir, when will you order the lands

owned and controlled by the Zemindars to be distributed among the tenants?", only to earn a sharp rebuke from him.

However, this does not necessarily justify the critique which the Marxist Left at one time directed against Gandhi and echoes of which are still to be picked up in Marxist historiography. For it seems the height of inequity to accuse the Mahatma of having betrayed the peasantry and the working class movement because he was stubbornly unwilling to go along with their wishes and insisted on conducting the civil disobedience movement within the limits which he—and the Congress—had set and strictly in accordance with the method which he had evolved and the Congress had accepted. The Ahmedabad Congress had defined his mandate and that mandate did not include a general call and sanction for a mass uprising of the workers and peasants in India even if he had been so minded. But he was not so minded. Nor was the Congress or it would have chosen someone else to lead it and, perhaps, would have had to be quite a different Congress.

Nor is there any reason to suppose that the conditions were ripe at the time for a revolutionary uprising of that kind. R. Palme Dutt writing eighteen years later in his *India Today* cites the example of Guntur and asserts, not entirely without a touch of dogmatism, that at "a word of command from the Congress" there would have been "a universal refusal of land revenue and rent" throughout the country. Leaving nothing to chance, he goes on to quote extensively from the resolution adopted at Bardoli by the Congress Working Committee on February 12, 1922, taking care to add his own emphasis to certain clauses, presumably to identify the cloven hoof of the class Devil in the anatomy of the Congress leadership and especially Gandhi. The clauses he chooses to italicize read as follows:

- Clause 6. The Working Committee advises Congress workers and organisations to inform the ryots (peasants) that withholding of rent payment to the Zemindars (landlords) is contrary to the Congress resolutions and injurious to the best interest of the country.
- Clause 7 The Working Committee assures the Zemindars that the Congress movement is no way intended to attack their legal rights, and that even where the



ryots have grievances, the Committee desires that redress be sought by mutual consultation and arbitration.

Thus the case for the prosecution would seem to Dutt as perfect as could be and the Congress—and Gandhi—stood accused by their own acts of admission. As he puts it:

The resolution shows that it was not an abstract question of non-violence which actuated the movers. . . . The dominant leadership of the Congress associated with Gandhi called off the movement because they were afraid of the awakening mass activity; and they were afraid of the mass activity because it was beginning to threaten those propertied class interests with which they themselves were still in fact closely linked. Not the question of 'violence' or 'non-violence', but the question of class interest in opposition to the mass movement, was the breaking-point of the national struggle in 1922. . . . This was the real meaning of 'Non-Violence.'

But was it? Not quite. There is such a thing as a case for the prosecution which is too perfect and cut and dried to be true; and that applies to the case which Palme Dutt builds. The clauses which he italicises were but statement of facts as they then existed. The non-payment of rents to the landlords was not part of the Congress Programme. Perhaps it ought to have been, but the truth is that it was not. Nearly a decade was to pass before the Congress very gingerly moved towards mooted the idea of modest land reforms and nothing as drastic as expropriation of the landlords. Nor is it by any means certain that the political climate was ripe for such a radical solution. A Guntur here and a Guntur there could not have been reasonably interpreted by any adult observer as presaging a summer of agrarian revolutionary upsurge on a subcontinental scale. After all, in years to come parties and groups in India swearing by Marx, Lenin and even Mao were to be deluded into issuing calls to the peasants and workers to overthrow at one go imperialism, capitalism and feudalism without achieving any brilliant results and often ending in fiascos and demoralisation all along the line.

At all events the Ahmedabad Congress had not authorised

Gandhi to undertake any quixotic effort at storming heaven. Nor was Gandhi willing to do so. The mass civil disobedience which he had promised was to be a struggle on a limited front and in that struggle, as has been noted, he was anxious to carry even the Moderates with him who did not approve of satyagraha but were exercised over the increasing curtailment of such civil liberties as existed. He certainly did not consider it good political generalship to enlarge the number of his adversaries by launching out an attack, albeit a non-violent one, in what the French call *tout azimuts*. He had intended to concentrate on the main issues and on the main adversary and had opposed those who had wanted to enlarge the scope of the struggle.

The critique of Gandhi's conduct in 1922 developed with much force and even intellectual incisiveness by Palme Dutt, therefore, would seem to be not only unfair but irrelevant as was the censure he earned from men of the sectarian Right like Dr. Moonje. It is even doubtful whether it connected with any serious Marxist analysis of the possibilities of the situation in India in 1922 and savoured rather of ardent adventism verging on adventurist fantasies. This cannot be said, however, of the criticism of Gandhi by the middle-of-the-road Congress leaders like Motilal Nehru, Lajpat Rai and C.R. Das. They had fallen in line with Gandhi over the issue of civil disobedience despite their own misgivings as to whether it was the right moment and the right method; and they felt annoyed with him and let down at his unconditional withdrawal of the movement without consulting their views simply because they were in jail. Jawaharlal Nehru, of course, retrospectively tried to justify Gandhi's decision which at the time he had regarded as arbitrary and unacceptable. He writes in his autobiography:

As a matter of fact even the suspension of civil resistance in February 1922 was certainly not due to Chauri Chaura alone, although most people imagined so. That was only the last straw. Gandhiji has often acted almost by instinct by long and close association with the masses he appears to have developed, as great popular leaders often do, a new sense which tells him how the mass feels, what it does and what it can do. He reacts to this instinctive feeling and fashions his actions accordingly, and later, for the benefit of his

surprised and resentful colleagues, tries to clothe his decision with reasons. This covering is often very inadequate, as it seemed after Chauri Chaura. At that time our movement, in spite of its apparent power and the widespread enthusiasm, was going to pieces. All organisation and discipline was disappearing; almost all our good men were in prison, and the masses had so far received little training to carry on by themselves. Any unknown man who wanted to do so could take charge of a Congress committee and, as a matter of fact, large numbers of undesirable men, including *agents provocateurs*, came to the front and even controlled some local Congress and Khilafat organisations. There was no way of checking them.

There is something in Jawaharlal Nehru's argument. However, it still seems to be largely a case of special pleading on behalf of Gandhi, prompted by Nehru's feeling that it was better to be wrong with the Mahatma than be right with most others. It was certainly not how he felt when he administered Gandhi that "freezing dose" in his letter from Lucknow prison. Palme Dutt was undoubtedly on firmer ground when he wrote, "It may be asked in what sense the movement was 'going to pieces'." There is no reason to think that the British Government and those who presided over the affairs of India for it considered that the civil disobedience movement was "going to pieces" or was running out of steam at the beginning of February 1922. On the contrary, Palme Dutt pertinently quoted a telegram which Reading had sent to the Secretary of State for India (Edwin Montagu) on the morrow of the Chauri Chaura incident (February 9) which presented a rather alarmist assessment of the situation in India:

The lower classes in the towns have been seriously affected by the non-cooperation movement.... In certain areas the peasantry have been affected, particularly in parts of the Assam Valley, United Provinces, Bihar and Orissa and Bengal. As regards the Punjab, the Akali agitation ... has penetrated to the rural Sikhs. A large proportion of the Mohammedan population throughout the country are embittered and sullen ... grave possibilities...The Government of India are prepared for disorder of a more formidable

nature than has in the past occurred, and do not seek to minimise in any way the fact that great anxiety is caused by the situation.

This assessment of the situation in the country could not be dismissed as that of an overwrought administration reached in a fit of anxiety or moment of panic. George Lloyd (later Lord Lloyd,) a hard-line imperialist but not a man devoid of intelligence and even some understanding, who was at the time Governor of Bombay and who would have had to face the music if Gandhi had gone ahead with his plans for civil disobedience at Bardoli, recollecting the events in a measure of tranquillity a year and a half later was in no doubt that the Government faced a very grave challenge and were at their wits' end how to tackle it. In an interview with the well-known American columnist, Drew Pearson, he admitted the success of Gandhi's boycott of schools and courts and even candidly acknowledged that his campaign of the boycott of Prince of Wales' visit was effective enough for "the streets down which his procession passed" to be "almost empty." More : he told Drew Pearson (see Appendix IV):

He [Gandhi] gave us a scare. His programme filled our gaols. You can't go on arresting people for ever, you know—not when there are 319,000,000 [population of British India at the time] of them. And if they had taken his next step and refused to pay taxes, God knows where should we have been! Gandhi's was the most colossal experiment in world's history, and it came within an inch of succeeding. But he couldn't control men's passions. They became violent, and he called off his programme. You know the rest....

It is clear from the evidence of the man on the spot that, whether or not the Chauri Chaura affair was engineered by some *agent provocateur*—and the Indian Government and its intelligence were fully aware of his sensitivity on the question of violence—the authorities both in London and Delhi must have heaved a sigh of relief when he reacted in the way he did. What would have been the result if he had gone on with his programme of progressively escalating civil disobedience as was planned must remain a matter of speculation—and rather idle speculation.

The movement might still have fizzled out without achieving its main ends. But, equally, it cannot be claimed with absolute certainty that it would have failed. The only possible verdict on the decision he took must be an open one.

Jawaharlal Nehru was probably right in saying that, like all popular leaders, Gandhi had a special instinctive sense of what the masses were going to do and were capable of doing. But, unlike most popular leaders, he rarely yielded to the temptation of pandering to populist demands. In fact, he often swam against the tide of popular opinion and took decisions which his critics regarded as cussed and which even puzzled his most devoted colleagues. The decision to cancel the civil disobedience in February 1922 was one of the most unpopular decisions he had taken since he entered the arena of Indian politics in right earnest. It brought on his head attacks from all sides—Right, Left and Centre. Nor did the authorities, though they were immensely relieved, thank him for this relief. On the contrary, at a time when it was being bruited about with malice aforethought that he had been instrumental in sending thousands of his followers behind the bars while himself continuing to bask in freedom, they responded to his unpopular moral gesture by intensifying repression.

At Delhi, while attending the Working Committee and the All-India Congress Committee meetings, he had plenty of opportunities of listening from the representatives of the various provinces harrowing stories of the police atrocities. A young representative of Assam had described to him the reign of terror let loose by the Government in parts of the Province. He was told in no uncertain terms by representatives of Bengal that, as Dr. Sitaramayya quotes them, "Bengal is not going to pay the Chowkidari tax [a punitive police tax which was a popular form of punishment with the authorities], say what you will." He returned to his Ashram near Ahmedabad on March 1st or 2nd only to find a letter from Jang Bahadur Singh, a noted political worker and journalist, written on February 28 from Allahabad which Gandhi published in *Young India* of March 9. Jang Bahadur Singh had been deputed with five others by the Gorakhpur Congress Committee to help the village in Hata Tahsil or sub-district "in the vicinity of Chauri Chaura" in resuming their normal life. He detailed instances of torture of

villagers and cases of looting and flogging and said : "If the Government cares to contradict the reports, I will take it upon myself to prove the substance of the allegations I have made."

The endorsement of his Bardoli decision by the A.I.C.C. had given him no particular pleasure. With that love of paradox that he often displayed, he had written in his Gujarati weekly *Navajivan* "I am not a quick despairee....But I must say the meeting of the All-India Congress Committee this time disappointed me.... The All-India Congress Committee gave me a majority, but I could see that very few really liked the Bardoli resolutions. I got the votes because I was Gandhi and not because people were convinced. How can we put any value on them?.... A duel was going on between the heart and the head of the majority. The heart would incline towards me, while the head would run miles away from me. I felt, and still feel, unhappy at this."

This was a largely true and perceptive judgment. That was why he not only felt unhappy, but confessed that if he saw "light even where there is pitch darkness," it was because he forced himself to do so. That was also probably the reason why he did not accept the suggestion, as Krishnadas tells us, that he should "take-up another tour to various important cities of Northern India to assure the general mass of the people that the policy of non-cooperation had not been abandoned by the Bardoli decision, and also to propagate the message of non-violence with greater insistence. It was in this mood of despondency compounded by a sense of helplessness that he wrote an anguished and bitter piece in *Young India* entitled "The Death Dance". He thought it to be rather well written. Krishnadas has recorded that he called him by name as soon as he had finished writing the article, exclaiming "in raptures", "Krishnadas, see what a beautiful article I have written! It is indeed, a piece of beauty; see how I have described the condition of present-day India."

The article certainly has fine literary phrasing, but it reflects a mood, quite unusual with the Mahatma, of anger with the exploited as well as the exploiters. Apparently, a doubling of the salt tax was being contemplated by the Government and there was an uproar about this added burden on the poor. But Gandhi was not impressed by the vehement disapproval of the measure by the political elite, not only the Moderates but even some of the "loyalists." "Why is there this chorus of condemnation of

the doubling of the salt tax and other taxes on the necessities of life?" he asked and went on to add : "Wonder is expressed that now there is no apology even offered for the terrific military charges of sixty-two crores. The fact is, it is impossible to offer apology for the inevitable." The military were needed, he said, not for the defence of India but "for the forcible imposition of the English exploiters upon India. That is the naked truth. Mr. Montagu has bluntly but honestly stated it. The retiring President of the Bengal Chamber of Commerce has said it and so has the Governor of Bombay."

He described the whole paraphernalia of "Reforms", the Councils and the like, as "the kid glove" and said : "We must pay for the glove. . . . They cover a multitude of defects including the blood-sucking salt tax." He went on in the same embittered vein even to argue that it would be "a thousand times better" for India "to be ruled by a military dictator than to have the dictatorship concealed under sham councils and assemblies. They prolong the agony and increase the expenditure. If we are so anxious to live, it would be more honourable to face the truth and submit to unabashed dictation than to pretend that we are slowly becoming free. There is no such thing as slow freedom. Freedom is like a birth. Till we are fully free, we are slaves."

These were seductive phrases even if they could not stand the test of connecting with political reality. So was the penultimate paragraph in which the phrase "The Death Dance", which gave the article its title, was used to some effect :

The councillors want their fares and extras, the ministers their salaries, the lawyers their fees, the suitors their decrees, the parents such education for their boys [not yet girls, it seems] as would give them status in the present life, the millionnaires want facilities for multiplying their millions and the rest their unmanly peace. The whole revolves beautifully round the central corporation. It is a giddy dance from which no one cares to free himself and so, as the speed increases, the exhilaration is the greater. But it is a death dance and the exhilaration is induced by the rapid heart beat of a patient who is about to expire.

For one who was often accused of being against socialism,

this came remarkably close to a socialist critique of capitalist society of his day and our own. But that is not the point. The point is that this article was written on the morning of March 8 by Gandhi "returning to his room from the prayer ground" at his Sabarmati Ashram. But it was not the only article that he wrote that day. Indeed, before it he wrote another piece which was headed "If I Am Arrested." It was somewhat longer and both appeared the next day in *Young India* when he was himself at Ajmer where he had gone overnight to attend a Conference of *Ulemas* or Muslim clerics. He explained at the very outset that "the rumour has been revived" that his arrest was imminent and even added that he could not himself "see how the Government can avoid arresting him if they want a permanent abandonment of civil disobedience, whether individual or mass." He also referred to the reports that "the Government are compassing the destruction of the three weeklies" which he was conducting, viz., *Young India*, *Gujarati Navajivan* and *Hindi Navajivan*. Characteristically, he hoped that the rumour about his three journals was "without foundation" since they were "insistently preaching nothing but peace and goodwill." One might have thought that this was rather a naive hope since insistent preaching of peace and goodwill by journals or individuals have never assured them immunity against closure and prosecution, least of all in British India.

Surprisingly, despite his bitter comment in the article "The Death Dance" on the repressive policies of the Government, he reiterated that he had "advised the Working Committee to suspend mass civil disobedience" and added that he was "now advising all provincial workers to suspend even individual civil disobedience" because he knew that "any disobedience at the present stage" would be "not civil but criminal." The turning of the other cheek could hardly have gone further. But the main purpose of the article "If I am Arrested" was to instruct the Congress workers and organisations what to do and not to do in the event of his arrest. This came in the penultimate paragraph :

There should therefore be no hartals, no noisy demonstrations, no processions. I would regard the observance of perfect peace on my arrest as a mark of high honour paid to me by my countrymen. What I would love to see, however, is the



constructive work of the Congress going on with clockwork regularity and the speed of the Punjab Express [apparently the fastest train in those days]. I would love to see people who have hitherto kept back, voluntarily discarding all their foreign cloth and making a bonfire of it. Let them fulfil the whole of the constructive programme framed at Bardoli, and they will not only release me and other prisoners, but they will also inaugurate swaraj and secure redress of the Khilafat and the Punjab wrongs.

He reminded his readers of "the four pillars of swaraj : non-violence, Hindu-Muslim-Sikh-Parsi-Christian-Jew unity, total removal of untouchability and manufacture of hand-spun and hand-woven khaddar completely displacing foreign cloth." He added that his removal from their midst might be of benefit to the people because it would not only destroy "the superstition about the possession of supernatural powers" by him, but demolish the belief that it was only because of his influence that the people have accepted the non-cooperation programme." He concluded by adding, again characteristically, that he had a selfish reason for welcoming his arrest : "It will give me a quiet and physical rest, which perhaps I deserve."

He was not to be disappointed—at least in securing a fairly prolonged period of rest for himself even though it was not quite as quiet as he would have wished it to be. It was, of course, not the first time that he had referred to the rumours of his imminent arrest. Such rumours had periodically surfaced during the previous six months or more. Nor were they just idle gossip. If the Government had their intelligence men and informants in the Congress camp, the Congress, too, had its sources of information within the bureaucratic structures. It may be that at times these sources dished out disinformation. Nevertheless the Congress leadership was often well posted on what the Government was up to.

At any rate among the documents brought to light during Gulzari Lal Nanda's stewardship of the Home Ministry there is a note prepared by William Vincent, the Government of India's Home Member during Chelmsford's and part of Reading's viceroyalty dated October 10, 1921, in which the pros and cons of arresting and prosecuting Gandhi were carefully set out. As Francis Watson has recounted in his *The Trial of Mr. Gandhi*,

"There were half-a-dozen items under each head. But the question was so intricate, and the evidence from provincial sources so curious and conflicting, that most of the arguments could be read both ways." Some thought that Gandhi was already "losing influence" and, therefore, it was best to give him long enough rope. Others felt that it was time to grasp this most prickly of political nettles and lock him up immediately. One thought which, it seems, weighed heavily with the authorities was the then forthcoming tour of the Prince of Wales who had been receiving "wildly popular reception on tours through the rest of the Empire." They were anxious not to foul the political climate which Gandhi's arrest might have done. Vincent advised postponement of any action against Gandhi.

That was not the end of the matter. Francis Watson has told the story of the whole back and forth over the question so well in his book that it seems supererogatory to tell it again. But one interesting and significant point has to be noted. This was the reversal of the role of the Government in London and its agency in Delhi. Hitherto, the Home Government, which had the parliamentary opposition to think of, was mostly inclined to counsel caution and restraint and it was the Government of India and especially some of its provincial satraps, who strained at the leash. But this time, for complex reasons, it was to be the other way round. Unlike Vincent—and Reading—Lloyd George and his Cabinet, Francis Watson says, "were inclined to treat the arrest of Gandhi as of prior importance, and the question of the Prince's visit as secondary. At a meeting on 12 October, with the Prime Minister in the chair and Curzon, Montagu and Churchill among others in attendance, the Secretary of State was instructed to tell the Viceroy that there should be no delay in taking action to vindicate the Government of India's authority. As between deporting Gandhi and bringing him to trial, the latter would be preferable." But London wanted above all speed in despatching the affair. About the Prince's visit, the Cabinet wanted the Government of India to go ahead with the arrangements, unless they "thought that a decision to arrest Gandhi would make a revision of the project desirable, in which case" they were asked to let their views be known to the Home Government.

Reading resorted to the technique of passive resistance. He ruled out immediate arrest of the Mahatma. Montagu was then

asked to send him "a reasoned telegram" that they had not changed their views on arresting being best, and this was to be reinforced by a personal message from the Prime Minister who with his usual flair, duly drafted one to the satisfaction of the Cabinet meeting on October 21. It did not succeed in moving the Viceroy who, to please No. 10 Downing Street and the India Office, redoubled arrests of Gandhi's followers and early in November declared the Congress Volunteers "an illegal organisation." This policy of Reading—strong action against all others but the Mahatma—continued after the Prince of Wales' arrival in India and the Moderates, led by Malaviya, only helped Reading in his resistance to instructions from London by floating the idea of a "Round Table" get together to prevent the launching of mass civil disobedience at Bardoli.

Curzon, who presided at the Foreign Office, was furious. He had the backing of Churchill. They thought that Reading "appeared to be ready to compromise the whole Indian policy of the Government and endanger British rule in India to purchase the ephemeral advantage of a good reception for the Prince of Wales." The Cabinet told Reading that if he wanted to receive any Indian politician he was free to do so, but "that it would be most improper to make a conference conditional on a welcome for the Prince." Similar truculence was reflected in messages from some Governors, including Lloyd in Bombay who informed the Viceroy, Watson writes, that in his own Presidency he could not take responsibility for "further restraining the due processes of justice"—a coded message that the arrest of Gandhi had become a matter of urgency.

Gandhi's letter to the Viceroy sent on February 1 seemed the last straw. Reading saw in it an "insolent ultimatum" as he duly informed London. Montagu, close to his political end and having exhausted any credit he ever had with India that mattered, replied in a vein of "I told you so." He sent a telegram to the Viceroy, writes Francis Watson, saying "how regrettable had been the delay in arresting its author, whose whole organisation it might now be advisable to suppress.... In London, the Home Government, fully aroused, met in ministerial conferences on 9 and 10 February.... Winston Churchill told his colleagues, an idea was prevalent among many people that 'we were fighting a rearguard action in India, that the British Raj was doomed

and that India would gradually be handed over to Indians'." Lloyd George, whose finest hour lay well behind him assuming that there was one, blew even hotter. He wanted the notion abroad among British official and commercial communities in India that "His Majesty's Government intended ultimately to withdraw from India" to be scotched firmly. "There must be a master in India," he insisted, "or it would relapse into chaos. We were now masters, and should let it be understood that we meant to remain so."

This was the climate of opinion among those who ruled India whether from afar or near just about a week after Chauri Chaura though the Raj had taken the affair in its stride and without turning a hair. Lloyd, according to Watson, was told by the Viceroy on February 11 that he could go ahead with Gandhi's arrest. February 14 was set as the deadline for the deed. But on that very day—February 11—the Working Committee had met at Bardoli and had adopted Gandhi's resolution recommending to the A.I.C.C. to suspend mass civil disobedience. This made Delhi think again. The Governor of Bombay received a message from Delhi early in the morning on February 14 that he had better postpone the arrest. Francis Watson observes, "Lloyd's normally steady head was beginning to spin." The more so because he had succeeded in "securing the assent of two Indian members of his Executive Council and three elected Indian Ministers" and they might have second thoughts if given time to reflect.

Lloyd himself, of course, was aware that Gandhi might cancel the whole civil disobedience movement. In fact, he was pretty sure of it. For the Mahatma had seen him, probably on February 9 when he had visited Bombay for the day after hearing of the Chauri Chaura killings. Lloyd was later to tell Drew Pearson that Gandhi was very shaken by the event and penitent. Lloyd chided him and said: "I told you what would happen. You are responsible." Gandhi, Lloyd told Drew Pearson, covered his face with his hands and said, "I know it". Giving further details of his meeting with the Mahatma after the Chauri Chaura incident Lloyd said he admonished Gandhi. "You know it!" he said, "Well, can your knowing it bring back to life the men and women whose heads were ground into dust by the heels of your Indian mob?" To this Gandhi replied, "Put me in gaol, Your Excellency." "Yes", Lloyd said, "I will put you in

gaol, but not until I get good and ready. Do you think I want to put a crown of thorns on your head?"

Lloyd was being a little disingenuous. He had been holding his hand not because he did not want to make a martyr of Gandhi—and his use of the phrase "crown of thorns" twice in the course of his interview with Drew Pearson would seem to be interesting and significant—but because Delhi had not made up its mind whether or not to arrest Gandhi immediately even as late as February 9. The Viceroy gave the green signal to Lloyd only on February 11 and then only to flash the red light again in the early hours of February 14. At all events it was not within the competence of Lloyd to place or not to place a crown of thorns on Gandhi's head. As far as that was concerned, Gandhi's own people were perfectly capable of fashioning a crown of thorns and even prepare a proper Calvary for him as the humankind have often done for those to whom their debt is far too great to be paid in any other currency except infliction of unmerited suffering.

But that apart, and undoubtedly, part of the reason for the go-stop conduct of the Viceroy was the complication created by Gandhi's sudden cancellation of the Bardoli civil disobedience plan. But, perhaps, there was also another and almost subliminal reason. Reading was a far subtler man than his predecessor, Chelmsford, or at least more intricate in his calculations and taking his dispositions. He may well have thought it necessary to start a round about process of detaching the Khilafat movement from the Congress before arresting Gandhi. To be effective it had not to be obviously divisive and even capable of being interpreted as a move to appease both the Congress and the Khilafat movement. After all, Gandhi himself had asked the Government "to make common cause with the people of India" over the Khilafat issue.

The idea must have had a long period of gestation. But the brain child of Reading was secretly delivered on March 1. "Early in the morning," Watson writes, Montagu received from "Reading a telegram proposing that Britain should recommend the formal revision of the Sevres Treaty, so as to secure the evacuation of Constantinople, the restoration of the Sultan's suzerainty over the Holy Places, and the return of Thrace and Smyrna to Turkey." This was a seemingly tempting idea likely to appeal to the Indian Muslims and a feeler thrown out to the Muslim political elite that

the British Raj was fully prepared to restore the favourite wife to the old status with full restitution of all conjugal rights. The offer, of course, was no more than a promissory note which might never have to be redeemed because other parties were involved and they might not be agreeable to the revision of the Treaty to help the British in renewed wooing of the Indian Muslim opinion.

But precisely because of its purely hypothetical—not to say hypocritical—nature it was likely to appeal to Montagu. He was willing to be the godfather without consulting the Prime Minister and his Cabinet colleagues. As Watson puts it:

By waiting until Friday to order the copying of this inflammatory document and its circulation to the Cabinet, the Secretary of State reached the blessed refuge of the English political week-end, for the task was not completed until Saturday afternoon. But on that day there reached him in his country retreat a second viceregal telegram seeking agreement for the immediate publication of the proposals in India. And to this Montagu wired his private assent, adding that he would confirm it officially on Monday.

One can well understand why Reading was in a hurry to publish the details of the revision of the Treaty of Sevres which the British Government wanted, on his persuasion, to suggest to their partners in the Treaty. Both Lloyd and Willingdon—Governor of Madras—had been called to Delhi for consultations, presumably on the issue of Gandhi's arrest and other matters. So had been the Governor of Bengal. It had been finally decided to cross the Rubicon and lock the Mahatma up. A date was fixed—March 10. But Reading obviously wanted the news of the arrest to be muffled by other headlines—the Government's concession to the Indian Muslims and the Congress which had made the Khilafat cause its own—on the Turkish question.

But it was not only Montagu's political credit in India which had run out and which he hoped would be in some measure restored by his having persuaded the British Cabinet to adopt Reading's thesis on the Treaty of Sevres. But things went hopelessly awry for him. His enemies in the Cabinet were not going to let him get away with it. When it met on Monday, March 6, "with Austen Chamberlain in the chair, Lloyd George being

ill," Curzon took strong exception to "any publication of Reading's telegram." Watson writes:

Montagu told him [Curzon] he had already authorised the Viceroy to do just that. It could still have been stopped, but nothing was done. It was published in India on Wednesday, in time to provide (as may have been thought) disarming cover for the step to be taken against Gandhi. The British Press carried it next day, and a storm of protest as well. In the Commons, to loud cheers from the Tory benches, Chamberlain spoke of the collective responsibility of cabinets and the duties of all governments of the Empire, and announced that the resignation of the Secretary of State for India had been tendered and accepted.

By a strange coincidence his famous speech which had set many an Indian political heart aflutter in July 1917 had also been made on a Thursday. Now his political eclipse—and more than just a political eclipse—was being made public on another Thursday. He was deeply hurt and although in a speech in his Cambridge constituency he described Lloyd George, as Watson relates, "a great if eccentric genius" who had demanded and been paid his price: "the total, complete and absolute disappearance of collective responsibility ever since he formed the Government." Lloyd George evidently was not willing even to spare an ambiguous compliment for his colleague whom he had found rather serviceable at one stage. In a letter to Frances Stevenson (later his second wife and Countess) he did not mince his words and called Montagu "a swine and a sneak."

Thus, remarks Watson, "the political career that was ended... was not Gandhi's. It was Montagu's." He adds: "But the tragedy for Edwin Montagu was that for him India was very much more than a political job. His life was over." This is perfectly true, though, perhaps, it could be said that like most clever politicians—and not only clever politicians—he was his own executioner. He never had a chance in hell to carry out some of the good intentions he had at the beginning. He had hardly any political base or following—except curiously in India, including Gandhi who insisted at the Amritsar Congress that there should be no word of censure of him. He should have resigned long before and

not been made to quit over the "bizarre" episode of the publication of Reading's telegram ostensibly offering a sop to the Khilafatists in India.

As for Gandhi, he was politically indestructible. Possibly, if the Government had left the Mahatma alone to face the mounting storm of criticism both within and without the Congress and allowed him to get tied up in illogical knots in justifying his decision, his influence might have been irretrievably eroded. But there were men in the administration, from Montagu downwards, who in their irritation with "the Saint," wanted to be brought home to Gandhi that his saintliness conferred no immunity on him. So the knock at the door of his room at the Sabarmati Ashram for which he had been waiting and almost longing duly came. It did not come at the midnight hour or at the first crowing of the cock as it was to come twenty years later, but at half past ten on the evening of March 10.

But, perhaps, it is incorrect to say that there was any knock at the door in a literal sense. Gandhi had returned to Ahmedabad and the Sabarmati Ashram from Ajmer that afternoon. He had got down at Sabarmati station and "quite a number of people from Ahmedabad and neighbouring places had arrived at Sabarmati, and been anxiously waiting for his return." This was because rumour had spread that he had already been arrested and, as Krishnadas tells us, telegrams had come from many people, including one from Jawaharlal Nehru, "asking for the verification of the widespread rumour." He goes on to relate a curious incident that took place at Sabarmati station which bears quotation:

As the train stopped at the Sabarmati station he got down from it with a face radiant with smiles, and was about to leave the precincts of the station escorted by a large crowd of people. At that moment a British soldier, who had been watching Mahatmaji from the train with wide and curious eyes, stretched out his hand as Mahatmaji was about to pass him, and said, "Mr. Gandhi, I must shake hands with you." Mahatmaji also stretched his hand which was immediately grasped by the soldier, who in the fullness of his heart stammered out some feeling words which, however, we could not catch.



After resting for a while at the Ashram, according to Krishnadas, he sent a cryptic message to the Congress office at Bombay: "Weather permitting going Bardoli Sunday—Gandhi." He attended the evening prayer meeting and Krishnadas tells us that "he was in an exceptionally happy and hilarious mood." After the prayers he went to his room and dictated several letters, including one to Paul Richard asking him to come to Bardoli on Sunday and telling him that he was publishing his statement (in *Young India* of March 16), and another to M.R. Jayakar in which among other things, he wrote: "I should be sorry if anything I have written has led you to infer that I have in any shape or form altered my view about the efficacy of imprisonment for our salvation."

His own salvation through imprisonment at least came within an hour or so of dictating these words. It came in the person of Daniel Healy, Superintendent of Police, Ahmedabad. Healy could not have carried out his stern duty more courteously. He would not even enter the Ashram to arrest the Mahatma, but waited for him on the public highway in his car, "allowing Mahatmaj," Krishnads writes, "as much time as he desired to prepare himself for the surrender." Gandhi was delighted when he was informed that Healy was waiting outside to take him to Sabarmati Jail conveniently located not far from the Ashram. According to Gandhi's Boswell during this critical period, he kept muttering as he got ready: "Oh! the happy day; the best thing has happened; the best thing indeed has happened."

In a sense it had—for him. Palme Dutt rather scathingly remarks in *India Today*: "After the movement had been thus paralysed and demoralised from within, the Government struck with confidence. On March 10 Gandhi was arrested.... Not a ripple followed in the mass movement.... The crisis was over." It wasn't and the fact that Dutt thought so only shows that erudite Marxists can be superficial in their judgements on events and often tend to be insensitive to their long-term moral and psychological dimensions. If it is permissible to think that the calling off by Gandhi of the civil disobedience movement in February 1922 was an Himalayan blunder as some argued at the time and continue to argue to this day, it is equally permissible to suggest that his arrest by the Government a month later was a blunder of no lesser magnitude.

At any rate, its immediate effect was to silence his vociferous critics within the Congress and even those outside it—at least for a time. Jawaharlal Nehru, who had been released from Lucknow Jail a few days before Gandhi's arrest and had decided to go at once to Ahmedabad, arrived only to be able to interview him in Sabarmati prison and, of course, attended the trial. "I was present at his trial," he writes in his autobiography, "it was a memorable occasion, and those of us who were present are not likely ever to forget it." Memorable it undoubtedly was—and remains. For it became not so much a trial of Gandhi, but of the Empire which he had challenged even though he had withdrawn the challenge at the last minute. The manner in which he conducted himself at the trial enabled him if not exactly to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat (to quote a Churchillian phrase), at least to turn what seemed to many on the face of things as worse than political defeat, indeed almost a great fiasco, into a moral vindication not so much for him personally as for the cause which he had made his own.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE TRIAL

Old men often forget and Pontius Pilate, apparently, kept no diary—not even an engagement-book. That, at any rate, is the implication in Anatole France's compelling short story, *The Procurator of Judaea*. For some years after he had retired and was taking the waters at Baiae, an ancient watering place in Campania, Italy, he had no recollection of the man who had been hauled up before him when he was posted at Jerusalem and but for whose trial by him Pontius would hardly have earned even a microscopic footnote in the history of the humankind. At Baiae he had a chance encounter by the roadside with his old friend Lamia whom he had sheltered and offered hospitality when he spent some time in Jerusalem during his fifteen years of exile by Tiberius on a charge of having had illicit relations with the wife of Quirinus, a man of consular status. At and after dinner to which Pontius had invited Lamia the next evening, they reminisced a great deal about their time in Judaea. At one point in their conversation, moved by an intimate memory, Lamia wondered whether Pontius recalled a young Galilean thaumaturgist with a small following of men and women. "His name," said Lamia, "was Jesus; he came from Nazareth, and he was arraigned for some crimes, I don't know what." "Pontius," he asked his friend,

"do you remember anything about the man?" The story concludes with Pontius Pilate's unforgettable reply:

Pontius Pilate contracted his brows, and his hand rose to his forehead in the attitude of one who probes the deeps of memory. Then after a silence of some seconds: "Jesus", he murmured, "Jesus of Nazareth. I cannot call him to mind."

Fact or fiction, that happened, if it happened, a long time ago. In our own time and within living memory, Robert Broomfield, I.C.S., who was serving as the District and Sessions Judge at Ahmedabad, then in the Bombay Presidency, in March 1922, had taken some precaution against the default and vagaries of human memory. In his rather perceptive book, *The Trial of Mr Gandhi*, Francis Watson writes that many years afterwards Broomfield had showed him his engagement-diary for 1922 and that the pencilled entries for 18 March read thus:

Golf before breakfast  
Try Gandhi.

Not that Judge Broomfield was aware of any historical parallel between the criminal trial over which he was to preside in the normal call of duty in the spring of A.D. 1922 and the one which Pontius Pilate presided over in the judgement hall at Jerusalem in the spring of A.D. 33; and although he was not unmindful of the political importance of Gandhi, just then trials of eminent Indian politicians were no novelty and he intended to take it in his stride after a round of golf and breakfast. However, the similitude suggested itself to the minds of many men and women of diverse experience and backgrounds, both Indian and British, and across political divides.

George Lloyd, as noted earlier, wanted to make sure that Gandhi, if he was hauled up before the law, should be denied "the crown of thorns." Krishnadas, at the time very close to him, who helped Gandhi to the bathing place in Sabarmati Jail on the day of the trial (apparently Malaviya had suggested it) writes that they all felt "as if we were anointing the Master before his crucifixion." That may sound sentimental and even a trifle melodramatic, but, after it was all over, Sarojini Naidu was to

write in the *Bombay Chronicle*: "My thoughts sped across the centuries to a different land and a different age, when a similar drama was enacted and another divine and gentle teacher was crucified, for speaking a kindred gospel with a kindred courage." And, again, when later that year C.R. Das was released and was elected to preside over the Thirty-seventh Session of the Congress at Gaya, despite his differences with Gandhi and even a certain irritation he began his presidential address by evoking what Francis Watson calls "the inexact but obsessive analogy" and quoted the relevant lines from the Gospel according to St. Matthew.

The trial itself was in two stages. There were first the committal proceedings. For the charge against Gandhi—and his co-accused colleague, Shankerlal Banker, who was the printer and publisher of the English weekly *Young India* and had been arrested with him—was no minor one. It came under the purview of Section 124-A of the Indian Penal Code: that of "bringing or attempting to bring into hatred or contempt or exciting or attempting to excite disaffection towards His Majesty's Government established by law in British India." The committal proceedings were held before the Additional District Magistrate, a man named Allan Brown, at the Divisional Commissioner's Office and were conducted for the prosecution by a local legal "loyalist" Rao Bahadur Girdharilal, the Public Prosecutor of Ahmedabad.

But on this occasion he did not have to work hard to earn his keep. The proceedings before the ADM were a matter of formality—and for the good reason that neither of the accused contested the charges against them. On the contrary, Gandhi in his "Statement of the Accused," describing himself as a "farmer and weaver," made it plain that at "the proper time" he would "plead 'guilty' so far as disaffection towards Government" was concerned. He not only admitted having written the four articles on which the charges against him rested, but added for good measure that the proprietors and publishers of *Young India* allowed him "to control the whole of policy of the paper" thus taking upon himself the total responsibility for anything appearing in it. Nevertheless the legal technicalities were carefully gone through. Witnesses for the prosecution were duly produced and their evidence recorded. They were the Superintendent of Police, Ahmedabad, the Registrar of the Appellate side of the Bombay High Court, a man named Gharda, and the District Magistrate of

Ahmedabad, G.E. Chatfield, besides two "formal police witnesses." The Superintendent of Police named the offending articles the first of which had appeared as early as June 15, 1921, entitled "Disaffection a Virtue" and the last, published under the heading "Shaking the Manes", as late as February 23, 1922—that is, after the Congress Working Committee had already suspended mass civil disobedience. The other two articles were "Tampering with Loyalty" and "The Puzzle and its Solution" which appeared on September 29 and December 15, 1921, respectively. The "accused" did not cross-examine any of the witnesses and were duly committed for trial at the Sessions Court.

This was on the very morrow of Gandhi's arrest—Saturday, March 11. The substantive trial did not take place till exactly a week later. As neither Gandhi nor Shankarlal Banker had applied for bail, they remained in Sabarmati prison. But for all practical purposes they might have been at the Ashram. No restrictions were placed on their visitors. These included Madan Mohan Malaviya, Jawaharlal Nehru, Jammalal Bajaj, Chhaganlal Gandhi, Shuaib Qureshi, and among women Kasturba Gandhi and Anasuya Sarabhai. As Krishnadas, who was himself almost in constant attendance on Gandhi during the period between the two trials, remarks: "The gaol was transformed into a sort of a royal Darbar." But all that was to change after the trial by the District and Sessions Judge and the sentencing on March 18.

The case number 45 of 1922 was listed as *Imperator Vs (1) Mr. M.K. Gandhi and (2) Mr. S.G. Banker*. But it was not heard at the Court of the District and Sessions Judge situated in the city. Instead, a courtroom was improvised for Judge Broomfield at the Circuit House in the fashionable part of Ahmedabad known as Shahibag—or King's Garden—which Francis Watson describes as "a well-appointed residence built for the temporary use of judges and other official visitors." Sixty-five years later it still stands and serves as a "well-appointed" hostelry for official and political VIPs or their guests though there is a plaque to remind guests and visitors that for a day it had served the venue for the historic trial of Gandhi and his printer and publisher.

The reason for shifting the venue of the trial from the Law Courts to the Circuit House was almost certainly security. In April 1919 at the time of the Rowlatt Act agitation the Law

Courts had suffered some damage at the hands of crowds protesting against Gandhi's arrest while on the way to the Punjab. Probably a repeat performance by crowds was expected. That was why it was considered safer to hold the trial at the Circuit House where police and security forces could be deployed more effectively as they were. Not that alone. Francis Watson writes that "across the road, in the ample compound of the Commissioner's house [incidentally part of its dating back to the Mogul times which was for several years used as the Governor's residence after the creation of a separate State of Gujarat and where Tagore is said to have written his rather spooky story *The Hungry Stones*], a battalion of Indian infantry was held in reserve." But their services were never needed. Indeed, one of the things which had made the Mahatma happy beyond words was that there were no significant disturbances anywhere in India after his arrest. But the Government were not taking any chances.

Nor, it seems, on the legal front. Conviction of Gandhi was a foregone conclusion under the circumstances. But they wanted a sufficiently heavy sentence. The presentation of the case for the prosecution was, therefore, not left to Girdharilal, Public Prosecutor of Ahmedabad. The services of a Britisher, Sir Thomas Strangman, Advocate-General of the Bombay Presidency, were secured to act as Special Public Prosecutor for the occasion. He arrived on the morning of March 18 from Bombay, travelling apparently by the same train which brought Sarojini Naidu who attended the trial with Kasturba Gandhi, Anasuya Sarabhai and several other prominent Indians, including Jawaharlal Nehru, and was to evoke the scene at the Circuit House in a classic piece of reportage.

Gandhi entered the improvised court room about midday. Sarojini Naidu writes :

A convict and a criminal in the eyes of the Law; nevertheless the entire court rose in an act of spontaneous homage when Mahatma Gandhi entered,—a frail, serene, indomitable figure in a coarse and scanty loin cloth, accompanied by his devoted disciple and fellow-prisoner, Shankarlal Banker.... "So you are seated near me to give me your support in case I break down," he jested with that happy laugh of his which seems to hold the undimmed radiance of the world's childhood in its depths.

And looking round at the hosts of familiar faces of men and women who had travelled far to offer him a token of their love, he added, "This is like a family gathering and not a law-court."

Judge Broomfield took his seat at 12 noon precisely. There was evidently a correction to be made in the charge-sheet. At the committal hearing Gandhi and Shankerlal Banker had been charged on four counts under Section 124-A. These were reduced to three. Apparently, the article headed "Disaffection a Virtue" which appeared in *Young India* on June 15, 1921, was found to be inoffensive on second thoughts. But three counts were good enough and Broomfield said that the law required that the charges should not only be read out, but explained. Not, he added, that it was necessary in this case to say much by way of explanation, since he said the words "hatred and contempt" were words the meaning of which was sufficiently obvious. As word "disaffection" as defined under the Section, it included disloyalty and feelings of enmity. What is more, invoking a ruling of the High Court of Bombay in a previous case, it meant also "political alienation or discontent, a spirit of disloyalty to Government or existing authority."

Having done his duty, he asked Gandhi whether he pleaded guilty or claimed to be tried. To this Gandhi replied : "I plead guilty on each count of the charge. I merely observe that the King's name is omitted from the charge-sheet and, in my opinion, very properly." The question was repeated to Shankerlal Banker who, too, pleaded guilty. Theoretically, therefore, there was little more for Judge Broomfield to do but sentence the accused. But the Advocate-General who had come all the way from Bombay and no doubt had prepared his brief with care hoping to display his legal skill in a trial which he knew would pass into history, wanted the Judge to try the case fully. "The charges," he urged, "should be investigated as fully as possible and also that the Court will be in a better position to pass sentence if it has the whole of the facts."

The Judge, however, thought otherwise. He said that "from the time he knew he was going to try the case, he had thought over the question of sentence and he was prepared to hear anything that the Counsel might have to say, or Mr. Gandhi wished to say, on the sentence. He honestly did not believe that the mere recording of evidence in the trial which Counsel had called



for would make any difference to them, one way or the other." He accepted the pleas of the accused which called forth a smile from Gandhi but did not please Strangman who, in any case, was somewhat irritated that "Ahmedabad officialdom had been magnetically affected by the charm of Gandhi's personality," as Francis Watson remarks.

Judge Broomfield said that nothing further remained but for him to pass the sentence. However, he was prepared to listen anything Sir Thomas Strangman might have to say so long as his "general remarks" were based "on the charges against the accused and on their pleas." The Advocate-General did not seem to think this was good enough. He pointed out his difficulty and insisted that the Court should consider the whole matter properly. "If I stated," he argued, "what has happened before the Committing Magistrate, then I can show that there are many things which are material to the question of the sentence." The first point he made was that the charges "formed a part of the campaign to spread disaffection openly and systematically to render Government impossible and to overthrow it." He harped back to an article in *Young India* as early as May 25, 1921, which said that it was the duty of a non-cooperator to create disaffection towards the Government. He read out parts of articles written by the Mahatma in *Young India* which were not in fact mentioned in the charge-sheet.

The Judge nevertheless maintained that he could accept plea "on the materials on which the sentence had to be based." Strangman agreed that the question of sentence was entirely for the Court to decide but he wanted to show that the articles on which the charges were based were by no means isolated. They formed part of "an organised campaign." He then read out extracts from several articles which he claimed were aimed at spreading "disaffection" towards the Government "by law established." One of them which appeared in *Young India* of July 28, 1921, went so far as to say that "we have to destroy the system." He paid a compliment to Gandhi by remarking that "the accused was a man of high educational qualifications and evidently, from his writings, a recognized leader." But this was not so much to praise the Mahatma as to establish that "they were the writings of an educated man, and not the writings of an obscure man" and, therefore, "the Court must consider

to what the result of a campaign of the nature disclosed in the writings must inevitably lead." He spelt out what the campaign had led to in spite of Gandhi's insistence on non-violence—"to the occurrences in Bombay last November and Chauri Chaura." He wanted the Court to take these incidents "into account in sentencing the accused."

However, in the circumstances of the case his eloquent deployment of the arguments for the prosecution were largely an exercise in superfluity as much as the holding in reserve of a battalion of troops across the road to make sure that Gandhi did not escape from custody. The accused had already pleaded guilty and there was nothing to suggest that he would beg the Court to take any extenuating factors into account while passing a sentence on him. Rather the reverse. Dr. Sitaramayya nicely describes the piquant situation in which the authorities found themselves while building their case against Gandhi:

When you go to a big textile shop or a jewellery mart for your dress and diamonds, your puzzle is what to buy with your limited purse. Even so might the Law officers of the Crown have been "puzzled and perplexed" as to the choice of Gandhi's articles published from week to week for their indictment against him. Which was not seditious? Gandhi always held that it was his duty to propagate sedition, and if his articles were not sufficiently seditious, it meant his pen was weak....

After hearing the Advocate-General of Bombay dwell on the gravity of Gandhi's transgressions, Broomfield asked Gandhi whether he wished to say anything on the question of sentence. To this the Mahatma replied that he would like to read out a written statement. The Judge had no objection but wanted the written statement to be handed to him in order that he could put it on record. Long afterwards, Broomfield told Francis Watson that he knew that Gandhi's statement was likely to be political propaganda, without much bearing on the only issue, which was the amount of sentence. "However," he added, "I saw no objection to his reading it, and I allowed him to do so.... I think that was one reason why he was pleased with his trial. I let him have his say."

As for his stipulation that Gandhi should let him have a copy for his record so that he should "not have the trouble of writing it," the Mahatma, it seems, had no copy. He had only the hand-written manuscript, but said that he would let him have the original as soon as he had finished reading it. But before reading the text, he wished to make some preliminary observations which were not by way of exculpation but rather a frank *mea culpa*. For he said:

...I would like to state that I entirely endorse the learned Advocate-General's remarks in connection with my humble self. I think that he was entirely fair to me in all the statements that he has made, because it is very true and I have no desire whatsoever to conceal from this Court the fact that to preach disaffection towards the existing system of Government has become almost a passion with me; and the learned Advocate-General is also entirely in the right when he says that my preaching of disaffection did not commence with my connection with *Young India*, but that it commenced much earlier and in the statement that I am about to read, it will be my painful duty to admit before this Court that it commenced much earlier than the period stated by the Advocate-General. It is the most painful duty with me, but I have to discharge that duty knowing the responsibility that rests upon me and I wish to endorse all the blame that the learned Advocate-General has thrown on my shoulders in connection with the Bombay, the Madras and the Chauri Chaura occurrences. Thinking over these deeply and sleeping over them night after night it is impossible to dissociate myself from the diabolical crimes of Chauri Chaura or the mad outrages in Bombay and Madras. He is quite right when he says that, as a man of responsibility, a man having received a fair share of education, having had a fair share of experience of this world, I should know the consequences of every one of my acts. I knew that I was playing with fire. I ran the risk and, if I was set free I would still do the same. I know that I was feeling it so every day and I have felt it also this morning that I would have failed in my duty if I did not say what I said here just now. I wanted to avoid violence. I want to avoid violence. Non-violence is the first article of my faith.

It is also the last article of my creed. But I had to make my choice. I had either to submit to a system which I considered had done an irreparable harm to my country, or incur the risk of the mad fury of my people bursting forth when they understood the truth from my lips. I know that my people have sometimes gone mad. I am deeply sorry for it, I am therefore here to submit not to a light penalty but to the highest penalty. I do not ask for mercy. I do not ask for any extenuating act of clemency. I am here to invite and cheerfully submit to the highest penalty that can be inflicted upon me for what in law is a deliberate crime and what appears to me to be the highest duty of a citizen. The only course open to you, the Judge, is as I am just going to say in my statement, either to resign your post, or inflict on me the severest penalty, if you believe that the system and the law you are assisting to administer are good for the people of this country. . . . I do not expect that kind of conversion but by the time I have finished with my statement you will, perhaps, have a glimpse of what is raging within my breast to run this maddest risk that a sane man can run.

Having said this by way of a preamble—perhaps one should say overture, for what followed was largely an elaboration of the strands of argument put out in his introductory remarks—he read out his statement. It was long, but not too long—in fact, less than two thousand words. He said that he had a duty “to the Indian public and to the public in England, to placate which this prosecution is mainly taken up,” to explain “why, from a staunch loyalist and co-operator, I have become an uncompromising disaffectionist and non-cooperator. To the Court, too, I should say why I plead guilty to the charge of promoting disaffection towards the Government established by law in India.”

He recalled how his public life had begun in 1893 in South Africa “in troubled weather.” From his very first contact with the British authorities there, which was “not of a happy character,” he had discovered that “as a man” and “an Indian” he had no rights. “More correctly,” he said, “I discovered that I had no rights as a man, because I was an Indian.” Why, then, did he not immediately raise the banner of revolt, indeed, was not even

"baffled". Because, he went on "I thought that this treatment of Indians was an excrescence upon a system that was intrinsically and mainly good. I gave the Government my voluntary and hearty co-operation, criticizing it freely where I felt it was faulty, but never wishing its destruction."

Not only did he not wish its destruction, he continued, he offered his services to it when the Empire faced the Boer challenge in 1899, raised a volunteer ambulance corps and served at several actions during the relief of Ladysmith. More: he raised a stretcher-bearer party during the Zulu revolt in 1906 and served till the end of the rebellion. He was mentioned in despatches and awarded medals in recognition of his services. This was crowned with the award of a Kaisar-i-Hind Gold Medal by Lord Hardinge for his work in South Africa. Again when the war broke out between England and Germany in 1914, he raised a volunteer ambulance corps in London from the Indian residents there, chiefly students. His work was duly acknowledged. As late as 1918, in response to a special appeal at the War Conference in Delhi by Lord Chelmsford, he struggled at the cost of his health to raise a corps in Kheda and only ceased his recruiting campaign when it was announced that no more recruits were needed. He did all this because he was persuaded that "it was possible by such services to gain a status of full equality in the Empire for my countrymen."

What then made him change this complaisant view of the British Raj? The first shock came, he said, with the passage of the Rowlatt Act, a law designed to rob the people of all real freedom. He was duty bound to lead an intensive agitation against it. The Punjab horrors, beginning with the Jallianwala Bagh and culminating in crawling orders, public floggings and other indescribable humiliations, followed. There was also the breach of the plighted word to the Indian Muslims over the integrity of Turkey and the holy places of Islam. Even so he hoped against hope that the Punjab and Khilafat wrongs would be redressed. That is why, in spite of the forebodings and the grave warnings of friends, at the Amritsar Congress in 1919 he had fought for cooperation and the working of the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms.

But his hopes were shattered. The Khilafat promise was not redeemed. The Punjab crime was whitewashed and many of

those responsible for the crimes went not only unpunished, but continued to draw their salaries and pensions from the Indian revenue and some were even rewarded. He realised that the reforms were only a device to drain India of her wealth still further. And so, reluctantly, he came to the conclusion that the British connection had made India more helpless than she ever was before, politically and economically. He also referred to the economic spoliation of India, the destruction of her cottage industries by incredibly "heartless and inhuman processes as described by English witnesses."

But the British exploiters of India were not the sole target of his accusations. He was equally unsparing of their Indian accomplices, whether active or passive. In particular, he was severe on the "town-dwellers" who were blind to the sufferings of the "semi-starved masses":

Little do they know that their miserable comfort represents the brokerage they get for the work they do for the foreign exploiter, that the profits and the brokerage are sucked from the masses. Little do they realize that the Government established by law in British India is carried on for this exploitation of the masses. No sophistry, no jugglery in figures can explain away the evidence that the skeletons in many villages present to the naked eye. I have no doubt whatsoever that both England and the town-dwellers of India will have to answer, if there is a God above, for this crime against humanity which is perhaps unequalled in history.

As for the legitimacy of the law by which the Government was said to have been established and under which it was sustained, he was scathing. He said:

The law itself, in this country has been used to serve the foreign exploiter. My unbiased examination of the Punjab Martial Law cases has led me to believe that ... in nine out of every ten cases the condemned men were totally innocent. Their crime consisted in the love of their country. In ninety-nine cases out of hundred, justice has been denied to Indians as against Europeans in the Courts of India. This is not an exaggerated picture. It is the experience of almost every

Indian who has had anything to do with such cases. In my opinion, the administration of the law is thus prostituted consciously or unconsciously for the benefit of the exploiter.

The tragedy, he argued, was "that Englishmen and their Indian associates in the administration of the country do not know that they are engaged in the crime I have attempted to describe." He was aware that many English and Indian officials were convinced that the system of administration which they operated was "one of the best systems devised in the world and that India is making steady though slow progress. They do not know that a subtle but effective system of terrorism and an organized display of force on the one hand, and the deprivation of all powers of retaliation or self-defence on the other, have emasculated the people and induced in them the habit of simulation. This awful habit has added to the ignorance and the self-deception of the administrators."

Coming down from the general to the concrete particular, Gandhi nicely characterised Section 124-A under which he and his friend Shankerlal Banker were being charged as "perhaps the prince among the political sections of the Indian Penal Code designed to suppress the liberty of the citizen." "Affection", he said, "cannot be manufactured or regulated by law." And he made the point that "if one has no affection for a person or system, one should be free to give the fullest expression to this disaffection, so long as he does not contemplate, promote or incite to violence." They—that is Gandhi and Banker—he said were charged under a section under which "mere promotion of disaffection is a crime." He had studied some of the cases tried under it and knew "that some of the most loved of India's patriots have been convicted under it." He would himself regard it as "a privilege, therefore, to be charged under it" not because he had any personal ill will against any single administrator, much less towards the King's person, but because he held "it to be a virtue to be disaffected towards a Government which in its totality has done more harm to India than any previous system."

In fact, he contended, he had rendered a service to India and England by writing the articles which were produced as evidence against him. By so doing he had shown "in non-cooperation the

way out of the unnatural state in which both are living." And he added:

In my humble opinion, non-cooperation with evil is as much a duty as is co-operation with good. But, in the past, non-cooperation has been deliberately expressed in violence to the evil-doer. I am endeavouring to show to my countrymen that violent non-cooperation only multiplies evil and that, as evil can only be sustained by violence, withdrawal of support of evil requires complete abstention from violence. Non-violence implies voluntary submission to the penalty for non-cooperation with evil. I am here, therefore, to invite and submit cheerfully to the highest penalty that can be inflicted upon me for what in law is a deliberate crime and what appears to me to be the highest duty of a citizen.

And he concluded by repeating what he had said at the beginning in his introductory remarks. The only course open to the Judge was either to resign his post and dissociate himself from evil if he felt that the law he was called upon to administer was an evil "and that in reality I am innocent." If, on the other hand, he believed that the system and the laws he was "assisting to administer are good for the people of this country and that my activity is, therefore, injurious to the public weal" to inflict "the severest penalty" upon him (Gandhi).

As Gandhi had himself said in his preliminary remarks he did not expect the District and Sessions Judge of Ahmedabad to undergo an instant conversion and announce his resignation. Indeed, Broomfield did not even follow Pontius Pilate's example who, because he could not find any "fault" in the man arraigned before him, had washed his hands off the whole affair by allowing them to choose Barabas "who was a thief" to be freed instead of Jesus. Instead, with the "pragmatism" of the British, he duly administered the law which he was paid to administer and at the same time said very nice things about the Mahatma which he knew would please Indians and, in fact, did please them as we can judge by the comments of Sarojini Naidu and Jawaharlal Nehru on Broomfield's conduct at the trial which (to quote Nehru) was characterised by "dignity and feeling."

For after formally asking Gandhi's co-accused, Shankerlal



Banker, whether he wished to say anything to the Court regarding the sentence and who merely said that he had the "privilege of printing" the offending articles and pleaded guilty to the charge. Broomfield pronounced his brief verdict which fell into two parts, the first being, as it were, the argument for his decision and the second the actual term of sentence and the precedent for it. He said to Gandhi:

You have made my task easy in one way by pleading guilty to the charge. Nevertheless what remains, namely, the determination of a just sentence, is perhaps as difficult a proposition as a judge in this country could have to face. The law is no respecter of persons. Nevertheless, it will be impossible to ignore the fact that you are in a different category from any person I have ever tried or am likely to have to try. It would be impossible to ignore the fact that, in the eyes of millions of your countrymen, you are a great patriot and a great leader. Even those who differ from you in politics look upon you as a man of high ideals and of noble and of even saintly life. I have to deal with you in one character only. It is not my duty and I do not presume to judge or criticize you in any other character. It is my duty to judge you as a man subject to the law, who has by his own admission broken the law and committed what to an ordinary man must appear to be grave offences against the State. I do not forget that you have constantly preached against violence and that you have on many occasions, as I am willing to believe, done much to prevent violence, but having regard to the nature of your political teaching and the nature of many of those to whom it is addressed, how you could have continued to believe that violence would not be the inevitable consequence it passes my capacity to understand.

All this was well put and was logical and consistent with the position Broomfield occupied and the law he had to administer. He was equally felicitous in phrasing the second part of his judgement which related to the question of sentence. He invoked a parallel which Gandhi found flattering even if Tilak was a man of very different temperament and philosophy to his own. After remarking that "there are probably few people in India who do

not sincerely regret that you should have made it impossible for any Government to leave you at liberty," he said:

But it is so. I am trying to balance what is due to you against what appears to me to be necessary in the interests of the public, and I propose, in passing sentence, to follow the precedent of a case, in many respects similar to this case, that was decided some 12 years ago, I mean the case against Mr. Bal Gangadhar Tilak under this same section. The sentence that was passed upon him as it finally stood was a sentence of simple imprisonment for six years. You will not consider it unreasonable, I think, that you should be classed with Mr. Tilak, and that is the sentence, two years, simple imprisonment on each count of the charge, i.e., six years in all, which I feel it my duty to pass upon you and I should like to say in doing so that, if the course of events in India should make it possible for the Government to reduce the period and release you, no one will be better pleased than I.

And turning to Banker, he said, that he assumed that to a large extent he (that is Banker) had been "under the influence" of his chief and, therefore, the sentence he proposed to pass upon him on the first two counts was simple imprisonment for six months—that is simple imprisonment for one year—and a fine of a thousand rupees on the third count, with six months' simple imprisonment in default.

It is not known whether the Advocate-General of Bombay was satisfied that the punishment was adequate. But Gandhi certainly was highly gratified that the Judge in sentencing him had looked back to Tilak's case and thought him worthy of an identical term of imprisonment. He had the last word at the trial:

I would say one word. Since you have done me the honour of recalling the trial of the late Lokamanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak, I just want to say that I consider it to be the proudest privilege and honour to be associated with his name. So far as the sentence itself is concerned, I certainly consider that it is as light as any judge would inflict on me, and so far as the

whole proceedings are concerned, I must say that I could not have expected greater courtesy.

The Judge then left the court and it was all over. As Sarojini Naidu was to write in her reportage of "The Great Trial":

The strange trial proceeded and as I listened to the immortal words that flowed with prophetic fervour from the lips of my beloved master my thoughts sped across the centuries to a different land and different age.... I realised now that the lowly Jesus of Nazareth, cradled in a manger, furnished the only parallel in history to this invincible apostle of Indian liberty who loved humanity with unsurpassed compassion, and to use his own beautiful phrase, "approached the poor with the mind of the poor."

The most epic event of modern times ended quickly. The pent up emotion of the people burst in a storm of sorrow as a long slow procession moved towards him in a mournful pilgrimage of farewell, clinging to the hand that had toiled incessantly, bowing over the feet that journeyed so continuously in the service of the country. In the midst of all this poignant scene of many-voiced and myriad-hearted grief he stood, untroubled, in all his transcendent simplicity, the embodied symbol of the Indian Nation—its living sacrifice and sacrament in one.

Her poetic description of the scene is endorsed by other less poetic accounts including one by K. Santanam in the *Tribune* of March 23, 1922, and another in *Young India* of the same date. K. Santanam reported that it was nearly half an hour or three-quarters before all the leave-takings were over after the Court had risen and Gandhi came out to be driven away in a motor car to Sabarmati Jail by the police which had remained in the background during the prolonged farewell scene. It seems that neither his friends nor even Kasturba had realised after his arrest that there was going to be a long period of separation, partly because during the nine days between his arrest and the sentence when he was lodged in Sabarmati prison his visitors had been allowed full and almost unfettered access to him and restraints on him were minimal if not non-existent. Now the painful reality

dawned upon them with full immediacy that the freedom which they and Gandhi had been allowed while awaiting his trial was abruptly to cease and that his imprisonment was going to be for real. Their distress at this realisation was also for real and expressed itself in sobs and tears. *Young India* reported soberly:

Then the friends of Mr. Gandhi crowded round him...and fell at his feet. There was much sobbing on the part of both men and women. But all the while Mr. Gandhi was smiling and cool and giving encouragement to everybody who came to him. Mr. Banker also was smiling and taking this in a light-hearted way. After all his friends had taken leave of him, Mr. Gandhi was taken out of the Court to the Sabarmati Jail.

And then, for the first though not the last time during his life in India, the gates of the prison-house really closed upon him....

## CHAPTER XIV

### AT THE CROSS ROADS

The reaction to Gandhi's arrest and conviction was rather muted—and on both sides of the great and basic political divide. Even the more Blimpish section of the non-official European opinion in India was surprised at the timing of the action taken by the Government against the Mahatma and more than a little nervous about its possible consequences which might be bad for business. The *Statesman*, reflecting this anxiety, had editorially described the arrest as a "masterpiece of ineptitude" and found the reasons for Lord Reading's decision "inscrutable." It had feared that it might prove a shot-in-the-arm for what it diagnosed as a "sickly movement." However, on the morrow of Gandhi's sentencing it was sufficiently comforted to write editorially, "A widespread belief was created among the masses that he [Gandhi] was sacrosanct and could not and would not be treated as an ordinary criminal. Suddenly this illusion is dispelled." It even thought that the sentencing of Gandhi "may encourage the hope that Government has at last made up its mind to enforce the law without fear or favour."

This was pretty mild. But so, too, by and large was the comment in the Indian nationalist Press. An editorial in the *Tribune* of Lahore which had the hallmark of Kalinath Roy's style in

which prolixity tended to be the soul of wit, said that the sentence passed on the Mahatma was no surprise. Indeed, it was "a foregone conclusion." The leaderwriter chose to sound a valedictory rather than denunciatory note, but made bold to remark that "the hands of the clock cannot be put back permanently or indefinitely, and the goals of the movement must be reached." Meanwhile, he wanted to pay his "last tribute to Mahatma Gandhi," and did so in a fine concluding flourish about a column or more later: "Six years' imprisonment was exactly the thing that was needed to put the seal of completion on his character and his nature for have not 'the great prophets of humanity all been martyrs'."

The popular response in the country was also generally subdued. To be sure there were *hartals*, or stoppages of work and business in many cities and towns; bonfires of foreign cloth were lit; but there was no great eruption of mass protest. The Congress leadership was inclined even to be gratified by the calm way in which the people had responded to the provocative act of the Government in incarcerating the Mahatma. The Congress Working Committee held an "emergent" meeting at Ahmedabad on March 17 and 18, 1922, and managed to get through a considerable amount of resolutions—eighteen in all to be exact. Of these the first sixteen concerned organisational matters, the programme of constructive work and above all promotion of khaddar or the home-spun cloth and were taken up before the actual trial at the Circuit House, that is on March 17. But the second—and the longest—resolution had a bearing directly on the neuralgic question of Gandhi's arrest and what it expected the people and the Congress organisations to do about it. After congratulating "the country upon the exemplary self-restraint and peace observed throughout the length and breadth of the land on and since the arrest of Mahatma Gandhi" and trusting "that the same dignified restraint will be continued during the trying times to which the people must look forward," it said:

The Working Committee is of opinion that observance of perfect peace in the country at this moment of supreme trial is a striking proof of the progress of non-violence and is further of opinion that Mahatma Gandhi's arrest and the

restraint observed by the country have considerably advanced the cause of the Khilafat, the Punjab and Swaraj.

This was by no means self-evident and must have seemed to any dispassionate observer an exercise in *Coveism*. However, the crucial part of the resolution came in the third paragraph which was a stern admonition to Provincial Congress Committees that Gandhi's arrest had made "no change in the programme recently laid down in the Bardoli-Delhi resolutions" and called upon "all Congress organisations to devote themselves to the prosecution of the constructive programme laid down therein." It warned "the Provincial Committees against any hasty use of the powers conferred upon them in respect of individual civil disobedience whether defensive or aggressive." And it urged all Congress and Khilafat organisations to propagate "the universal adoption of the spinning wheel and of the consequent use of hand-spun and hand-woven khaddar which was "essential for the attainment of the country's goal." Why? Because, it argued:

In as much as the use of khaddar apart from its great and undoubted political value is bound to give to millions of India's homes a steady cottage industry needed for the nation's spare hours and is calculated to supplement the slender resources of millions of half-starved poor people and is thus bound to establish a link between classes and masses, the Working Committee hopes that men and women of all parties and races inhabiting India, irrespective of political colour, will lend their hearty support and co-operation to the movement, and to that end authorises Mian Mahomed Haji Jan Mahomed Chhotani and Syt. Jamnalal Bajaj to interview capitalists and others in order to put the growing national cottage industry on a sound economic basis.

All this was true; the khaddar cause was a worthy cause; and the distinction drawn between "classes and masses" though meant ostensibly to link them through the magic of hand-spun and hand-woven cloth, had at least the merit of originality even if it verged on tautology. But it was hardly the stuff to prepare them psychologically for the struggle, admittedly a non-violent one, against a powerful empire or even secure from it redress for

the Punjab and Khilafat wrongs. What they needed was not so much instructions as to how they could utilize their spare hours to earn a few more annas to supplement their meagre income but some clear direction regarding the mobilization of their energy for the achievement of freedom. Nor did the two resolutions which the Working Committee passed when it met on March 18 after Gandhi had been sentenced and removed to Sabarmati Jail, appear designed to release the springs of patriotic fervour among the masses or even the "classes."

The last resolution—number eighteen—was about fixing the date for the Committee's next meeting. Obviously, the members were playing a waiting game to see the direction of the political winds in the country. For they did not fix the date there and then, but left it to the General Secretary to decide after consultation with the President of the Congress, Hakim Ajmal Khan. But the previous resolution—number seventeen—meant to be a comment on the Mahatma's conviction was couched in a language of resounding piety. It said:

The Working Committee while realising that Mahatma Gandhi's conviction deprives the country of the guidance of its universally trusted and beloved leader rejoices that through him India delivers to the world, even in her bondage, her ancient message of truth and non-violence.

As for the world at large, it had far too many preoccupations to have time or inclination to register India's message of truth and non-violence as interpreted and delivered by Gandhi. Indeed, for the most part it was blissfully unaware of what was going on in India, and although news of Gandhi's arrest and conviction could not be altogether kept from the outside world, few people knew or cared what non-violent non-cooperation was about and why Gandhi had decided suddenly to call it off. Even among the British newspapers the *Manchester Guardian* was the only newspaper whose Man was enterprising enough to secure an interview (see Appendix V) with the Mahatma while he was still in Sabarmati prison on the eve of his trial and conviction. It was quite a remarkable interview though it barely touched directly on the Indo-British litigation and for the most part ranged over moral—and even metaphysical—issues such as what precisely Christ had



in mind when he said "Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's," and even such off-beat conundrums whether or not crocodiles, and snakes and scorpions, have souls and ended with the *Manchester Guardian's* reporter hedging his bets on the heart of the matter by remarking:

As I bade good-bye ... [and] reached the end of the verandah, I turned for a last look. There was this unassuming looking little man, dressed with less ceremony than the meanest coolie, squatting cross-legged in front of his charkha, spinning away as contentedly as Mohammed's spider. Was he, I wondered, spinning a web that was to save the Indian peasant from the menace of an industrial system, untinged with even a veneer of Christian ethics; or was he himself caught in the centre of a vast web of illusions, spun from his own extraordinary brain, into which he had drawn hundreds and thousands of his ignorant and emotional countrymen?

Gandhi's reasoning, whether right or wrong, grounded in reality or illusion, had always a kind of magnificence. But translated into the vapid language of well-meaning piety by the Working Committee it could only exasperate still further those who had accepted the plan of civil disobedience with strong mental reservations and, like Lajpat Rai, regarded the arbitrary decision to withdraw the whole campaign after Chauri Chaura, as Feroz Chand tells us, as "almost like a betrayal." Lajpat Rai, indeed, had been so angry that he managed to smuggle a letter to Gandhi out of the Lahore Central Jail where he was then lodged, and which his friend K. Santanam had delivered to the Mahatma in Delhi who acknowledged it "in a postcard" to Santanam, and after sharing Lajpat Rai's strictures with friends at an informal consultation at Dr. Ansari's house on February 24, 1922, commented "that people in prison being 'civilly dead' were not expected to guide or advise political movements!" He even asked the letter not to be put on record because it had been written under an "angry impulse" though apparently the "document ... somehow survived." At least that is the version which Feroz Chand gives in his biography of Lajpat Rai and it is true as far as it goes. But it is not, perhaps, the whole truth. For it seems from Krishnadas' account that Gandhi began his speech

at the Working Committee meeting in Delhi by reading the many critical communications which had been "received from Non-cooperators then in the different gaols of India" and it is hardly likely that he would have omitted reading out the great Lala's strongly worded critique of the Bardoli decision to the whole Committee.

However, the criticism of the Mahatma, whether by eminent Congress leaders behind the bars or those outside, which had been welling up was bound to ebb after his arrest and conviction. The more so because there was a complete blackout of news about the whereabouts of the Mahatma more or less immediately after he was taken away from the Circuit House to Sabarmati Jail. This had given rise to widespread anxiety and as for poor Kasturba, Krishnadas tells us, she "passed those days almost in a state of living death." This may well sound exaggerated. After all she had seen her husband imprisoned by the regime in Pretoria. But the reason for her acute apprehensions is not difficult to understand. On March 20 at midnight Gandhi and Banker were put in a special train at Sabarmati station and it was flagged off for an undisclosed destination. Undisclosed that is, not only to the public at large, but to the next of kin. As Broomfield had invoked the precedent of Tilak's case in deciding the question of Gandhi's sentence, "there was no knowing," to quote Francis Watson, "how far the honour of being associated with Tilak was to be carried." Removal to Mandalay would have made it very difficult for her or others to visit him on the infrequent intervals when, according to the jail manual, he was entitled to receive visitors.

But nothing quite so drastic was intended by the authorities. After two or three days, it was learnt through "unofficial sources," that Gandhi and his fellow-prisoner had been taken to and lodged in the Central Jail at Yeravda near Poona which was to be his home on more than one occasion and for fairly long stretches each time. There he was to settle down to a period of "quiet and physical rest" which he thought he "deserved" and insofar as it was compatible with his rather full prison routine of work. This, of course, included intensive spinning; indeed, on arrival at Yeravda Jail on March 21 he had gone on fast till his spinning-wheel had been restored to him in the evening. But it also included equally intensive if eclectic reading and even some

writing. The authorities did not allow him access to the newspapers of the day or even periodicals of a purely literary variety, like the Gujarati *Vasant*, a monthly edited by a titled "loyalist"; and when he brought this to the notice of George Lloyd, Governor of Bombay, who visited him towards the end of his term, he got the tart reply: "The best way to keep posted in politics is to keep out of gaol." However, and paradoxically, the British were civilised enough to allow him—and their other eminent Indian prison guests—liberal access to books and Gandhi was able to catch up with his reading, not only in edifying classics like the *Qu'ran*, the *Bible*, Tulsidas' *Ramayana* and *Pro Christo et Ecclesia*, but psychologically intriguing minor classics like *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*.

Meanwhile, outside the prison walls the Congress was drifting. Gandhi's arrest had left it without a helmsman and almost rudderless. Whether mistaken or right, the Mahatma generally knew his mind which he often identified with the mind of Indian humanity. But the Indian National Congress as a collectivity was even at its best a coalition of many minds covering a wide spectrum of political and social impulses and trends. The coalition held together best under some overwhelming challenge and similitude of purpose. But after the withdrawal of its challenge to the Raj with the Bardoli resolution endorsed by the A.I.C.C. at Delhi, the differences which had been submerged by the wave of enthusiasm for the mass civil disobedience programme at Ahmedabad surfaced once again. Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya in his own inimitable style acknowledges as much. He writes:

The fact is that in this world, whenever there is a failure in business or death of the head of a family, the calamity is followed by an immediate bustle and excitement incidental to readjustment, which in turn gives rise to a feeling of void and vacuum. Into this void and vacuum, there is a rush of multiple thoughts and divided counsels ending in some confusion. Even so was the conviction of Gandhi followed by three months of readjustment of affairs, payment of money, collection of dues, interpretation of terms, appointment of committees, reassertion of principles, statement of policies, filling of casual vacancies, recording of services and such other things.

In plainer, less circumlocutory terms this meant that the chief executive body of the Congress, while it carried on with the normal and purely routine organisational functions, and even addressed itself to the task of creating proper instruments for the implementation of the "constructive programmes"—promotion of khaddar, propaganda and systematic grassroot activities for the eradication of untouchability, definition of a framework for national education and so forth—seemed to be reluctant to turn its eyes and mind to its principal objective, the attainment of Swaraj because it was at a loss and without any sense of direction.

This is abundantly clear from the business it transacted over the next few months. It met at Calcutta for three days from April 20 to 22, 1922 and passed nineteen resolutions. The first of these concerned the venue of the next plenary session of the Congress. Invitations had been received from Bihar, Andhra, Ajmer, Gujarat and Karnataka. T. Parkasam was present in person to convey the invitation from Andhra. Rajendra Prasad, destined to be the first President of the Indian Republic, pleaded the case for Bihar. And he won the day and it was decided that the next Congress be held at Gaya—the historic site associated with the enlightenment of Gautama Buddha almost two and a half millennia earlier—as the Bihar Provincial Congress Committee wished in its invitation.

The Working Committee reassembled a month later, this time at Bombay. It had even a larger agenda to chew over which took it four full days—from May 12 to 15. The number of resolutions it passed was even larger than at Calcutta, twenty-seven. They were important resolutions, like the adoption of a scheme involving a budget of Rs. 17 lacs for stimulating the production and consumption of "hand-spun and hand-woven khaddar on a sound organized basis" under the direction of Jamnalal Bajaj; the setting up of a high-power committee consisting of Hakim Ajmal Khan, Dr. M.A. Ansari, S. Srinivasa Iyengar and Principal A.T. Gidwani "to prepare a scheme for organizing and financing national education in the country and for that purpose to raise funds, prepare a budget and submit the proposals at the next meeting of this Committee;" and yet another committee was conjured up, chaired by Faiz B. Tyabji and two members—S. Srinivasa Iyengar and C. Abdul Hakim—"for investigating and reporting to the All India Congress

Committee" the causes which had led to the outbreak of the Moplah rebellion, the extent of the outbreak, the measures adopted by the Government for suppressing it such as declaration of Martial Law and other relevant questions.

However, it was inclined to skirt the heart of the matter, namely the political line of action which the Congress movement was to adopt after the decision to suspend "aggressive" civil disobedience programme. It approached it, but very gingerly and then only indirectly and obliquely. It passed a resolution—number two on the agenda—requesting "the Central Khilafat Committee and Jamait-ul-Ulema... to call meetings of their respective Working Committees on the day and at the place of the next meeting of this Committee in order to enable the three bodies to confer together, if necessary." It obviously did not intend to take a decision on its own responsibility.

Indeed, it did not want to take a decision at all as regards what Dr. Sitaramayya, hitting the nail for once on the head, calls "fundamentals." It wanted to leave the onus and responsibility of re-assessing "the theory and practice" and reviewing "the science and art of Non-cooperation, Passive Resistance and Civil Disobedience" to the supreme deliberative body of the Congress—the All-India Congress Committee. It, therefore, resolved (in resolution seven) "that the General Secretary be requested to take steps to convene the next meeting of the All India Congress Committee on Wednesday the 7th June at Lucknow." And this request was duly complied with and the A.I.C.C. met on the day and the place it desired.

The Working Committee, however, met at Lucknow a day ahead of the A.I.C.C. meeting—June 6—but only to adjourn after meeting the next day till June 10, 1922. But it was on June 6-7 that it discussed and passed the main resolution which was taken up at the A.I.C.C. meeting. The resolution, number one on its list, recommended to the A.I.C.C. that it should pass the following resolution:

Whereas repression in a most severe form has been resorted to by the Government in several provinces of the country in spite of the suspension of all aggressive activities, this Committee is of opinion (1) That civil disobedience will have to be undertaken to enable the country to enforce its demands,

and accordingly calls upon all Provincial Committees to make greater efforts in working the constructive programme by the 30th September 1922, when the situation will be considered by this Committee and the question of launching civil disobedience will be finally determined. (2) That the President be requested to nominate and authorize a few gentlemen to tour round the country and report on the situation by the 15th of September.

A footnote to this resolution, however, added that it did not affect "the powers given to the provinces by the resolution passed at Delhi" on February 25 by the A.I.C.C. which had modified the Bardoli resolution of the Working Committee by allowing a degree of latitude to the Provincial Committees to initiate "individual civil disobedience whether of a defensive or aggressive character" in particular places and against particular laws, provided the conditions laid down by the Congress and the A.I.C.C. were "strictly fulfilled."

The All-India Congress Committee duly met on June 7 and for two succeeding days. It was chaired by Hakim Ajmal Khan and passed five resolutions. The first one was an exercise in formal piety, though a sincere one. The Committee placed "on record" Gandhi's "services to the cause of humanity by his message of peace and truth" and reiterated "its faith in the principle of Non-Violent Non-Cooperation inaugurated by him for the enforcement of the rights of people of India." This could not have taken long. Nor the second one which filled the vacancies caused by the arrest of the Mahatma, "Deshbhakta" K. Venkatappayya and Sardar Kharak Singh. It elected J.M. Sen-Gupta, T. Prakasam and Lala Dunichand (a leading lawyer of Ambala, then part of the undivided Punjab) in their place. The third resolution approving the recommendation of the Working Committee reducing the provincial contributions to the A.I.C.C. from 25 to 5 per cent of the donations subscribed may have been debated at some length since it concerned financial resources at the disposal of the Committee, but probably not at great length. And the fourth resolution whereby a Committee "consisting of Swami Shradhdhanand, Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, and Messrs G.B. Deshpande and I.K. Yajnik to formulate a scheme embodying practical measures to be adopted for bettering the condition

of the so-called "Untouchables" throughout the country, and place it for consideration before the next meeting of the Working Committee" was appointed; and Rs. five lacs set as the target to be raised for the scheme, obviously, was not one to excite much controversy or heat and did not take much time to discuss before being passed.

The A.I.C.C. then turned to the general political situation in the country. Significantly, we learn from an official summary of its transactions, that "at this stage the House went into Committee." Presumably this was done in order to give members freedom to say what was really in their minds and give their assessment of the conditions obtaining in their provinces. J.M. Sen-Gupta, K. Santanam, H.N. Misra, S.K. Som and Sunderlal spoke on the situation in Bengal, the Punjab, Hindustani-speaking part of the C.P., Assam and the U.P. respectively. The Committee then adjourned for the day to meet again on June 8.

Before resuming the debate, it had a pleasant duty to perform to welcome Motilal Nehru who had been released from Naini Tal Jail after having served his term and although, as we know from Jawaharlal Nehru's statement on his release early in March, he had been troubled by asthma in prison and was not in the best of health, resumed his duties as General Secretary of the Congress immediately on arrival in Lucknow. It was he who raised the question whether or not press representatives should be admitted to the proceedings. After some discussion it was decided that reporters should be admitted but on condition "that their reports should be submitted to one of the General Secretaries for approval before being published."

Motilal Nehru also moved the main Working Committee resolution. It was seconded by Dr. Ansari and its discussion took the rest of June 8 and 9. It was passed but after being considerably amended, or rather re-phrased, by Madan Mohan Malaviya. The changes in the draft, though seemingly just terminological, did imply a shift of emphasis, especially in the second paragraph which read:

The Committee has taken note of the wide-spread feeling that in view of the extremely unfair manner in which the policy of repression is being carried out [sic] by the Government the country should be advised to resort to some form of civil

disobedience to compel the Government to abandon their present policy and to agree to concede the triple demand of the Congress. But the Committee is of opinion that the carrying out of the constructive programme will be the best preparation for even mass civil disobedience while it will also be the most effective means of furthering the object of the Congress. The Committee therefore earnestly appeals to the country to concentrate all its efforts upon carrying out the constructing programme to the fullest extent and to endeavour to complete it within the shortest period possible.

The strong stress on getting on with the constructive programme and completing it with the maximum possible speed was reasonable enough, even very necessary, if it did not conceal a certain oblique shift away from the commitment to civil disobedience. This suspicion seemed to find some confirmation in the next paragraph which hinted at the possibility of some alternative to non-violent non-cooperation. It said "that the further consideration of the question *whether civil disobedience in some form or some other measure of a similar character* [our emphasis] should be adopted, should be taken up at the next meeting of the Committee to be held at Calcutta on the 15th of August next."

However, the Committee accepted the Working Committee's proposal that the President be requested to nominate and authorize a few gentlemen to tour round the country and report on the situation to the next meeting. This indeed was done. Hakim Ajmal Khan, after consulting members of the A.I.C.C., "nominated himself" and the following gentlemen on the Committee to tour round the country and report on the situation: Pandit Motilal Nehru, Dr. M.A. Ansari, Sjt. V.J. Patel, Seth Jamnalal Bajaj, Sjt C. Rajagopalachari and Seth M.M.H.J.M. Chotani. But Jamnalal Bajaj had enough on his plate with the khaddar promotion work and instead Sarojini Naidu was asked to take his place. But she could not accept "owing to ill-health" and finally S. Kasturiranga Iyengar agreed to fill the breach. As for Chhotani he was "unable to join in the tour or take part in the meetings of the Committee" for some unstated reason.

The A.I.C.C. was being oversanguine when it fixed its next meeting for August 15, hoping that by that time it would have all



the data at hand for considering the question of what options were open to the Congress. August came and went; and September and October, too, without the meeting being possible. Of course, in the meanwhile the Working Committee met several times—briefly in Delhi on June 30, again on July 18-19 at Bombay; then on September 17-18 in Amritsar continuing its deliberations in Multan on September 21. But at none of these meetings it grappled with the main issue which was the focus of political attention and even anxiety: what the Congress intended to do next in order to achieve the objectives it had set itself. It passed many resolutions. Some of them were important, like the one at its meeting in Amritsar in September after having had a meeting with the Working Committee of the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee—a symbol of the close link that then existed between the Congress and the Akali movement engaged in a grim struggle on two-fronts—with the *Mahants* and the Government—for the democratic control of the Sikh shrines.

The resolution, of course, condemned "the brutalities perpetrated by the police on unresisting and non-violent Akalis." But it went further than just condemnation. It appointed a committee "to enquire into the whole matter and submit a report to the All India Congress Committee before the end of October." The Committee consisted of S. Srinivasa Iyengar, M.R. Jayakar (who was unable to take part in its work because of an accident and his place was taken by M.V. Abhyankar, a lawyer of Nagpur), J.M. Sen-Gupta, S.E. Stokes, Mohammad Taqi, and Professor Ruchi Ram Sahni.

However, there was hardly a word in the resolutions it passed between June and September—and it was not to meet again till the second half of November in Calcutta—which gave an inkling as to the future political strategy of the Congress. The reason for this reticence was not difficult to guess. The Congress, not for the first or last time, was a house divided. The consensus reached at Ahmedabad had been fractured and the cracks were all too visible to the naked eye. Dr. Sitaramayya, not putting too fine a point on it, reveals it all with a flourish of rather outlandish metaphors and similes which delight even as they baffle. "We need not make an unnecessary secret of the simple fact," he writes, "that top-notch politicians notably Deshbandhu Das and Vithalbhai J. Patel and Motilal who were reluctant converts

but warm apostles of Non-cooperation, were in favour of changing faith on its orthodox lines and professing a protestant creed that would carry Non-cooperation into the very aisles and chancel of the Bureaucratic Church. They wanted to beard the lion in its own den and carry Non-cooperation into the very citadels of Provincial Governments." In other and simpler words, many were keen to jettison the programme of boycott of Councils set up under the Montagu-Chelmsford "reforms" but without giving the impression of a volte face.

In the absence of any clarity of purpose or policy at the top, uncertainties were multiplying among the ranks of the Congress and divisions were surfacing among the leadership. On the other side of the divide, the Government, pleasantly surprised by the mildness of reaction in the country to Gandhi's incarceration, had not only recovered its self-confidence but also the arrogance of power. It was reflected in the distinctly provocative, if not insolent, speech made that summer by the British Prime Minister, Lloyd George, who, having dispensed with the fig-leaf of Montagu's reputation for pro-Indian sympathies, seemed to be unaware that the coalition over which he presided was heading towards an ignominious collapse and that the Liberal Party itself was soon going to pass from the historic scene leaving only an abject rump behind. Presumably to encourage the bureaucratic establishment in India in its good work, he declared:

I can see no period when the Indians can dispense with the small nucleus of British race. . . . They are the steel frame of the whole structure. This is one institution which we shall never cripple. There is one institution which we will not deprive of its functions or its privileges and that is the institution which built up the British Raj—the civil service in India.

Not that the bureaucratic despotism which the cosmetic dyarchy system at the provincial level had done little to curtail and contain, needed much encouragement. As the A.I.C.C. resolution had bemoaned "repression in a most severe form" and carried out in an "extremely unfair manner"—as if there could be a fair manner of carrying out repression—was the order of the day. Dr. Sitaramayya in his history of the Congress remarks without any exaggeration: "The reign of Law reduced itself to

the reign of Sections 108 and 144. The Indian Members of the Executive Council [of the Viceroy and at the provincial level] expressed helplessness as the Collectors [Deputy Commissioners] were all-powerful in the matter, and only a Judicial appeal—which the non-cooperators would not resort to—could remedy the obvious wrong.”

Indeed, the non-cooperators—and despite the Congress reluctance to sanction any civil disobedience even by individuals a number of movements had erupted in various parts of the country over diverse issues, like the hoisting of National Flag in Andhra, the Lawrence Statue (a rather provocative piece of imperialist civic statuary with a post-1857 British proconsul standing with sword in one hand and pen in the other, asking the Indian people which of the two they would be ruled by) and the Akali struggle which was still in progress—were under instructions not to defend themselves at all as a part of their satyagraha pledge. This is precisely what happened when Jawaharlal was re-arrested barely two months after his release from Lucknow Jail.

The arrest took place in rather curious circumstances on May 11, 1922. He had gone to see his father, Motilal Nehru, then in Lucknow Jail. He was inside the prison when he was arrested and brought to Allahabad the same night and lodged in the District Jail where he was tried by K.N. Knox, District Magistrate of Allahabad, on May 17 and sentenced on May 19. For good measure, he was charged on three counts, two of them rather intriguing—criminal intimidation and attempted extortion under Sections 117/506 and 385/116 of the Indian Penal Code—and the third a staple one, of sedition under Section 124-A, was kept in reserve. He did not defend himself. But, unlike Gandhi, he refused to plead either guilty or not guilty as we learn from the statement he made to explain his position which was considerably longer than Gandhi's statement at his trial:

I have refused to plead guilty or not guilty and I have declined to participate in this trial by cross-examination of witnesses or otherwise. I have done so because I do not recognise this court as a court where justice is administered. I mean no disrespect to the presiding officer when I say that so far as

political offences are concerned, the courts in India merely register the decrees of the executive.

This was true. Nehru then went on to give some biographical details: of how he had returned to India after ten years in England and having imbibed most of the prejudices of Harrow and Cambridge so that he and his "likes and dislikes" were more that of "an Englishman than an Indian." "I looked upon the world," he said, "almost from an Englishman's stand-point." But, he added, "today, ten years later, I stand here in the dock charged with two offences and with a third hovering in the background—an ex-convict who has been to jail once already for a political offence, and a rebel against the present system of Government in India. That is the change which the years have wrought in me." He did not think it was necessary for him to give the reasons for this change since "every Indian knows them.... Today sedition against the present Government in India has become the creed of the Indian people...."

As for the charges against him, he wondered whether they were seriously meant. They bore "no relation to the facts even as disclosed by the prosecution evidence." "Does anyone believe," he asked, "that we could achieve success...by criminal intimidation and extortion?" On the contrary, their picketing had been "perfectly peaceful, perfectly courteous." At all events, picketing was not a crime even under the law in British India. But he was glad that he was being tried for picketing because his trial would bring "the question of the boycott of foreign cloth even more to the front." He had no grievance against the cloth dealers who had given evidence for the prosecution in the case. Indeed, he would "suffer most gladly any imprisonment" if he knew that thereby he had "touched their hearts and won them over to the great cause."

In fact, he said towards the end of his statement, he would "go to jail most willingly and joyfully." Jail had become "a heaven for us, a holy place of pilgrimage" since their "saintly and beloved leader was sentenced." One felt "almost lonely outside the jail, and selfishness prompts a quick return." And he concluded his statement on a very emotional—some might say

almost sentimental—note :

I have said many hard things about the British Government. For one thing however I must offer it my grateful thanks. It has given us a chance of fighting in this most glorious of struggles. Surely few people have had such an opportunity.... And the greater our suffering, the more difficult the test we have to pass, the more splendid will be the future of India. India has not survived through thousands of years to go down now. India has not sent twenty-five thousand of her noblest and best sons to the jails to give up the struggle. India's future is assured. Some of us, men and women of little faith, doubt and hesitate occasionally. But those who have vision can almost see the glory that is to be India.

I marvel at my good fortune. To serve India in the battle of freedom is honour enough. To serve her under a leader like Mahatma Gandhi is doubly fortunate. But to suffer for the dear country, what greater good fortune could befall an Indian unless it be death for the cause or the full realisation of our glorious dream.

He did not get six years' simple imprisonment. He was sentenced to eighteen month's imprisonment on each count. In addition he was fined Rs. 100 and in lieu three months additional imprisonment. But the sentences were to run concurrently so that it meant a total sentence of one year and nine months. Unlike in the case of Gandhi, however, his was to be rigorous imprisonment as the "Jail History Ticket" duly recorded, listing him with exquisite ambiguity as a "first class misdemeanant" while leaving blank the space provided in the Ticket for entering the educational qualifications of the convict. The omission was probably a case of absentmindedness although it would be nice to think that it was an act of calculated delicacy on the part of his jailers who did not wish to associate the fair names of Harrow and Cambridge with a "first class misdemeanant." It must be added, however, that Harrow and Cambridge never disowned him as Gandhi was disowned and disbarred by the Inner Temple Bench "at a Parliament holden on Friday, the 10th day of November 1922" by issuing an order which ran as follows:

Whereas at a Bench Table holden on the 9th day of November 1922 the treasurer having reported that he had received a

certified copy of the conviction and sentence to six years' imprisonment of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, a barrister of this Inn, at the Court of the Sessions Judge, Ahmedabad, India, on the 18th March, 1922, for sedition.

It was ordered that the said Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, having been convicted by a competent tribunal of an offence which, in the opinion of the Bench, disqualifies him from continuing a member of the Inn, should have his name removed from the books.

And at the same Bench Table it was further ordered that at the Parliament to be holden on Friday 10th November, 1922, the said Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi should be disbarred and his name removed from the Books of the Society . . .

In his statement at his trial in the District Jail at Allahabad on May 12, Jawaharlal Nehru had spoken of "men and women of little faith" who "doubt and hesitate occasionally." Was he thinking of anybody in particular? Certainly, he was not referring to his father. True, Motilal Nehru had had his doubts about the efficacy of non-cooperation but at the Calcutta Congress he had thrown in his lot with Gandhi, partly, as we know, because of his son's persuasion. And he was a man, once he took up a position, not easily persuaded to abandon it. He was very critical of the Mahatma's decision to call off the civil disobedience campaign that was to be launched at Bardoli. Nor is there any reason to suppose that he had changed his mind in the four months between February and early June when he was released from Naini Tal Jail to which he had been moved from Lucknow Jail before his release. If anything, the arrest of Jawaharlal Nehru in Lucknow Jail where he had gone to see him and conviction the next day with a sentence of 21 months' rigorous imprisonment was hardly likely to induce a change of his political stand. And, indeed, there was little indication of any such shift when he moved the Working Committee's main resolution in the All-India Congress Committee at Lucknow on the resumption of his duties as General Secretary of the Congress. This resolution contained a distinct hint if not warning that civil disobedience "will have to be undertaken" if the Government's policy of repression continued at the level at which it was being pursued and even set a deadline for the Provincial Committees to complete the constructive

programme—September 30, 1922. True, the resolution as it was finally passed by the A.I.C.C. was considerably watered down and set no deadline for completing the constructive programme except the vague phrase "within the shortest period possible" which could be the Greek calends. But that was owed to the drafting genius of Madan Mohan Malaviya.

But what of Lajpat Rai and C.R. Das, representing two sensitive and important provinces, the Punjab and Bengal, where they wielded enormous influence? Did Jawaharlal have them vaguely in mind when he spoke of Doubting Thomases? Both of them were in jail at the time when he made the statement. But he knew something of their political views. It was known that at the Special Session of the Congress at Calcutta Lajpat Rai had doubts about the efficacy of non-cooperation. Later he was to admit "that after all Mahatmaji was right." He had seconded the Non-cooperation resolution at Nagpur Congress which, it is well to recall, had been moved by none other than C.R. Das. However, Das had his mental reservations and he disapproved of Gandhi not grasping the seeming olive branch which Reading had held out in the form of a "Round Table" get together towards the end of 1921 to ensure that there was a warm welcome for the heir to the British throne in Calcutta and elsewhere. He thought that the Mahatma had missed an opportunity for wringing concessions from the British Government by insisting on the release of the so-called *fatwa* prisoners and the participation of the Ali Brothers in any parleys with the representative of British power in India.

At the back of Das' mind there was a deeper reservation. He was opposed to one particular item in the Non-cooperation programme particularly—the boycott of Councils. A distinguished lawyer, he commanded no mean oratorical talent. Like other brilliant lawyers—and they abounded in the old Congress as well as the new one which Gandhi was trying to mould into shape—he believed that the critique of argument, especially when pressed inside the Council Chamber rather than outside, would itself suffice to bring down the Jericho of imperialism and bureaucratic despotism foisted on India. At least he wanted to give it a trial and had made up his mind to bring about a radical change in the Congress tactics and even strategy when he got his ticket of release from the jail.

This happened about a month after Motilal Nehru was

released—in July 1922. Even without him the number of Congress leaders who wanted a change of policy was growing although the arrest and conviction of Gandhi and the intensification of repression by the Government had made it difficult for them to come out openly and demand changes. In a sense, however, the appointment of a committee to tour the country and report on the situation was recognition of the strong undertow for a change. Now that C.R. Das was able to move about the country and not only consult with likeminded Congress leaders, but to speak in public in favour of his alternative programme, it meant a great accession of strength to the revisionists. After all he was to have presided over the Ahmedabad Congress session and was almost certain to be elected President of its 37th session at Gaya at the end of the year.

He visited the Punjab, for instance, where the Congress was not altogether on the Gandhian wavelength—and for reasons which had more to do with its confessional balance rather than political philosophy. He expected fertile soil for his ideas even though he was wholly free from any confessional bias himself. And, indeed, there was warm welcome for him from nearly everybody, including the “Lion of the Punjab”, Lajpat Rai, who was still caged. As his biographer Feroz Chand tells us, though he was not allowed to see him by the authorities, he received a letter from Lajpat Rai extending him “a most hearty welcome to the Land of the Five Rivers and a salaam of love and respect from your admirer and fellow-labourer.” The letter purported to be a statement of “tentative opinions and the tendencies of one’s thoughts” and tried to give a balanced assessment of the loss and gain of the movement since the Non-cooperation programme had been adopted. He had no regrets as far as the propaganda side was concerned. “It has,” he wrote, “completely changed the psychology of our people, and has brought about a transformation in their political views, ideas and ideals.” This was largely true. He added, however, that there were mistakes. The programme that had been drawn up was “excellent for a one-year drive” but now something for a longer haul and therefore less intense was needed. He wanted suppleness of tactics and Gandhi lacked that at times:

The real mistake which I am inclined to regret was the



inflexibility of Mahatmaji in December and January [1921-1922]. In politics I think one may be (or rather must be) inflexible in principles, but not in strategy and methods. Please do not misunderstand me; by 'strategy' I do not mean 'stratagem'. Under no circumstances will I sacrifice honesty and truth at the altar of expediency. Yet I cannot bring myself to believe that strategy and expediency can be safely and totally banished from a political campaign. In my judgement Mahatmaji missed the opportunity of ordering an honourable suspension of hostilities which the Viceroy gave him in December. Then again his inflexible attitude at the Malaviya Conference, and his ultimatum were grave slips....

All this must have sounded like sweet music to Das. But he was above all interested in one thing—removal of the ban on Council entry. But Lajpat Rai, who seemed otherwise his natural ally on many points, was in some difficulty over giving Das satisfaction on the question of going into legislatures such as they were. As his biographer observes, it "had originated with himself [Lajpat Rai]", adding, quite unfairly if not petty-mindedly, "appropriated by the author of non-co-operation," meaning Gandhi which was wholly untrue (whatever his other failings, Gandhi never "appropriated" anybody else's ideas without publicly declaring it). Lajpat Rai, therefore, could not oblige Das by repudiating his own idea of an embargo on Council entry. He wrote:

After careful consideration, I am disposed to think (tentatively) that it will be a mistake to go into the councils either for co-operation or for obstruction. The terms "responsive co-operation" and "responsive non-cooperation" are mere phrases which mean nothing. The best we can do is to follow the Sinn Fein plan—the attempt to set up a rival Government. A rival assembly and rival councils elected on Government franchise will be a great moral victory....

Whatever the merits or demerits of following the Sinn Fein plan which was not quite what Lajpat Rai made it out to be, C.R. Das had his own ideas on going into the Councils which were different as, indeed, on other crucial matters, like the question of

a firm political entente between the majority and minority communities which was universally recognised as an essential condition for presenting a solid common front to the entrenched British power. On this last issue Das, though, according to Jawaharlal Nehru, he had a religious temperament, was far more secular in his understanding than Lajpat Rai who, despite the many years he spent in England and America and contacts with radical left-wing circles there, had imperceptibly lapsed into something of that siege mentality which obtained in the milieu in which he moved, lived and had his being, especially because the plague of confessional bigotry and intolerance of which the communal troubles in Multan in the summer of 1922 were a symptom, was to become endemic in the Punjab.

But if C.R. Das could not have much effective change from Lajpat Rai on the issue of entry into the legislatures—and, in any case, being behind prison bars even though he did not accept Gandhi's odd doctrine that people in jails were "civilly dead," he could not be of much practical help to Das in securing a change of policy from the Congress—he had better chance of converting Motilal Nehru, who was no longer in jail, to his way of thinking. Das may have been temperamentally different from the elder Nehru, as Jawaharlal Nehru says in his autobiography, but intellectually the two men were very close to each other in their liberal outlook. Jawaharlal Nehru writes in his autobiography speaking of the period between 1923-25: "During this period there grew up a close friendship between my father and Mr. C.R. Das. It was something much more than political *camaraderie*. There was a warmth and intimacy in it that I was not a little surprised to notice, since intimate friendships are perhaps rarely formed at advanced ages."

Perhaps, their friendship went even further back, possibly to 1920 when they were both appearing in a zamindari case in Arrah in the Bihar though on opposite sides of the legal battlefield. And although Motilal Nehru had sided with Gandhi on the non-cooperation issue at the special Calcutta session of the Congress, he was not what may be called a natural non-cooperator and Das' task in weaning him away from the policy of boycott of Councils was not all that difficult, particularly in the climate of disenchantment that prevailed after Gandhi's decision to abandon his plan for mass civil disobedience.

Moreover, during the summer and autumn of 1922 the tide was definitely on the turn and flowing in the direction in which Das and others of his mind wanted the Congress to go. The A.I.C.C. was to have met in the middle of August. But though that meeting was never held, Dr. Sitaramayya tells us, "private discussions took place about the time when some of the prominent men of India met in Calcutta in connection with the wedding of Deshbandhu Das' second daughter. It was then, we were told at the time, that Pandit Motilal Nehru was weaned away from Civil Disobedience and converted to Council-entry." Quite apart from this private conclave on the happy occasion of the marriage of Das' second daughter—which only underlines how in India in those days, though not only in those days, private and public affairs tended to get enmeshed—the Committee set up in the first week of June at Lucknow to tour the country and report on the general political situation and whether it was ripe for starting general mass civil disobedience, had finished their labours and the report was ready.

But the A.I.C.C. did not meet till the last week of November for some reason and the committee's findings could not be considered till then. Its first recommendation was predictable, indeed, inevitable. It was:

- (a) The country is not prepared at present to embark upon general mass civil disobedience, but in view of the fact that a situation may arise in any part of the country demanding an immediate resort to mass civil disobedience of a limited character, for which the people are ready e.g., the breaking of a particular law or order or the non-payment of a particular tax, this committee authorises Provincial Committees to sanction such limited mass civil disobedience on their own responsibility if the conditions laid down by this Committee in its resolution No. 2 dated the 4th November 1921 are fulfilled;
- (b) That resolution No. 2 passed by this Committee at Delhi on the 4th November [1921] which gives Provincial Committees all the powers necessary to determine upon a resort to civil disobedience of any kind whatever, be restored and resolution 1 clause 1 passed on the 24th February [1922] to the extent it conflicts with that

resolution be cancelled; provided that general mass civil disobedience is not permissible.

This was, if not a case of one step forward and two steps back, at least an exercise taking away with one hand what was given with the other. Its second recommendation related to entry into legislatures. It also marked a barely camouflaged retreat from total boycott to a policy of resistance and obstruction from within. The Congress and the Khilafat Conference were urged to declare at their Gaya session that, "in view of the fact that the working of the Legislative Councils during their first term has, besides, proving a great obstacle to the redress of the Khilafat and the Punjab wrongs and the speedy attainment of Swarajya, caused great misery and hardship to the people, it is desirable that the following steps should be taken in strict accordance with the principles of non-violent Non-cooperation to avoid the recurrence of the evil:

1. Non-co-operators should contest the election on the issue of the redress of the Punjab and Khilafat wrongs and immediate Swarajya, and make every endeavour to be returned in a majority.
2. If the Non-cooperators are returned in a majority large enough to prevent a quorum, they should after taking their seats leave the Council Chamber in a body and take no part in the proceedings for the rest of the term. They should attend the Councils occasionally, only for the purpose of preventing vacancies.
3. If Non-cooperators are returned in a majority which is not large enough to prevent a quorum, they should oppose every measure of the Government including the budget, and only move resolutions for the redress of the aforesaid wrongs and the immediate attainment of Swarajya.
4. If the Non-cooperators are returned in a minority they should act as pointed out in No. 2; and thus materially reduce the strength of the Council.

However, as the new Councils were not scheduled to meet till the first week of January, 1924, the Committee suggested that the plenary session of the Congress for 1923 should be brought

forward to the first week of December instead of being held in the last and issue of final mandate by the Congress in view of the election should be decided there. Meanwhile there should not be any change of the Congress programme regarding the boycott of the Councils. On contesting the elections for the local bodies, it was less ambivalent and more positive. There were also five other recommendations relating to the boycott of Government educational institutions, courts by litigants and lawyers, organisation of labour as envisaged in the Nagpur resolution, right of private defence and boycott of British goods which were accepted in principle, but the question "referred to a committee of experts for a full report to be submitted before the Congress meets." It was added, as a cautionary admonition it must be supposed, that while "there is no objection to the collection and examination of facts by experts...the acceptance of the principle by the All India Congress Committee would mislead the Nation and injure the movement." Little wonder that C. Rajagopalachari, at the time a fundamentalist among the Non-cooperators, recorded his dissent on the issue of acceptance "in principle" of the boycott of British goods but its rejection for all practical purposes.

Despite the relative unanimity by which the Civil Disobedience Committee adopted its main recommendation, this did not reflect accurately the opinion among the Congress ranks in the country. There was a feeling that in Gandhi's absence in jail forces of revisionism—some even termed it recidivism—were trying to gain control of the policy-making organs of the Congress and intended to take it back to the path of ineffective "constitutionalism." As Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, an ardent Gandhian, puts it:

The diversion of the national mind—be it even of a section—from the dynamic and destructive programme of boycott and the offensives of Civil Disobedience to the milder spheres of Local Self-Government and Legislatures is perhaps like a diversion from the firing line of the battle-field to the chess-board of the drawing-room. Yet, the fact must be recognized that by the winter of 1922, there was a schism which it was no longer possible to conceal, and which was destined to develop into a split at the Gaya Congress.

In November, however, that was still the future that was to be. When the Working Committee met at Calcutta on the 18th and 19th of November it accepted virtually all the recommendations of the Civil Disobedience Committee though here and there it entered a reservation or qualification. For instance, it stated explicitly that the recommendation of the Civil Disobedience Committee on the question of the boycott of British goods should not affect the Congress programme regarding khaddar and the boycott of all foreign cloth. Again, on the boycott of courts by litigants and lawyers alike, it laid much stress on creating an alternative system of dispensing justice through the establishment of "Panchayats" and cultivating "a strong public opinion in their favour."

But in the All-India Congress Committee, a larger and more representative body, the balance of opinion was not so one-sided as in the Working Committee. If anything, it was tilted rather against sounding a general retreat from the position taken up at the Ahmedabad session on the programme of non-cooperation. The session lasted for five days, beginning on November 20 and ending on November 24. Yet it had not many resolutions to debate; indeed, no more than six. Of these last three were non-controversial: One of them congratulated "the Turkish Nation on their recent victories" and recorded "the emphatic opinion" of the A.I.C.C. "that unless the demands of the Angora Government are satisfied in regard to the restitution of the Turks to full and unhampered freedom in their homelands in Asia and Europe, and unless the *jazirat-ul-Arab* are freed from all non-Moslem control, there can not be peace and contentment in India." Another recorded "the grateful appreciation" of the Committee for "the services rendered to the nation during the critical juncture in its affairs by the members of the Civil Disobedience Enquiry Committee who have discharged their duties with devotion, with untiring energy and at a sacrifice hard to appraise." And the final resolution requested the General Secretary "to authorise the Natal Indian Congress to send delegates to the Congress to be held at Gaya in anticipation of affiliation."

These three resolutions could not have delayed the members very long from grappling with the matter that was uppermost in their mind and which was covered by the three earlier resolutions—number one to three. The debate on those was not only to take

most of the time of the Committee but was impassioned and even heated. Dr. Sitaramayya gives a graphic account of it in his history of the Congress:

The Congress discussions in Calcutta were like a tournament in which the rounds were all well marked out, and pairs of opposing speakers were carefully selected. The first day's sittings were held in the Indian Association Rooms, but the atmosphere was suffocating and the next four days were spent under a *shamiana* that was erected for the occasion on the premises of 148, Russa Road, Bhawanipore, the magnificent residence of Mr. C.R. Das, which was bearing on its forehead the mark of ten months' neglect [while Das was in prison]. Nor could it be said that the Calcutta performance was a mere feat of intellectual levity.

Certainly, it was no laughing matter, intellectually or otherwise, involving as it did a major decision on whether or not to beat a strategic retreat. The speakers were, therefore, allowed to have their say without having to look at the hands of the clock. Dr. Sitaramayya tells us that no time-limit was set for those who took part in the debate whether for or against entering the Councils though the issue was not put quite so bluntly:

Although towering personalities like Nehru, the elder, and Das were supporting the Council programme and were briskly aided by their old ally, Maharashtra, yet the recent incarceration of Gandhi and the spirit of loyalty and reverence which his following always bore towards him, the attractiveness of a programme of revolt, the absence of a programme of equal attractiveness, the proximity of the goal in sight, in spite of the crags and chasms that intervened but were hidden from view by the carpet green of tree-tops, and above all, the crossing of the Rubicon and the burning of the boats by most Non-cooperators,—all these constituted a formidable opposition which could not be overawed either by the intellectual eminence of Motilal or the dominating personality of Das.

Allowing for the engaging mixing of metaphors drawn freely

and almost surrealistically from land and water which came with great facility to the historian of the Congress, Dr. Sitaramayya's version of the balance of argument as the debate developed at what he describes as the "gala session" of the A.I.C.C. at Calcutta at the end of November is probably accurate. At any rate, the A.I.C.C., although it accepted the Civil Disobedience Committee's finding after touring the country—an exercise which Dr. Sitaramayya does not fail to mention had cost the Congress the sizeable sum of Rs. 16,000—that the country was not prepared at the time to embark upon general mass civil disobedience, did not take upon itself the responsibility of taking a decision on other related and crucial matters but left them for the plenary Congress session at Gaya in a month's time to decide. Dr. Sitaramayya writes:

At the end of five days' analysis, criticism, invective and diatribe, the Committee resolved that the country was not prepared for mass Disobedience but it authorized P.C.Cs. to sanction on their own responsibility limited Civil Disobedience that may be demanded by any situation, subject to the fulfilment of the conditions laid down in that behalf. The harder question of Council-entry was held over till Gaya, and likewise were postponed the questions of Boycott of British goods, the recommendation of entry into Local Bodies with a view to facilitating the constructive programme, the boycott of schools and colleges and Law Courts, and the right of private defence within the limits of Law except when carrying on Congress work. Thus ended the deliberations of the Civil Disobedience Committee which cost the Congress Rs. 16,000.

Apart from the cost, what the A.I.C.C. meeting at Calcutta proclaimed to India and the world was that the main decision-making body of the Congress was caught up in the division between the fundamentalists and the revisionists—a situation which was time and again to repeat itself in the Congress story. Curiously, unlike the A.I.C.C. the Khilafat Committee which had also appointed a Committee to report on the general situation was not faced with a crisis of indecision. Its special Committee had come out more firmly for adhering to the Council Boycott



than the Civil Disobedience Committee set up by the A.I.C.C. at Lucknow.

And so to Gaya, a name associated with a distant and most remarkable enlightenment, and even in 1922 only a vestigial memory, though not so vestigial as today; and both the Chairman of the Reception Committee, Braj Kishore Prasad, in his address of welcome delivered in Hindustani, and C.R. Das in his presidential address in English reminded the more than ten thousand delegates and visitors who were there to attend the Thirty-seventh Session of the Indian National Congress held between December 26 and 31, 1922, of it. They could hardly have failed to do so. For the *Pandal* at Swarajyapuri as the site of the Congress session was named on the bank of the Phalgu was barely three miles from "the hallowed spot," as Braj Kishore Prasad noted at the very outset of his speech of welcome, "where Buddha attained his supreme enlightenment and by which reason it has come to be known as Budh Gaya."

It was at Ahmedabad in December 1921, when "a large number of delegates from Bihar" attended the Congress session, that an invitation to the Congress to hold its next session in that Province—the first time Bihar had the honour of providing a venue for the Congress session had been in 1912 at Bankipore and that was at a time when the Congress had reached its nadir and the session had been a lack-lustre affair—had been extended. But it was not until towards the end of April that the Working Committee accepted the invitation. Early in May the Provincial Congress Committee of Bihar met at Gaya with Deep Narayan Singh in the chair and decided on Gaya. A reception Committee was duly set up with Braj Kishore Prasad as its chairman and the work of collecting funds for the enterprise began soon after.

Apparently, it did not proceed very smoothly. And for two reasons—one beyond human control and the other man-made. Then as now Bihar attracted either excess of rain or none or very little. The monsoon that year set in early and lasted much longer and, we are told, not "much progress was . . . made until October." The man-made reason was the Government repression and intimidation. "The myrmidons of the bureaucracy," the official report says, "did all they could . . . to prevent rich people from giving pecuniary aid to the Reception Committee." At one time it was so short of money that it had to borrow

Rs. 50,000 on the personal responsibility of its members to get on with the work.

However, despite these difficulties, in mid-October the foundation stone of "the Pandal and Swarajyapuri... was laid by Maulvi Haji Syed Khurshed Husnan and Babu Rajendra Prasad," it seems, "with due Muslim and Hindu ceremonies." Altogether it was a triumph of improvisation, especially as electricity, water and conservancy services had to be provided and Gaya, a relatively poor town even in a poor region, had not the resources and facilities which metropolitan and other major cities hosting Congress sessions had. Nevertheless, the Gaya Municipality was cooperative and agreed to supply water to Swarajyapuri free of charge and eventually a township of huts and tents to accommodate the Congress and Khilafat camps emerged on the bank of the Phalgu river well in time for the Congress to be held as scheduled. And not only the Congress, but also for the Khaddar Exhibition to be held simultaneously as the principal sideshow meant to demonstrate "all the processes of preparing silk, woollen and cotton Khaddar of all descriptions, coarse as well as fine," including the process of dyeing khaddar. The latter, it is interesting to recall, had volunteers from Prafulla Chandra Ray's (who had won international recognition in the scientific community for his researches on mercury and nitric acid and their interaction) science faculty at Calcutta to demonstrate it for the visitors to the Exhibition.

The *Pandal*, where the Congress met, was a wooden and bamboo structure "covered entirely with khaddar." It was, according to the official report, "elliptical in shape and the extreme length and the breadth of the ellipse were 370 ft. and 255 ft. respectively.... A life-size portrait of Mahatma Gandhi, especially painted for the occasion by Mr. C. Nageshwar Rao, and [incongruously enough] another of Rana Pratap Singh were also hung in two very prominent places on the platform. The main entrance to the Pandal was a gate after the pattern of the Buddhistic gate of Sanchi and a round pillar standing in the middle with a lion as its capital was an imitation of one of Ashoka's Pillars in which the Province abounds.... Just behind the main gate was a beautifully laid out garden with four marble fountains." And there were all other amenities, like the hall for

the meetings of the Subjects Committee and even a printing press to turn out Congress documents and literature.

Altogether 3,848 delegates had registered, but since some of them had registered after the deadline for registration, only 3,248 were officially admitted as delegates which was 1,500 less than the delegates to the Ahmedabad session. The late-comers attended as visitors among whom, we are told, were "ex-prisoners, the Akalis [whose movement for the reform of Sikh shrines was supported morally and materially by the Congress], the Sadhus, the Ulema and the agriculturists." More: about 250 persons from the tribal region of Chota Nagpur had walked all the way "from the interior of the district of Ranchi, with their own rice, fuel and earthen cooking pots to have sight of the great national assembly." It seems they were wholly self-reliant in the matter of food and "were quite content to live in an orchard reserved for them and to squat on the passage floor in the Congress *Pandal*."

The Bihar Provincial Congress Committee, in those days representing the avant-garde of Gandhian thought and practice and not the rear, had taken great pains to ensure that the Gaya session, in so far as the arrangements for the creature comforts of the delegates and visitors were concerned, should be as good as human effort could make them. A special effort had been made to encourage the women of Bihar to join the Reception Committee and actively participate in the preparatory work. This was easier said than done. For Purdah was still the rule rather than the exception in Bihar, especially among the middle and better-off sections in both urban and rural areas. The success of the attempt to draw in women was at best mediocre. Out of 2,666 members of the Reception Committee there were only 28 women. However, a much larger body of women—"not less than 500" according to the official report—took part in the work of the session either as delegates, volunteers or visitors.

A Working Committee meeting was held four days before the opening of the Thirty-seventh session. It passed three resolutions, none of them having any direct bearing on the main issue before the Congress and the country. As already related, in the late summer of 1922 there had been recrudescence of Hindu-Muslim tension and one rather serious outbreak of communal violence at Multan in the Punjab. The Working Committee resolved

"that a Board consisting of the President [C.R. Das], Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, Hakim Ajmal Khan and a Mohammadan gentleman nominated by Hakim Ajmal Khan be appointed to prepare a scheme for the settlement of Hindu-Muslim differences, to be placed before the Subjects Committee." The other two resolutions it passed concerned organisational matters. Strangely, however, there is no mention of any scheme for settling Hindu-Muslim differences which the four-man Board appointed by the Working Committee was to prepare and place before the Subjects Committee in the resolutions passed by the Congress at Gaya.

There was the usual "flourish of trumpets, sounding of bugles and marching of volunteers and Congress Boy Scouts" to mark the arrival of the President "in a procession composed of ex-Presidents" in the *Pandal* at 1.30 P.M. on Boxing Day, December 26. This was followed by the singing of *Bande Mataram* "by a choir of Bengali girls led by Professor Brajendra Nath Ganguli followed by the Majestic voice of Prof. Vishnu Digambar of Gandharva Mahavidyalaya, the soul-stirring song of Miss Tyabji [presumably in Urdu] and songs in vernacular." Then at two in the afternoon the Chairman of the Reception Committee read his address in Hindustani which took forty-five minutes, after which he "formally invited Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das to take the Chair of the Thirty-seventh Indian National Congress and deliver his Presidential address." And with it began the trial of strength between those who came to be known as "No Changers" and those who wanted a radical change of tactics of non-cooperation to achieve the same end—Swaraj.

The battle-lines, in any case, had been clearly drawn in the months leading up to the crunch that was expected to be reached on the banks of the Phalgu at Gaya. Dr. Sitaramayya argues that "the fight at Gaya was really a tripartite one," though curiously he does not identify which the third party was, mentioning only "those that raised politics to a spiritual level and those that worked politics on the intellectual and the material plane." Presumably, he had in mind the undivided middle, the fence-sitters and the *attentists* who either had not made up their minds or were waiting to see which side the battle was going before taking sides. For as the A.I.C.C. debate at Calcutta had shown, despite the intellectual eminence of Motilal Nehru and the

resonant oratory of C.R. Das, it was by no means certain that they would carry the day. They themselves were not sure of the outcome. That is why, perhaps, as Dr. Sitaramayya claims "Deshbandhu Das really had two precious documents in his pocket when he presided over the Gaya Congress,—one was the Presidential Address and the other his resignation of the Presidency, together with a constitution of the Swaraj Party."

From the word go the issue became clearly and sharply defined in the speech of welcome by Braj Kishore Prasad and the presidential address of C.R. Das. The Chairman of the Reception Committee was frankly a committed Gandhian who attributed "the introduction of the element of purity and spirituality in our political life" to the Mahatma and wanted them to reject "the distinction that was sought to be drawn between private and public character" and continue their faith in Gandhi who had shown them "the right path". He came to deal with the central point of dispute pretty early in his speech which was by no means unduly long. He said that there were two aspects to the non-cooperation programme—a positive and constructive programme and a negative or destructive one. The latter included "the boycott of Councils, boycott of law courts by lawyers and litigants, boycott of Government and Government aided schools and colleges and the boycott of foreign cloth." He dealt with the boycott of Councils—he described them as "sham institutions"—at some length, realising no doubt that was the real bone of contention.

He developed his argument in a civilised manner of which the Mahatma would have wholly approved. Instead of attacking those who wanted the policy on Council entry to be reversed, he began by castigating those who were seemingly on the side of boycott angels but had been left "untouched" by "the purifying influence of this movement" and had "completely failed to imbibe the message of Mahatma Gandhi." He added:

I had heard in Calcutta and the perusal of daily newspapers only serves to confirm the information, that some gentlemen who are opposed to council entry, have taken to vilifying our leaders and other workers, who hold different views on this question. For myself, I cannot conceive of a more abominable conduct. Friends, do not flatter yourselves that

you continue to be great patriots, while they have proved faithless to the best interests of the country. . . . I would also avail myself of the opportunity to emphasise that our attitude even towards those who are avowedly opposed to our movement should be one of love and esteem. Honesty, truth and wisdom are not the monopoly of non-cooperation. . . .

However, his admonition to those believing in the boycott of Councils to be tolerant to those who thought otherwise did not mean that he was any the less convinced of the rightness of the boycott policy. He dealt politely but effectively with all the arguments of the opponents of the boycott thesis and, indeed, his views on the pitfalls of going into the Councils and contesting elections were to prove prophetic. Not the least among the dangers was the possibility of conflict among Congressmen themselves. He said:

There is every likelihood that council elections may breed strife in the ranks of Congressmen themselves. So many will offer themselves for election that one may be pardoned for entertaining a genuine apprehension that they may ultimately begin to fight among themselves. The Congress committees are not yet strong enough to enforce rigorous discipline among the members. You know how people begin to quarrel and go to the length of forming factions even in matters of election to the offices of the president, vice-president, secretaries of the various Congress committees as also in the election to the All India Congress Committee. . . .

This was undeniable and remains so till this day. But the danger was compounded under conditions of alien rule and Braj Kishore Prasad did not fail to point it out. "The British," he said, "are a most diplomatic people." And in any situation they assume "the role of the sole custodian of the interests of humanity and civilization." They are, therefore, able to intrude "upon the parties and whichever of them may win or lose," the British never fail to make out something for themselves by way of brokerage. The Councils, as they were constituted, he argued, would give the Government ample scope for pursuing this type

of political game:

Almost all the highest officials of the land are members of it. All their endeavours are directed towards one end...to do anything to keep its hold on the country. By throwing the tempting baits of Government offices, Executive Councillorship, Ministership, Presidentship of the Councils, Secretaryship, Judgeship of the High Court, District Court Judgeship and other offices, high and low and even by holding out prospects of appointments to their friends and relations, they try to entrap our countrymen. This process goes on from day to day and yet we knowingly allow ourselves to be caught in the mesh....

This was perfectly true. All Governments use patronage, not as a trust as idealistic Benthamites thought it should be, but as an instrument of bribery and corruption. The British in India used patronage unashamedly to enlarge the base of Quislingism—an essential factor in securing and perpetuating their stranglehold over India. He did not blame them for it, but he did not want Indians—and particularly Congressmen—to be led into temptation. It is advisable, he counselled, to avoid “points of contact, as far as practicable.” Nor was he impressed by the argument advanced by Jayakar at Calcutta that the reason why the Councils had been ineffective hitherto was because only unrepresentative nonentities had gone into them, and that if the real leaders of the people, like Motilal Nehru and C.R. Das, were elected they would be able to “dictate their terms.” Braj Kishore Prasad, however, thought this argument to be fallacious.

Swaraj, he maintained, was impossible so long as the Congress failed to take the masses with it for which they had “to work the constructive programme.” And fairly early in his speech he had outlined a programme of establishing what would have been virtually a parallel or alternative administration if not government, involving the setting up of village committees or Panchayats which would look after the affairs of each village, such as: “(1) Education, (2) Health and Cleanliness of the village, (3) Settlement of local disputes, (4) Spread of Charkha, Khaddar and Swadeshi, (5) Fostering and development of unity among Hindus, Mohammedans and other communities, (6) Uplifting of the suppressed or depressed classes, and (7) Raising of necessary

funds for these purposes through the system of Muthia or in any other way."

For him the "real foundation of the edifice of Swaraj" was the village Panchayat or committee. He wanted other committees at various other levels—"Sub-divisional, Taluk, District and Provincial . . ." It was almost a system of Soviets, but built from the ground upwards not the other way round. As he put it, "Make your Congress Committees, from the village panchayat upwards to the All India Congress Committee, living, working and powerful institutions. That is the real work to be done for the attainment of Swaraj. Therefore, let this controversy about councils cease to distract our thoughts and energies. . . . Otherwise, all that has been done so far will be spoiled and Swaraj will begin to recede from our vision, and we shall be relegated to the position from where we had started." Above all, he pleaded, they should listen to the arguments on either side "with respect and attention," without showing "discourtesy to anyone," or indulging in "noisy demonstrations," and, finally, whatever decision the Congress reached "must be ungrudgingly and unreservedly accepted. . . ."

This was a counsel of perfection, but, again, let us not anticipate. The Chairman of the Reception Committee having had his say and welcomed the delegates and apologised "for the many deficiencies in our arrangements," garlanded the President and put on him the President's star and led C.R. Das to the rostrum "amid deafening shouts of 'Mahatma Gandhi-ki-jai.'" The President then read out his address which, we are told, covered twenty-five printed foolscap pages "in bold and clear voice." It took him two hours and a quarter and he was listened to "mid pindrop silence broken only at intervals by cries 'hear, hear' and lusty cheers." Whether the applause at the end was as loud and unanimous as it was at the beginning, we do not know. But the address was a remarkable performance by any standards. Indeed, nothing like it had been heard at any Congress session since Annie Besant's address to the Calcutta Congress in 1917.

It was quite unlike the rather sententious address which he was to have delivered at the Ahmedabad Congress but which he was unable to deliver because the authorities had locked him up in Alipore Jail only two weeks before the Ahmedabad session although this did not prevent Gandhi, whom Das had sent a copy



of his address, from publishing the text in *Young India*. Obviously, while in his prison cell he had given deep thought to the problems of Indian polity, both in their historical perspective and their immediate actuality, and come to certain firm conclusions which he tried to work with much care into his presidential address to the Gaya session. The result was not just a lawyer's clever brief, or a small-time politician's tawdry platitudes, but a document fit to hand down to posterity as his political testament as it was, unhappily, to turn out to be. There were hardly any dull passages in it and there were parts of it which not only can be read with profit nearly seven decades after, but seem to have the immortal touch.

This is certainly true of the beginning and the end. He began by expressing his "sense of overwhelming loss" which he was sure was "uppermost in the minds" of all and everyone assembled at Gaya. He was, of course, referring to the imprisonment of Gandhi which had deprived them of his guidance. "But," he said, "there is inspiration for all of us in the last stand which he made in the citadel of the enemy, in the last defiance which he hurled at the agents of the Bureaucracy." He could only think of one parallel. The thought was not original to him. It had occurred to Krishnadas when he helped Gandhi to have his bath before the trial. Sarojini Naidu had invoked it in her description of the trial in her own poetic fashion. It had haunted even George Lloyd, the Governor of Bombay, though he tried hard to exorcise it from his mind and minds of his interlocutors, like Drew Pearson. Das said: "To read a story equal in pathos, in dignity, and in sublimity, you have to go back over two thousand years when Jesus of Nazareth, as 'one that perverted the people' stood to take his trial before a foreign tribunal." And he quoted the relevant verses from Chapter twenty seven of the Gospel according to St. Matthew :

And Jesus stood before the Governor: and the Governor asked him, saying:

Art thou the king of the Jews? And Jesus said unto him, Thou sayest.

And when he was accused of the chief priests and elders, he answered nothing.

Then said Pilate unto him: Hearest thou not how many things they witness against thee?

And he answered him to never a word; in so much that the Governor marvelled greatly.

But Das, unlike some others who had thought of and used the analogy, was aware of the difference, too. Jesus had refused to incriminate himself, almost as if he was invoking the Fifth Amendment. Gandhi, he added, "took a different course. He admitted that he was guilty and he pointed out to the Public Prosecutor that his guilt was greater than he, the Prosecutor, had alleged. . . . If I may hazard a guess, the Judge who tried him and who passed a sentence of imprisonment on him was filled with the same feeling of marvel as Pontius Pilate had been." This was by no means certain. For Pontius Pilate was not an Englishman. But that question apart, Das' problem was how to make the transition in his address from the sublime to the mundane but agonising problems facing the Congress.

He managed it rather well by likening the "Bureaucracy" and its apologists—and even the "Moderates"—who argued that "if you cannot actively co-operate in the maintenance of 'the Law of the land' . . . it is your duty as a responsible citizen to obey it passively," to "Scribes and Pharisees of the days of Christ." And, then in a wide historical sweep, he described how the doctrine of the "law and order" had given rise to the counter-vailing concept of "independency of Parliament," "individual liberty, the right to resist, and the right to compel abdication and secure deposition of the Crown in a word, they stood for Man against the coercive powers of the State."

He had no difficulty in proving by quoting chapter and verse from British history—and not only British history—"that it is not by acquiescence in the doctrine of law and order that the English people have obtained the recognition of their fundamental rights." But, having started with the Christ analogy, he could not get away from the *Bible*, or rather the New Testament, and referred to the way in which Jesus had dealt with the law when some of his hungry disciples had gone into a corn-field on the Sabbath day and had begun to pluck ears of corn and to eat them, much to the horror of the Pharisees, and Jesus' argument that the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath.

Even so, said Das, "the truth is, that law and order is for Man, and not Man for Law and Order." He thought it was an encouraging sign that the battle-cry of law and order was being raised by the bureaucracy and its friends. "I ask my countrymen," he observed, "to be patient and to press the charge. Freedom has already advanced when the alarm of law and order is sounded; that is the history of Bureaucracies all over the world. In the meantime it is our duty to keep our ideal steadfast. . . ."

But what ideal was India to set before itself? He was quite clear about it. "The first and foremost," he said, "is the ideal of nationalism. Now what is nationalism?" He was quite clear on that question, too: "It is, I conceive, a process through which a nation expresses itself and finds itself, not in isolation from other nations, not in opposition to other nations, but as part of a great scheme by which, in seeking its own expression and therefore its own identity, it materially assists the self-expression and self-realisation of other nations as well: Diversity is as real as unity." He did not want, and quite rightly, the nationalism of countries like India struggling for freedom and "self-expression and self-realisation" to be confused with "the conception of nationality as it exists in Europe to-day," in other words of advanced colonialist countries:

Nationalism in Europe is an aggressive nationalism, a selfish nationalism, a commercial nationalism, of gain and loss. The gain of France is the loss of Germany and the gain of Germany is the loss of France. Therefore, French nationalism is nurtured on the hatred of Germany, and German nationalism is nurtured on the hatred of France. It is not yet realised that you cannot hurt Germany without hurting Humanity, and in consequence hurting France; and that you cannot hurt France without hurting Humanity, and in consequence hurting Germany. That is European nationalism: that is not the nationalism of which I am speaking to you to-day.

Was he simplifying things too much? Not at all. What he said has to be judged in the context of post-Versailles Europe and the characterisation fits. Equally, what he went on to say, despite a tendency to see India's past in an idyllic framework,

was sufficiently close to the historical truth as to possess a residual validity that cannot be denied. For he saw Indian nationhood, not as an off-the-peg, readymade and prefabricated structure, as it were; but a process, "Movement after movement," he argued, "has swept over this vast country, apparently creating hostile forces, but in reality stimulating the vitality and moulding the life of the people into one great nationality." He referred to the interaction of Aryans and non-Aryans and to the rise of Buddhism as a protest against Brahmanism which succeeded "not only in broadening the basis of Indian unity, but in creating, what is perhaps not less important, the greater India beyond the Himalayas and beyond the seas, so much so that the sacred city where we have met [Gaya] may be regarded as a place of pilgrimage of millions and millions of people of Asiatic races."

He spoke of the advent of Islam in India with the coming of "Mahomedans of diverse races, but with one culture which was their common heritage" and "for a time it looked as if here was a disintegrating force, an enemy to the growth of Indian nationalism, but the Mahomedans made their home in India, and, while they brought a new outlook and a wonderful vitality to the Indian life, with infinite wisdom, they did as little as possible to disturb the growth of life in the villages where India really lives. This new outlook was necessary for India; and if the two sister streams met, it was only to fulfil themselves...." Into this somewhat romantic mode of historical exegesis—and its legitimacy is at least equal if not superior to the "Subaltern" school—he fitted in the British impact on India by remarking: "Then came the English with their alien culture, their foreign methods, delivering a rude shock...but the shock has only completed the unifying process so that the purpose of history is practically fulfilled. The great Indian nationality is in sight." In sight, but not fully realised. For that to be possible "the path of Swaraj" was necessary since "Swaraj is the natural expression of the national mind.... The question of all questions in India to-day is the attainment of Swaraj."

But how was it to be attained and by what method? Das had no doubt that it could only be attained through non-violent non-cooperation. Yes, he admitted, "Doubt has...been expressed in some quarters about the soundness of the principle of non-violence." He was aware of the history of revolutions—in France,

in England even, in Italy and in Russia; of Danton and Robespierre; of Jacobins and Girondists; of Mazzini, Garibaldi and Cavour; of Karl Marx; of Cromwell (though he did not name him). "I believe in revolutions," he declared, "but I repeat, violence defeats freedom. The revolution of non-violence is slower but surer." This was what Gandhi also believed, though the assertion in either case had to be taken on trust and Das' quotations from Carlyle, however convincing they may have sounded to his audience at Gaya, could hardly be taken as a conclusive and impartial evidence of the French Revolution having been nothing but expense of spirit and toil and blood in a waste of futility which had merely replaced "Aristocracy of Feudal Parchment" by the shoddy "Aristocracy of the Money-bag."

He was aware that many minds were agitated by the question as to whether "we have succeeded in our work of non-violent non-cooperation"; aware too, that the Moderates were accusing the Congress of "having corrupted the youth of the country" and of "preaching the gospel of hatred" while having "love on our lips." On the first count, he almost accepted that there was a significant deficit in achievement and that "the work of destruction and creation" had to be pursued "more vigorously." But he said to the critics of the Congress that while he admitted it had failed "in many directions," they, for their part, should acknowledge where it had succeeded. To the second charge his answer was that the Christ himself had been accused of having corrupted the people and had furnished an anticipatory defence by declaring "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I come not to send peace, but a sword." And as regards hypocrisy, he described the charge as "a vile slander," but insofar as they had failed to live up to their ideals it was only a proof of their weakness and imperfection. "Judge us by our ideals," he said, "not by what we have achieved."

He dealt with other neuralgic problems, like the Hindu-Muslim question and the rights of different communities generally. He wanted the Lucknow Pact to be emphatically confirmed and a clear declaration of the rights of minority communities such as the Sikhs, the Christians and the Parsees whom the Hindus and the Muslims should give in the Swaraj administration "more than their proportional share." He was also for ending "the policy

of exclusiveness" and keeping in touch "with world movements" by establishing Congress agencies in America and in every European country and communicating "with the lovers of freedom all over the world." More: he envisioned the emergence of "the great Asiatic Federation" and had no doubt that "the Pan-Islamic movement" would outgrow its limitations and develop into "the great Federation of all Asiatic people...the union of the oppressed nationalities of Asia." He could not conceive of India remaining outside such a union.

Why? Because "no nation on the face of the earth can be really free when other nations are in bondage." They had been concentrating on achieving Swaraj in the course of a year which made a certain self-absorption necessary. But they had now to think in terms of "a broader sympathy and a wider outlook." He saw the world "on the eve of great changes" and thought Kamal Pasha's victory had "broken the bonds of Asia" which was now "all astir with life." And having begun with a Biblical theme, he now introduced an inspiring image drawn from Greek mythology—Prometheus. "It is Prometheus," he claimed, "who 'spoke within her' [meaning Asia] and her 'thoughts are like the many forests of vale through which the might of whirlwind and of rain had passed'." He also noted "the stir within every European country for the real freedom of the people."

All this necessitated rethinking and restatement of the national demands, including those regarding the Punjab wrongs some of which had been redressed as well as Khilafat on which he was sanguine that most of them would be realised by the time the Lausanne Commission had completed its labours. What is more, the demand for Swaraj "must now be presented in a more practical shape." And although he did not think that it was "within the province" of his address "to deal with any detailed scheme," he could not allow the opportunity "to pass without giving" the Congress delegates an expression of his opinion as to the character of the system of Government he could equate with Swaraj:

No system of Government which is not for the people and by the people can ever be regarded as the true foundation of Swaraj. I am firmly convinced that a Parliamentary Government is not a Government by the people. Many of us believe that the Middle Class must win Swaraj for the masses,...

I do not believe that the Middle Class [having won power] will then part with their power. . . . My ideal of Swaraj will never be satisfied unless the people co-operate with us in its attainment. Any other attempt will inevitably lead to what European Socialists call the "Bourgeois" Government. . . .

And a truer—or more prophetic—word had never been heard from the mouth of any of his predecessors in the Presidential chair at the Congress sessions. But apart from a vague notion of "autonomy of small local centres" and quoting an anonymous European woman writer in support of devolution of power down to the base, all he could think of was to suggest "that the Congress should appoint a Committee to draw up a scheme of Government which would be acceptable to the nation," and moreover "suggest means by which the scheme can be put in operation at once."

Having traversed a vast trajectory of seductive generalisations, historical and even metaphysical evocations—at one point he spoke, for instance, of God revealing his *Leela*, or play (though *jeu d'esprit* would express the idea better) of which Individual, Society, Nation, Humanity are but aspects, in history—he came down to the brass tacks of Indian politics at the time—the question of boycott of Councils on which everybody was all agog to know his position though they had some notion of what he was going to say. He said it, of course, with some subtlety and sophistication. "Unhappily," he remarked, "the question has become part of the controversy of Change or No-change. To my mind the whole controversy proceeds on a somewhat erroneous assumption. The question is not so much as to whether there should be a change in the programme of the work; the real question is whether it is not necessary now to change the direction of our activities in certain respects for the success of the very movement which we hold so dear."

This sounded reasonable enough, but was he not already in some degree begging the question? The hair-splitting analysis of the Bardoli Resolution that followed rather suggested that he was. He endorsed the finding of the Enquiry Committee that "Civil Disobedience on a large scale is out of question because the people are not prepared for it." At the same time he boldly suggested that "the restrictions which have been put upon the

practical adoption of any system of civil disobedience" should be abolished by the Congress. He said he had not been able to understand why "to enable a people to civilly disobey particular laws, it should be necessary that at least 80 per cent of them should be clad in pure 'Khadi'." Indeed, he seemed to argue in favour of attempts to offer disobedience to laws which are "eminently unlawful." "What hope is there for a nation," he asked, "so dead to the sense of truth as not to rebel against lawless laws, against regulations which injure their national being and hamper their national development?"

But this was an ingenious ploy to disarm no-changers, a case (reversing the famous French adage) of *sauter pour mieux reculer*. He was for reconsidering in the light of circumstances the question of the boycott of Councils which was agitating the country. For him there was "no opposition in idea" between such civil disobedience as he had mentioned and "the entry into the Councils for the purpose, and with the avowed object of either ending or mending them." This was a marvellously deceptive phrase which not only seemed to carry credibility over the next few years with a substantial segment of the Congress intelligentsia, but could—and did—deceive the man who coined it.

This is clear from the rather involved arguments that he developed in the rest of his speech. He was not, he said, "against the boycott of Councils." Indeed, he did not believe them to be worth entering:

I am simply of opinion that the system of the Reformed Councils with their steel frame of the Indian Civil Service covered over by a dyarchy of deadlocks and departments, is absolutely unsuitable to the nature and genius of the Indian nation. It is an attempt of the British Parliament to force a foreign system upon the Indian people. India has unhesitatingly refused to recognise this foreign system as a real foundation for Swaraj. With me, as I have often said, it is not a question of more or less; I am always prepared to sacrifice much for a real basis of Swaraj, nor do I attach any importance to the question as to whether the attainment of full and complete independence will be a matter of 7 years or 10 years or 20 years. A few years is nothing in the life history of a nation.



Then why was he in favour of entering the Councils? He gave two reasons, each plausible but fallacious. The first was to show them up for the sham and fraud they were. He argued:

It should be the duty of the Congress to boycott the Councils more effectively from within. Reformed Councils are really a mask which the Bureaucracy has put on. I conceive it to be our clear duty to tear this mask from off their face. . . . The only successful boycott of these Councils is either to mend them in a manner suitable to the attainment of Swaraj or to end them completely. That is the way in which I advise the nation to boycott the Councils.

But was there not a contradiction embedded right at the heart of his argument summed up in the phrase "mend or end"? For if the Councils were capable of being mended, they could not be described as wholly fraudulent? He was too intelligent and perceptive not to realise that there was a contradiction even as he was trying to make the phrases "mending or ending" and "boycott from within" the popular currency of debate on the issue. For he obliquely admitted as much. "The people of India," he went on to add, "do not like these Reforms, but let us not forget that the Bureaucracy does not like them either. Because it is the result of two contending forces pulling in different directions, the Reforms have assumed a tortured shape."

This was a true and dialectically accurate analysis of the anatomy of Montagu-Chelmsford reforms. As for the charge that entry into Councils was inconsistent with the ideal of non-cooperation, he pointed out, "Surely the charge of inconsistency must depend on the object of the entry." And as was often to happen with the Congress leadership committed to Gandhian non-violence, including Gandhi himself in his unguarded moments, Das drew an analogy from the battlefield. "An advancing army," he said, "does not co-operate with the enemy when it marches into the enemy's territory." And he rightly added, "Entry into the Council to cooperate with the Government and entry into the Council to non-cooperate with the Government are two terms and two different propositions." Nor did the oath of allegiance to the Crown which those entering the Councils were required to take, present any difficulty for him though he

admitted that it might for those abiding by the "dictates of any particular religion." "The oath is a constitutional one," he claimed. "The King stands for the constitution. Great changes in constitution have taken place in England under that very oath."

This was rather misleading. For the Councils, unlike Parliament in Britain, were not sovereign bodies and it was somewhat disingenuous to labour an analogy which was unreal. But, then, a strain of disingenuousness was inherent in the position he and those of his mind had taken up and the case which they were trying to make, brushing aside the arguments of their opponents which, though naive to a degree, had an undeniable consistency—or would have had if they had stuck to them and had not yielded to the temptation of opportunism as some were to do in the coming months and years.

In the concluding part of his address, Das dealt briefly and almost in passing with a number of other matters which were on the agenda of the Congress session at Gaya—the need to take up work of labour and peasant organisations which he was sorry had not been taken up; boycott of schools; boycott of Law Courts on which he preferred a pragmatic rather than strictly dogmatic approach by laying down "rules which will cover all the circumstances which may arise in particular cases;" and khaddar which he stressed was "one of the most important questions" before them. Why? Not because he agreed with those who said that khaddar alone would bring Swaraj which he did not consider a serious proposition. But he did accept the importance of khaddar in "one sense only." "We must regard Khaddar," he said, "as the symbol of Swaraj. As the Khaddar makes us self-contained with regard to a very large department of our national life so it is hoped that the inspiration of Khaddar will make the whole of our national life self-contained and independent. This is the meaning of the symbol."

And then came the conclusion. He called it "a last message of hope and confidence." And so it was and more; a magnificent coda, as it were, of a composition which had a symphonic structure and which not merely rounded it off exquisitely, but had about it what Marcus Aurelius would have recognised as "the accent of heroic truth." No apology is needed to quote it almost

in full. For nothing like it was to be heard at a Congress session for many a year if ever:

There is no royal road to Freedom, and dark and difficult will be the path leading to it. . . . Do not make the mistake of confusing achievement with success. Achievement is an appearance and appearances are often deceptive. I contend that, though we cannot point to a great deal as the solid achievement of the movement, the success of it is assured. . . . But though the ultimate success of the movement is assured, I warn you that the issue depends wholly on you, and on how you conduct yourselves in meeting the forces that are arrayed against you. Christianity rose triumphant when Jesus of Nazareth offered himself as a sacrifice to the excessive worship of law and order by the Scribes and the Pharisees. The forces that are arrayed against you are the forces, not only of the Bureaucracy, but of the modern Scribes and Pharisees whose interest it is to maintain the Bureaucracy in all its pristine glory. Be it yours to offer yourselves as sacrifices in the interest of truth and justice, so that your children's children may have the fruit of your sufferings. Be it yours to wage a spiritual warfare so that the victory, when it comes, does not debase you, nor tempt you to retain the power of Government in your own hands. But if yours is to be a spiritual warfare, your weapons must be those of the spiritual soldier. Anger is not for you, hatred is not for you nor for you is pettiness, meanness or falsehood. For you is the hope of dawn and the confidence of the morning. . . .

This was rhetoric; it connected but fitfully and tenuously with the political reality in India—and the Congress—even in those days. But words have a magic that induces a willing suspension of disbelief and can cast a spell that, momentarily at least, makes the ideal real. Chittaranjan Das made the spell even more powerful when he told his audience that for them was "the song that was sung of Titan, chained and imprisoned, but the Champion of Man, in the Greek fable;" and he went on to quote the most poignant and revolutionary utterance by Shelley—the lines which the poet puts in the mouth of Demogor-

gon at the end of *Prometheus Unbound*:

To suffer woes which Hope thinks infinite;  
To forgive wrongs darker than death or night;  
To defy Power which seems omnipotent;  
To love, and bear;  
to hope till Hope creates From its own wreck the thing it  
contemplates;  
Neither to change, nor falter, nor repent;  
This, like thy glory, Titan is to be Good, great and joyous,  
beautiful and free; .  
This is alone Life, Joy, Empire and Victory.

## CHAPTER XV

### REHEARSALS OF DISCOMPOSURE

The speech of welcome delivered by the Chairman of the Reception Committee had stated the case for the boycott of the so-called reformed legislatures as well and as civilly as it could be stated. The presidential address had made the case against boycott, or rather for entering the Councils with the declared purpose of mending them or ending them, with the utmost persuasiveness and great eloquence. Thus the point and counterpoint of the theme which was to be the principal focus of discussion both in the Subjects Committee and the plenary sessions of the Congress at Gaya had been intoned cogently and lucidly. C.R. Das' presidential address, indeed, seemed to scale heights not just of spell-binding political rhetoric, but at points attains an intensity and poignancy of utterance for which what followed during the next four days could only be a descent and falling away as it turned out to be.

The agenda before the Congress was fairly heavy, though by no means as heavy as at some of the previous sessions. Altogether it adopted seventeen resolutions. But quite a number of them were non-controversial or dealt with routine organisational matters, like the last three. One of these—number fifteen—placed on record "its grateful thanks for the valuable services" of the

outgoing General Secretaries, namely Motilal Nehru, Dr. M. A. Ansari and C. Rajagopalachari while appointing M. Moazzam Ali, Vallabhbhai J. Patel and Rajendra Prasad in their place. The next resolution announced the re-appointment of Jamnalal Bajaj and M.M.H.J.M. Chotani as Congress Treasurers for the coming year. And the final resolution fixed the venue for the next session which was to be held "in Andhra Desha" though the place where it was going to be held was not specified, being left for latter decision in consultation with the Andhra Congress Committee.

As always, the Congress began with mourning its dead. Since the Ahmedabad session two of its veterans, representing the link with its Founding Fathers who began the long march to freedom through a difficult and almost unnegotiable terrain, had died. One of them was Ambica Charan Mazumdar who had presided at the Lucknow Session in 1916 at which the Congress-Muslim League concordat was forged and endorsed. The other was Motilal Ghose, the pioneer of nationalist press and journalism in India, who founded the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* which had been a thorn in the flesh of the bureaucratic establishment and was on occasions to earn its extreme disfavour and even suffer for it.

The Congress also had to acknowledge its debt of gratitude to the living—and above all to the man who was not there but behind prison bars at Yeravda near Poona even though Gandhi, for his part, regarded himself and other prisoners of conscience as "civilly dead." The second resolution it passed placed on record "its grateful appreciation of the services of Mahatma Gandhi to the cause of India and humanity by his message of Peace and Truth." It took the opportunity also to reiterate "its faith in the principle of non-violent non-cooperation inaugurated by him for the enforcement of the rights of the people of India." In those days it remembered not only its great leaders who had served to make it what it was, but also the thousands of anonymous but brave men and women who had answered its call and gone to prison. And the third resolution recorded:

... profound appreciation of the services rendered to the national cause by all those brave citizens, who have suffered in pursuance of the programme of voluntary suffering and who in accordance with the Congress advice, without offering any

defence or bail, served or are serving various periods of imprisonment, and calls upon the nation to keep alive this spirit of sacrifice and to maintain unbroken the struggle for freedom.

This was followed by a resolution recording "with pride and admiration its appreciation of the unexampled bravery of the Akali martyrs and the great and noble example of non-violence set by them for the benefit of the whole nation." This resolution may sound strange and ironical against the background of more recent history of Punjab and the relations between the Congress and the Akali Party and its various factions. But in the early 1920s and for a decade and even more, despite the reservations which the Punjab Provincial Congress Committee may have entertained about the Akali movement for the control of Sikh shrines from the generally corrupt *Mahants* or Priests, the All-India Congress leadership saw, and rightly, in the Akali struggle not only a movement of reformation within Sikhism, but as a tributary stream of the movement of national liberation.

Next came a resolution expressing the solidarity of the Congress with the new Turkey emerging under the leadership of Ghazi Mustafa Kamal Pasha and congratulating him and the Turkish nation "on their recent successes" and further recording "the determination of the people of India to carry on the struggle till the British Government has done all in its power and removed all its own obstacles to the restoration of the Turkish nation to free and independent status, and the conditions necessary for unhampered national life and effective guardianship of Islam, and the Jazirat-ul-Arab, freed from all non-Muslim control." This resolution fitted in fairly well with the increasingly overt anti-imperialist tone of the Congress pronouncements on international affairs. But it seemed somewhat incongruous with another resolution—number nine—which it passed and which related to the situation in the Near East. It read:

In view of the serious situation in the Near East which threatens the integrity of the Khilafat and the Turkish Government and in view of the determination of the Hindus, Mussalmans and all other peoples of India to prevent any

such injury, this Congress resolves that the Working Committee do take steps in consultation with the Khilafat Working Committee in order to secure united action by the Hindus, Mussalmans and others, to prevent exploitation of India for any such unjust cause and to deal with the situation.

There was, undoubtedly, an anti-imperialist content in the resolution. The Turkish people needed the support and solidarity of other Asian nations and anti-imperialist forces generally to withstand the pressures to which they were being subjected by imperialist powers, principally Britain and France. The Lausanne Conference was still in session, and although the contradictory pulls within British policy relating to Turkey and the Near East had already led to the resignation of Lloyd George in October 1922 and the accession to premiership of Bonar Law, it was still not certain how far the new Turkish Government would be able to hold its ground at Lausanne. But the Khilafat issue as such was soon to become obsolete. This should have been clear to any moderately well-informed observer. But the Congress leadership did not want to get out of step with the Khilafat movement although the latter's programme had little relevance to the new situation in the Near East with the rise of Kamal Pasha in Turkey who was to build a modern, secular Turkish Republic on the ruins of the old Ottoman Empire and finally lay the ghost of the doctrine of Caliphate.

Another resolution towards the end of the agenda dealt with the question of affiliations of a number of kindred organisations outside India with the Congress. It had been rather wary of allowing such organisations, some of them evoking its name in their own nomenclature, freely to affiliate with it, partly because it could not be sure of who would control them and what policies they might pursue. Its experience even in the case of the British Committee of Indian National Congress towards the end had been rather unhappy and discouraging. However at Gaya it seemed to be in a liberal mood on this issue and resolved:

...that the Natal Indian Congress Committee, Durban, the British Indian Association, Johannesburg, the British India League, Capetown, and the Point Indian Association, Durban, be affiliated, with power to send ten delegates—this number



to be allotted amongst themselves by agreement to be reported to the All India Congress Committee...that the Kabul Congress Committee be affiliated, with power to send two delegates.

The resolution immediately preceding it dealt with a more important matter. It was two years earlier—at Nagpur—that for the first time the Congress had given thought to the need for organising Indian Labour “with a view to promote their well-being and secure their just rights,” and to prevent its “exploitation...by foreign agencies.” But as C.R. Das in his presidential address said, it “had remained a paper resolution” and he had rightly diagnosed the reason for the Congress failure to act upon it. But at Gaya it not only reiterated the Nagpur resolution and amplified it, but set up a committee to cooperate with the All-India Trade Union Congress. The resolution number thirteen said:

Whereas this Congress is of opinion that Indian labour should be organised... it is resolved that this Congress, while welcoming the move made by the All India Trade Union Congress and various Kisan Sabhas in organising the workers of India, hereby appoints the following Committee with power to co-opt, to assist the Executive Council of the All India Trade Union Congress for the organisation of Indian labour, both agricultural and industrial: (1) C.F. Andrews. (2) J.M. Sen Gupta. (3) S.N. Haldar. (4) Swami Dinanath. (5) Dr. D.D. Sathaye. (6) M. Singaravelu Chettiar.

Singarvelu Chettiar who seconded the resolution provided unwittingly, perhaps, the rare comic relief of the session. He was so carried away with elation at the prospect, as he saw it, of the ferment among the workers “in Russia, Australia and America,” and his own impassioned eloquence in a worthy cause, that the audience could not quite take it. As he was warning the bourgeoisie and asking them “to hearken, hearken” to him and calling upon “ye richmen...ye big men” to beware because “the Labour of India, the Cinderella of the East” was “wide awake” and “coming up and up,” there were repeated interruptions and cries of “stop, stop” from the floor of the House so that his dire and prophetic

warnings could not be heard. But, of course, he was knocking at an open door and the resolution was put to vote and passed.

There had been no plenary session of the Congress on December 27 because the Subjects Committee had taken the whole day in discussing the resolutions. One of them which it passed, but which is not mentioned in *The Encyclopaedia of the Indian National Congress*, Vol. 8, presumably because it was rejected by the Congress at its plenary session on December 28, concerned the boycott, not just of foreign cloth, but foreign goods. It was moved by S. Satyamurti who described it as "a very modest and a very practical one." But it was opposed by no less a person than C. Vijiaraghavachariar, who had presided over the Nagpur Congress. He considered it "impractical and undesirable" because "it would displease the Labour organisation and the Labour movement in England." His opposition was reinforced by C. Rajagopalachari and amidst some confusion the President declared the resolution to be lost.

However, these were only preliminary skirmishes. The real "battle royal," as Dr. Sitaramayya nicely describes it, was joined on the question of Council entry. The resolution on the issue was moved by C. Rajagopalachari, in those days a fundamentalist on non-cooperation; it was seconded by Dr. M.A. Ansari; and among those who spoke in its favour was Sarojini Naidu who described herself as one of the "five earliest disciples" of the Mahatma. An amendment was moved by S. Srinivasa Iyengar which proposed that the Congress candidates should contest the elections and, if elected, should refrain from taking their seats. Another amendment was proposed by Motilal Nehru and supported by Jamnalal Bajaj and Madan Mohan Malaviya. It was also for going into the Councils—for the paradoxical reason of securing Gandhi's release which the Mahatma would not have relished. C. Rajagopalachari replied to the debate. The amendments were rejected and for the voting on the Council boycott resolution the *Pandal* was cleared of all but the delegates. The resolution as finally adopted read:

Whereas the boycott of Councils carried out during the elections held in 1920 has destroyed the moral strength of the institutions through which Government sought to consolidate

its power and carry on its irresponsible rule [this was a reference to the low level of voters' participation even on a restricted franchise]:

And whereas it is necessary again for the people of India to withhold participation in the elections of the next year as an essential programme of non-violent non-co-operation:

This Congress resolves to advise that all voters shall abstain from standing as candidates for any of the Councils and from voting for any candidate offering himself as such in disregard of this advice, and to signify the abstention in such manner as the All India Congress Committee may instruct in that behalf.

The next resolution connected with a long-standing grievance of the Congress over military expenditure and its economic consequences. But it linked the old complaint with the constitutional confidence trick which, in its judgement, the "Reformed" Councils amounted to:

Whereas by reason of unjustifiable military expenditure and other extravagance, the Government has brought the national indebtedness to a limit beyond recovery; and whereas the Government still pursues the same policy of extravagance under cover of the authority of the so-called representative assemblies constituted without the suffrage of a majority or any substantial fraction of the voters and despite their declared repudiation of the authority of such assemblies to represent the people:

And whereas if the Government is permitted to continue this policy, it will become impossible for the people of India ever to carry on their own affairs with due regard to the honour and happiness of the people and it has therefore become necessary to stop the career of irresponsibility:

This Congress hereby repudiates the authority of the legislatures that have been or may be formed by the Government in spite of the national boycott of the said institutions in future to raise any loans or to incur any liabilities on behalf of the nation, and notifies to the world that on the attainment of Swarajya the people of India though holding themselves liable for all debts and liabilities rightly or wrongly incurred

hitherto by the Government will not hold themselves bound to repay any loans or discharge any liabilities incurred on and after this date on the authority or sanction of the so-called legislatures brought into existence in spite of the national boycott.

This was by far the most radical and defiant statement of policy the Congress had ever made, challenging the legitimacy of the Raj and all its instrumentalities and proclaiming to the world at large that the Indian people repudiated in advance any commitments and liabilities assumed on their behalf by the Government in London or Delhi even if they had behind them the sanction of the legislatures conjured up under the Montagu-Chelmsford "Reforms". However, the question might well have been asked by neutral and even friendly observers that while it was easy to make defiant statements, what really mattered was the clout which the Congress could invoke in order to be taken seriously by the imperialist power and the world. It was all very well for it to reaffirm in the next resolution its "opinion that civil disobedience is the only civilized and effective substitute for an armed rebellion when every other remedy for preventing the arbitrary, tyrannical and emasculating use of authority has been tried" and go on in two other resolutions—number ten and eleven—to reiterate that the boycott of Government and Government-aided and affiliated educational institutions as well as law courts by lawyers and litigants must be maintained. But the authorities were not likely to be impressed by such reaffirmations and reiterations, especially as the Civil Disobedience Inquiry Committee had already announced that the country was not ready for mass civil disobedience and the All-India Congress Committee had endorsed that finding and Congress was divided on the question of the boycott of Councils.

Significantly, the operative part of the resolution on civil disobedience—number eight—was worded more subtly and even more positively. There was no gratuitous admission about the country not being "prepared at present to embark upon general mass civil disobedience" which was almost tantamount to confession of defeat and invitation to the Government to do what it wanted without fear of any resistance from the principal political organisation of the Indian people. Instead what it

stressed was the need for getting ready for the trial of strength through civil disobedience at the earliest:

...in view of the wide-spread awakening of the people to a sense of the urgent need for Swarajya and the general demand and necessity for civil disobedience in order that the national goal may be speedily attained, and in view of the fact that the necessary atmosphere of non-violence has been preserved in spite of all provocation:

This Congress calls upon all Congress workers to complete the preparations for offering civil disobedience by strengthening and expanding the National Organisation and to take immediate steps for the collection of at least Rs. 25 lakhs for the Tilak Swarajya Fund and the enrolment of at least 50,000 volunteers satisfying the conditions of the Ahmedabad pledge by a date to be fixed by the All India Congress Committee at Gaya; and empowers the Committee to issue necessary instructions for carrying this resolution into practical effect.

A footnote to the resolution once again said that the powers of the Provincial Committees under the resolution of the A.I.C.C. passed at Calcutta on November 20, 1922, shall not be affected by this resolution. But this note merely showed that the Congress leadership in those days was very mindful of the susceptibilities of the P.C.Cs. It did not imply any qualification of the seemingly positive thrust of the resolution. Rather, and unlike the A.I.C.C. and the Working Committee pronouncements at Calcutta in November, the resolution adopted by the Congress at Gaya sounded as if it were a prelude to an imminent offensive rather than rationalisation of a retreat conceived in a defeatist mood.

To all appearance, therefore, at Gaya the fundamentalists in the Congress had prevailed over the "revisionists", in spite of the wealth of debating talent which the latter commanded. Above all this signified that the line of policy which the President had outlined in his address had been rejected by the Congress. This placed him in a very invidious position and whether or not he had carried in his pocket two documents—one his presidential address and the other his letter of resignation—the categorical

rejection of Council entry by the plenary Session of the Congress left him no option but to tender his resignation from the presidency. And this he did as soon as the Congress session was over.

At any rate, it was in the hands of the A.I.C.C. which met in Gaya on January 1, 1923. It had a number of routine but necessary items to deal with, including the election of the new Working Committee in which, under the circumstances, there was a preponderance of No-changers as the names in the list indicate. These were: Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Dr. M. A. Ansari, Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, G.B. Deshpande, T. Prakasam, C. Rajagopalachari, Dunichand, Braj Kishore Prasad, Teja Singh Samundri. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was still in jail on the New Year Day, but it must have been known that he was due to be released three days later—on January 4, 1923.

The A.I.C.C. was in considerable difficulty. The Gaya Congress, far from clarifying the situation, had tended to confuse still further an already confused situation. Consequently, on many of the resolutions before it—nine in all—it adopted a waiting posture, either referring the matters to the Working Committee or to its own next meeting the date and place of which was to be fixed by the Secretaries. This included the question of the President's resignation and the National Pact—a kind of redefined Congress-League concordat—which Dr. Ansari had been requested to prepare and place before the Working Committee.

The two resolutions which it passed without hedging its bets or waiting on events were, firstly, its endorsement of the Gaya Congress' call for collection of funds and enrolment of 50,000 volunteers to which it set a deadline—April 30, 1923—and, secondly, an earnest appeal for efforts to intensify the boycott of foreign cloth. It also authorised the Working Committee "to act under the Congress resolution regarding the Turkish situation without reference to the date fixed above [April 30] and to relax any of the Delhi conditions for civil disobedience, in order to meet any grave emergency that may arise out of the Turkish situation." This was obviously a gesture towards Muslim opinion in India and outside and in order to strengthen the position of the Turkish delegation at the Lausanne Conference.

However, the victory of the No-changers at Gaya was soon to prove pyrrhic—or as Dr. Sitaramayya has it “short-lived”. As has often happened in the history of the Indian National Congress, the revisionists who wanted to enter the Councils “to mend or end them” did not accept the rejection of their line of policy by the Gaya Congress and abide by its decision—or even wait and work patiently for their essays in persuasion to succeed in bringing about a reversal of the decision on Council boycott at the next Congress session. They had evidently made up their mind to go off at a tangent of their own preference, ignoring the collective decision of the Congress. They were determined to contest the elections in the autumn of 1923 and to storm and capture the bureaucratic citadel from within without even the services of a Trojan Horse and relying only on the power of their rhetoric and debating skill. Even before the All-India Congress Committee or the Congress Working Committee could consider C.R. Das’ resignation—and both of them could only decide to postpone the decision on it till their next meeting—he announced the formation of a new party to be called the “Congress Khilafat Swarajya Party” and issued its manifesto (see Appendix VI).

It was signed by 110 members of the A.I.C.C. which was a substantial minority, but still a minority. The signatories included, apart from C.R. Das and Motilal Nehru, Hakim Ajmal Khan, V.J. Patel (Sardar’s brother), N.C. Kelkar, M.R. Jayakar and A. Rangaswami Iyengar. The Working Committee of the Congress was to authorise C. Rajagopalachari and Rajendra Prasad who had been appointed the Working General Secretaries to draft a statement in reply to Das’ statement, but it made no difference to the resolve of Das and the leading lights of the new Party. Thus, not for the first time, a section of the Congress leadership had broken ranks. Indeed, the example of indiscipline was being set, not by the rank and file, but men at the top and this was in time to develop into a reflex which has continued to dog the Congress to this day.

It is true, of course, the new Party had retained both the name of the Congress and Khilafat movements in the label under which it proposed to conduct its business. It seemed particularly anxious to dispel the impression that it was a breakaway group hell bent on splitting the Indian National Congress. The detailed programme of the Party that it issued after its meeting at

Allahabad in February 1923, in the very first paragraph proclaimed:

Whereas this party within the Congress was formed and constituted at Gaya on the 31st December 1922, and whereas by its manifesto bearing the said date it accepted the creed of the Congress, viz., the attainment of Swaraj by all legitimate and peaceful means, and whereas by the said manifesto it further accepted the principle of Non-Violent Non-Cooperation as guiding and shaping its activity, but with a determination to apply it rationally to prevent the said principle from degenerating into a lifeless dogma.

Now this Party declares that that policy of Non-Violent Non-Cooperation shall include on the one hand all such activity which tends to create an atmosphere of resistance making Government by bureaucracy impossible with a view to enforce our national claim and vindicate our national honour, and, on the other hand, it shall include all steps necessary for the gradual withdrawal of that cooperation by the people of this country without which it is impossible for the bureaucracy to maintain itself.

This sounded eminently reasonable. But Das and his colleagues were aware that what the Congress rank and file wanted to know was their attitude to Civil Disobedience. After all thousands of them were still in jails all over India for having obeyed the Congress call to offer it on an individual basis and had not cared to defend themselves when hauled up before the courts. The manifesto and programme, therefore, went on to say:

And whereas it is further necessary to define the attitude of this Party to the question of Civil Disobedience.

Now this party makes the following declaration: that at present Civil Disobedience is not a question of practical politics and that it cannot be artificially organized; that whilst fully accepting the same as a legitimate weapon which must be used and applied when the country is prepared and occasion demands, it recognises that such disobedience can only be based on the obligation to obey a higher law, and determines that the application of Civil Disobedience must depend on the



vivid realization of such duty by the people of the country and the attitude of the bureaucracy with regard to such realization, and that, therefore, it is impossible to fix any time or date for starting it, but that in the course of the work of this Party, according to the programme which is hereinafter set out, whenever such occasions would arise, this party would conceive it to be its duty to resort to such Civil Disobedience as circumstances may then demand.

This was a far cry from the closing lines of Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* with which Das had concluded his Presidential Address. Even charitable critics could not help feeling that it was a smoke-screen of pompous verbalism, full of weasel words and weasel phrases, meant, not just to conceal the retreat from civil disobedience—that retreat Gandhi himself had announced and justified—but almost a subtle way of justifying return to constitutionalism and collaborationist politics. In the eleven-point programme that the manifesto went on to outline, the Party's intention to set up "Nationalist candidates throughout the country to contest and secure seats in the Legislative Councils and the Assembly at the forthcoming general elections on the following basis" was spelt out in unmistakable terms:

- (a) They will, when they are elected, present on behalf of the country its legitimate demands as formulated by the party as soon as elections are over and ask for their acceptance and the fulfilment within a reasonable time by Government.
- (b) If the demands are not granted to the satisfaction of the party, occasion will then arise for the elected members belonging to the party to adopt a policy of *uniform continuous and consistent obstruction* within the Councils with a view to *make Government through Councils impossible* [emphasis as in the original text]. But before adopting such a policy, representatives of the party in the Councils will, if necessary, strengthen themselves by obtaining an express mandate of the electorates in this behalf.
- (c) Detailed instructions in this behalf will be given by the party after the elections are over.
- (d) In no case will any member of the party accept office.

The remaining ten points covered such questions as election to the local and municipal bodies; organisation of agricultural and industrial labour; boycott of selected British goods; full support for the constructive programme all along the line; promotion of the Indian National Pact by means of which "all reasonable communal claims may be guaranteed and disputes and differences may be settled;" initiating moves to ensure India's participation in the formation of "*Federation of Asiatic countries and nationalities* [emphasis as in the original text];" organisation of foreign propaganda for Indian affairs "with special reference to the dissemination of accurate information and the securing of the sympathy and support of foreign countries in this country's struggle for Swaraj."

The last point of the programme concerned "the scheme of Swaraj prepared by Sjt. Chittaranjan Das and Babu Bhagwan Das" which the new party wanted to "be circulated" and on which it "invited" opinions and even asked for the appointment of a Committee to collect opinions and eventually submit a "scheme of Swaraj after a full consideration of such opinion" within six months to the Congress Khilafat Swarajya Party. The blueprint for Swaraj, which C.R. Das and Bhagwan Das had drawn up, was one of those platonic exercises in building utopian constitutional models which for the next decade and a half were to become a popular pastime with Indian politicians of varying hues. The blueprint was laid before a meeting of the leading members of the new party at Bombay on January 29, 1923, but could not be discussed because of paucity of time though it was claimed that members of all the major Provincial Congress Committees who were present at the gathering expressed approval in general but that some reserved their judgement. It was agreed, however, that the Swarajist scheme should be brought to the attention of the Indian people through the medium of the Press and suggestions and criticism invited.

The scheme was based on the idyllic notion of a democratic structure built from the base upwards, starting with the village panchayat and going up through the town, the district and the provincial units to the All-India Panchayat. Whether such a plan of governance would have worked in a world moving rapidly towards mass production and macro-systems must remain a matter for guessing. Nor is it really relevant to this chronicle

except insofar as it had any impact on the mainstream Congress opinion before it came to be superseded by other, if equally notional, schemes conjured up by the Congress and other political parties and no less by the constitutional experts of the Raj which held all the levers of power.

Over the next six months or more the Congress leadership was to be preoccupied with the problem of resolving the differences between the two factions. The Congress Khilafat Swarajya Party met at Allahabad on February 20 six days before the meeting there of the Congress Working Committee which was to be followed by the meeting of the All-India Congress Committee on February 27. It appointed a committee authorising it to agree on the party's behalf to such terms of settlement as they might approve after discussing with the Working Committee. Apparently four sets of proposals for a compromise were in the field, two of them implying "suspension" of the resolution regarding the boycott of the Council elections without reference to any fresh Congress session. Of the other two, one was Maulana Azad's proposals "as modified and added to by Das." The second envisaged. (1) Suspension of Council propaganda on both sides till the 30th of April; (2) Both parties to be at liberty to work in the remaining items of their respective programme in the interval without interfering with each other; (3) Each party to adopt such course after the 30th April as it may be advised; (4) No special Congress.

The new party, however, made all the four sets of proposals subject to one condition, the condition being that there was no dissolution of the existing Councils in any of the Provinces leading to anticipated elections which it thought might be sprung on the country to forestall its campaign to mobilize the electorate. The Working Committee amended the Azad-Das text in some important respects. It also formulated an alternative set of proposals. It was the latter that the Congress Khilafat Swarajya Party finally approved and they were placed before the A.I.C.C. at Allahabad on February 27 under the presidency of C.R. Das whose resignation had still not been accepted. The A.I.C.C. for its part accepted the compromise. The only other business it transacted was to pass a resolution to record its "grateful thanks... for the services rendered by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru in effecting the settlement." Jawaharlal

Nehru had been released before the expiry of his full term of imprisonment together with other "politicals" from Lucknow District Jail, as he tells us, "on the last day of January 1923," apparently because for once the Provincial Government in the U.P. had heeded a resolution passed by the Legislative Council "favouring a political amnesty."

As he writes in his autobiography, his own "inclination was wholly against Council entry, because this seemed to lead inevitably to compromising tactics and to a continuous watering down of our objectives." Nevertheless he was anxious for the Congress unity to be preserved and was active with Maulana Azad in drafting the compromise formula. As finally approved by the A.I.C.C. and the new party it read:

1. Suspension of Council propaganda on both sides till the 30th April.
2. Both parties to be at liberty to work the remaining items of their respective programmes in the interval without interference with each other.
3. The majority party will be at liberty to carry on their propaganda in accordance with the Gaya programme about money and volunteers.
4. The minority party will co-operate with the majority party in appealing for and raising such funds and enlisting such workers as may be necessary for the constructive programme and also in working the constructive programme and other common matters.
5. Each party to adopt such course after the 30th April as it may be advised.

Thus the minority group favouring the Council entry seemed to be anxious, as *The Indian Annual Register* 1923 noted:

...to give a free field and a full chance to the majority who had proclaimed their intention to launch civil disobedience early in May when their collection of funds and volunteers would be completed. If any civil disobedience worthy of the country was going to be launched, Mr Das said that he and Pt. Motilal [Nehru] would be the first to take part in it. Civil Disobedience, such as was carried out in December

1921, or even vaster than that, alone could be effective. If, however, civil disobedience on a large scale could not be carried out within the period the majority party had themselves fixed, his party would then carry on its Council-entry propaganda. It might not then be said of the Swarajya Party that they hindered the carrying out of civil disobedience.

No doubt the Swarajists, as they came later to be popularly known, were perfectly sincere in making the offer to take part in any civil disobedience movement launched within the time limit which the Majority group had set. They were anxious to prove beyond all reasonable doubt that they were as good Congressmen as the fundamentalists. Nevertheless, shrewd men of the world as most of them were, they must have known that they were taking on a sure bet. There was little prospect of any general civil disobedience movement being launched by the deadline that had been set or even much later that year. For one thing, with Gandhi still in jail in Yeravda—the amnesty for political prisoners applied only to the United Provinces—there was nobody to lead it. For another, the communal tensions had been mounting ever since the withdrawal of the No-tax campaign at Bardoli the previous spring and the riots in Multan in the summer of 1922 had been followed by general deterioration of the relations between the two major communities which led to Hindu-Muslim riots in Amritsar on April 11—just two days before the anniversary of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre where Hindus and Muslims together had fallen to General Dyer's bullets.

The Congress Working Committee met at Poona on April 17. It does not seem to have been well attended, judging from the reference in the second resolution it passed, to a telegram "from Messrs. Das, Nehru [presumably the elder], Ajmal Khan, and Azad and Mrs. Naidu suggesting a meeting of the Working Committee at Allahabad on the 20th or 21st of April to consider the Punjab situation and possibilities of united action in future Congress work." The suggestion by the absentees was turned down. The resolution went on to say:

The Committee, in view of the importance of putting forth all effort to fulfil the Gaya Congress programme within the time fixed and in view further of the fact that any meeting

of the Working Committee before the 30th of April [the deadline set for completing the Gaya programme] will dislocate all work in the country in that direction by withdrawing members from their respective provinces, authorises Mr. C. Rajagopalachariar to proceed to the Punjab and, in consultation with other members of the Working Committee and leaders present there, to take such steps as may be considered necessary in view of the situation....

But the resolution insisted that any steps taken should not be "inconsistent with any resolution of the Congress, and if any further consultation with the Working Committee be necessary, to consult it by circulation or to call a special meeting of the Working Committee, if unavoidable."

The Majority evidently had hardened its position. This is underlined by the first resolution which turned down another proposal made by no less a person than C.R. Das which C. Rajagopalachari and Rajendra Prasad had brought with them after their conversations at Lahore with the President of the Congress. The proposal related to creating separate departments for the work of the Congress in the field of National Education, election to Local Bodies and Councils, promotion of Khaddar, Foreign Propaganda, Civil Disobedience, Labour, Removal of Untouchability and the like; raising of a fund of Rs. 5 to 6 crores to finance the various departments so created; and thus a common platform should be created for all. The No-changers probably suspected that this was the thin end of the wedge—and not so thin either—and calculated to lead to the bureaucratisation of the Congress in the long run. The Committee, therefore, resolved unanimously that it could not "recommend this proposal to the All-India Congress Committee, as it is impracticable, and in regard to the abandonment of the boycott of the Councils, contrary to the decisions of the Congress."

A climate of mistrust was clearly gathering within the Congress, souring tempers and straining relations between old comrades, and eventually generating an ambient sense of disorientation and discomposure throughout the movement. Jawaharlal Nehru describes it well in his autobiography when he tells us of how, when he and his fellow-prisoners were released from Lucknow Jail, they had "felt exhilarated, but this was a passing

sensation, for the state of Congress politics was discouraging enough. In the place of ideals there were intrigues, and various cliques were trying to capture the Congress machinery by the usual methods which have made politics a hateful word to those who are at all sensitive."

The responsibility, as usual, for this degeneration of atmosphere within the Congress was equally shared by the two factions. Certainly, immediately after the Gaya Congress session C.R. Das and Motilal Nehru had not waited to convert the majority to their line of politics which involved capture of the representative institutions, however limited their effectiveness. Instead they had announced the formation of a party within the party—the Congress Khilafat Swarajya Party and thus set a bad example. But in accepting the compromise formula which Azad and the younger Nehru had worked out they had in some measure expiated their sin of indiscipline. And it was now the turn of No-changers or fundamentalists to exacerbate the situation and general confusion by their intransigence.

This intransigence was partly due to a basic weakness in their position. They had the majority still with them, but it was a wasting asset in the absence of any programme of political action in the foreseeable future. The constructive programme was all right as far as it went. As Jawaharlal Nehru says: "The no-changers laid stress on a 'constructive programme,' which in effect was a programme of social reform, and its chief merit was that it brought our workers in touch with the masses. This was not likely to satisfy those who believed in political action...." Even as a preparation for eventual political action it had not been conspicuously effective. Their appeals for men and money for the cause had at best produced mediocre response in the six weeks since the Allahabad meeting of the A.I.C.C. and the remaining fortnight before the deadline was to expire was unlikely to work the miracle. Politics by deadlines, which Gandhi had introduced into the Congress methodology of struggle, had its advantages. It created a climate of urgency and stimulated public response. But serious politics concerned with ends that matter, more often than not, involves the long rather than the short haul. This rules out deadlines. Particularly, this applied to the politics of anti-imperialism during the years between the wars and especially

in India where British imperialism still had considerable room for manoeuvre and not inconsiderable musculature.

Their annoyance with the revisionists increased in direct ratio to their apparent inability to mobilize sufficient popular backing for their policy of confronting the Government. It is true that there was a strong undercurrent of discontent with and resentment against it and the slightest incident or provocation on its part tended to bring it to surface. This was demonstrated at Jabalpur only four days before the Working Committee met at Poona and which was to be the subject matter of two of its resolutions. A number of young Congressmen had staged a rather original demonstration on 13 April 1923—the anniversary of the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre—at Jabalpur. They had climbed up the municipal building and hoisted the National Flag. The authorities were furious and the police hauled down the flag and allegedly trampled upon it. The Deputy Commissioner—a Britisher (though an Indian would have acted in the same way)—who was *ex-officio* chairman of the Municipality blew very hot which led to the resignation of the non-official members in a body. The Jabalpur Congress Committee launched a satyagraha on the issue. The agitation soon spread to Nagpur, the provincial capital, and the Provincial Congress Committee took on the responsibility for the struggle. It opened a satyagraha camp, collected funds, and enrolled volunteers who, like their comrades in Jabalpur, courted arrest, beatings, humiliations, in fact, as *The Indian Annual Register* whose Editor was not particularly sympathetic to the Congress, and least of all to the No-changers, put it, “all suffering unto death to vindicate the honour of the National Flag.”

At the time of the Poona meeting of the Working Committee which did not fail to commend the Flag Satyagraha, the agitation was still in its very early stage and had not gathered the momentum that it was to during the next two months and when the A.I.C.C. not only blessed it, but declared that the Gandhi Day, observed on the 18th of each month, should also be observed as the Flag Day, calling upon all Provincial Congress Committees to organise flag processions on the day. The agitation was to end in a partial victory for the Congress Satyagraha. The Government, it seemed, did not want to get involved in a trial of strength on an emotive issue with the Congress—and that, too,



within a few months of the second elections to the "Reformed" Councils. It could afford a partial tactical retreat on the Flag question in the interest of its larger strategic objective which was twofold—the fostering of a process of fission inside the Congress and then ensuring an electoral discomfiture of the new party which seemed perfectly feasible considering the built-in handicaps of the electoral system and franchise.

The Fundamentalists almost certainly felt encouraged by the response to the Flag Satyagraha. But many of them were experienced politicians and they must have known that Satyagraha on a single issue was no substitute for the kind of civil disobedience which had been envisaged in the resolution of the Gaya Congress as "the only civilized and effective substitute for an armed rebellion." They were also aware that once the idea of contesting elections and entering the Councils had been put in circulation even if by a minority in the Congress, it could not but set up ripples of ambivalence, especially among the Congress intelligentsia. That, indeed, was one of their grounds of complaint against the advocates of Council entry.

And it was a legitimate complaint. When the deadline was reached and still there was no early prospect of the Gaya resolution being implemented, there was a distinct drift away of opinion in favour of the Swarajists who knew that they had the wind in their sails. The General Secretary of the Party, Motilal Nehru, lost no time in issuing a circular to all members of the All-India Congress Committee and the Provincial Congress Committees on May 1st. It was very plausibly, even subtly phrased. In the very first paragraph, for instance, while referring to "the intensive propaganda" which "the No-Change Party" had carried out "to complete their preparations for Civil Disobedience according to their own conception," he said that he hoped they would believe him that he was "sincerely sorry that they" had "not met with the success they deserved." But this was largely a ploy to make out a case for the alternative strategy which the Congress Khilafat Swarajya Party had put before the Congress. If only, he argued, the energy and endeavour to prepare for civil disobedience had been diverted to the capturing of Councils, most of the Councils in the country "would to-day have been at the feet of the Congress to be dealt with, as the Congress pleased."

This was pitching the claim rather high. But he could invoke "the result of the recent Municipal elections in the U.P. achieved by a minimum of joint effort" to underscore his argument. He had evidently little hope of any compromise being reached with the No-change faction. In fact, he thought it to be a time-wasting device and pointed out that the efforts made at Delhi in informal talks recently to arrive at an understanding and the basis for it announced in the Press had served no purpose since C. Rajagopalachari had wired to Das from Ahmedabad that it "was unacceptable to Mr. Vallabhbhai Patel and Seth Jammalal Bajaj." This was true and there was some force in his argument that wasting time in search of a compromise was really playing into the hands of "the moderates and hangers-on of the Bureaucracy" who were "putting forth strenuous efforts to give the country another three years of Government by mock parliaments."

However, there was a strong, almost irreducible element of disingenuousness at the root of the arguments marshalled in Motilal Nehru's "circular" which could not be wholly cloaked by the debating points he managed to score against the No-changers. The new party wanted to be all things to all Congressmen, Right, Left and Centre. It also wanted to be in the Congress—for the label had considerable electoral mileage—and yet not abide by the majority Congress decision. This was very much like having its cake and eating it, too. Nor could it really explain how the mere fact of its candidates winning and entering the Councils would transform them from being "mock parliaments" into real ones. After all, even the existing elected membership of the Central Assembly and the Legislative Councils in the Provinces had been able to inflict crucial defeats on the bureaucracy without seriously inconveniencing it because the Viceroy and the Governors could easily by-pass voting in the Council Chamber by the virtually unlimited power of certification vested in them. The circular also betrayed a certain wilfulness, if not truculence, in announcing that neither he nor Hakim Ajmal Khan intended attending the meeting of the A.I.C.C. called at Bombay on May 25.

The No-changers had been no less prompt than the Revisionists in issuing their manifesto. But, unfortunately, it rather spoilt a good case by its dogmatism and even self-righteousness. It was

drafted by C. Rajagopalachari who assumed that he was preaching only to the converted. He not only made out that there was nothing more to discuss at the meeting of the A.I.C.C. than to decide upon civil disobedience, but also that "without a programme of suffering" the "apathy and dissensions" which were plaguing public life could not be overcome. This line of reasoning was considered counter-productive by some of the No-changers especially from Bombay, and there was even talk of removing him from the party leadership. These cross-currents within the majority faction led to some accession of strength to the Swarajists.

This became clear as soon as the A.I.C.C. met in Bombay on May 25. The meeting was well-attended, and although Motilal Nehru and Hakim Ajmal Khan were conspicuous by their absence, C.R. Das was very much there and presided over its deliberations which lasted until May 28. In his opening speech he showed himself to be far less truculent than Motilal Nehru in his circular. He said that he and his party had come to the A.I.C.C. with a genuine desire to reach a compromise and adjust differences in an honourable way, and without either group having to abandon their essential positions. If such a satisfactory compromise could be arrived at he would withdraw his resignation. But he opposed the suggestion which the Working Committee, starting its work two days before the A.I.C.C. meeting, had made. This was for the A.I.C.C. to authorise it to convene "a special session of the Indian National Congress to consider the present political situation provided that Deshbandhu Das and his party agree to abide by the decision arrived at therein...."

The reason he gave for his rejection of the proposal to hold a Special Congress Session sounded eminently sensible. As the elections were very close, to ask them to wait for the Special Congress before launching their election campaign was tantamount to asking them "to withdraw their special electioneering programme." But, of course, the unstated reason for his rejection was that he and his friends were not sure of getting a majority for their policy in the plenary Congress session and he, therefore, refused to give an undertaking that his party would abide by the decision of the Special Congress that might be convened. It was a measure of the shift in the opinion among the Congress leadership since the A.I.C.C. meeting at Allahabad that Das had his way

and the Working Committee resolution proposing a Special Congress Session was withdrawn.

In fact, more. The first resolution passed by the A.I.C.C. registered a distinct, even if only by implication, a success for the new Party headed by Das and Motilal Nehru. It was partly an appeal for unity among Congressmen and women, but it was also virtually a call to the Congress workers not to do anything to queer the pitch for the election campaign of those who favoured Council-entry and indirectly calculated to put the Gaya resolution in cold storage for the time being. At least the fundamentalists were quick to interpret it as such. It said:

In view of the fact that there is a strong body of opinion within the Congress in favour of contesting elections to official councils and that the existing division amongst congressmen has already led to a lessening of the influence of the Congress, this committee deems it absolutely necessary that Congressmen should close up their ranks and present a united front, and it therefore directs that no propaganda be carried on amongst voters in furtherance of resolution of the Gaya Congress relating to the boycott of councils.

The resolution in question, it may be recalled, called upon all voters to abstain both from contesting the elections and voting. Little wonder that the No-changers were incensed at what they regarded, with some justice, as a volte-face by the A.I.C.C. Apparently there was an adjournment and when the Committee re-assembled the next day C.R. Das from the chair read out a letter addressed to him by the No-change members of the Working Committee of the Congress. "In view of the decision of the All India Congress Committee adopting a resolution of vital importance on which we hold a contrary opinion and which runs counter to the resolution of the Congress," they wrote, "we consider it our duty to resign our seats on the Working Committee and such offices as we hold therein which we humbly do." The collective letter of resignation was signed by C. Rajagopalachari, Vallabhbhai Patel (Secretary), Rajendra Prasad (Secretary), Braj Kishore Prasad, G.B. Deshpande, Jamnalal Bajaj (Treasurer).

The A.I.C.C. was now in a fine mess. It already had with it the letter of resignation of the President on which it had deferred

a decision. It now had a collective letter of resignation by the two General Secretaries, the Treasurer and other leading members of the Working Committee. C.R. Das asked the signatories of the letter of resignation to reconsider their decision and Jawaharlal Nehru who, together with Azad, had earlier been active in working out a basis of truce between the two factions, moved a resolution saying that the Committee "does not accept" the resignations that had been offered and "expresses its confidence" in the signatories of the letter and "requests them to reconsider their resignation." Jawaharlal Nehru's resolution was duly carried and the Committee once again adjourned to allow efforts at private persuasion to heal the fracture. But in vain. For not only did the signatories of the original letter of resignations could not be persuaded to withdraw their resignations, but the third General Secretary, Moazzam Ali, who had been absent the day before, also tendered his resignation.

The Committee, therefore, had no other option but to accept all the resignations, including that of the President, C.R. Das, and elect a new Working Committee and its chairman to fill the breach and shore something up against the ruins of the Congress policy decided at Gaya. The new President was to be Dr. Ansari. The three General Secretaries were T. Prakasam, Dr. Syed Mahmud, and Jawaharlal Nehru who was to be the Working General Secretary. Other members of the Working Committee as reconstituted at Bombay were: Sarojini Naidu, Teja Singh Samundari, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Purushottamdas Tandon, Virumal Begraj, K. Santanam, Velji L. Nappoo, Umar Sobhani, Anugrah Narayan Singh Vardarajulu Naidu and Khwaja Abdul Majid Saheb. It seems no treasurer was appointed to replace Jamnalal Bajaj, presumably because no suitable person was available.

The Committee then transacted the rest of the business on the agenda as best as it could under the circumstances. Apart from congratulating "the volunteers of the Central Provinces on their Satyagraha in defence of the National Flag at Nagpur" and calling upon "all volunteers throughout India to be ready to join in the struggle when required," the Committee resolved to refer the National Pact to the Working Committee "for completing the draft and circulating the same when completed among members of the A.I.C.C." The Working Committee was also

entrusted the task of going into the question of the conditions of the untouchables and taking the necessary action.

There was no meeting either of the Working Committee or the A.I.C.C. till the first week of July. Both Committees met at Nagpur—the Working Committee beginning its discussion a day ahead of the meeting of the A.I.C.C. on July 8. Evidently confusion and indiscipline in the Congress had grown in the intervening weeks because of the divisions at the top, judging from a resolution that the Working Committee passed at Nagpur. This deplored “the attitude of some Provincial Congress Committees in defying the authority of the All India Congress Committee by passing resolutions expressing their intention to disobey the Bombay resolution of the All India [Congress] Committee.” It described “this attitude” as “not only subversive of all discipline but . . . calculated to break up the Congress organisation and, if persisted in, will compel the Committee to take disciplinary action.”

In the encircling gloom the only ray of hope was the Flag Satyagraha which was being well sustained in Nagpur and its environs. The Working Committee and the A.I.C.C. clutched at it and both Committees passed resolutions recording their deep appreciation of “the steadfast and determined resistance” of the brave satyagrahis. They did more. The Working Committee recommended and the A.I.C.C. endorsed a call to all the Provincial Committees of the Congress to observe the next Gandhi Day—that is July 18th—as the Flag Day and instructed them to organise Flag processions and public displays of the flag by the people.

The Provincial administration in the United Provinces may have heeded the Council’s resolution on amnesty for political prisoners. But the Punjab administration which carried on with the tradition of repression even if in a somewhat diluted form under O’Dwyer’s successor, Edward Maclagen; and many Congress leaders, including Lajpat Rai, were still in jail. Lajpat Rai, in particular, was keeping very bad health—with a continuous low fever and incipient dyspepsia which the prison diet (some time earlier the well known Indian journalist, St. Nihal Singh, who had accompanied the pressmen who came with the Prince of Wales, had seen Lalaji in jail and taken a piece of the bread given to prisoners to show Montagu) did not improve

his condition. His condition became sufficiently serious to cause anxiety to prison doctors who did not want an eminent political leader to die in jail. As a result he was removed from Lahore to Dharamsala in the Kangra valley. But that had not assuaged public anxiety about the health of the "Lion of Punjab" and both the Working Committee and the A.I.C.C. passed resolutions expressing their deep concern at his illness and associated themselves with the people of the Punjab in observing July 9 as the Lajpat Rai Day (who, incidentally was released five weeks later, on August 16, 1923).

However, the essential focus of attention at Nagpur was on the question of holding a Special Session of the Congress to consider once again the issue of boycott of the Councils. It was to discuss this controversial issue which had sharply divided the Congress into fiercely opposing self-righteous camps that the A.I.C.C. meeting had been "requisitioned." This was at the very outset to lead to a procedural wrangle and impart a certain heat even during debate on what one would have thought would be regarded by both sides as non-controversial matters, like the Flag Satyagraha which was going on. As indeed it did when a number of amendments were moved to the resolution on the subject.

At one point Jawaharlal Nehru charged the members of "light-heartedness" in treating the question which could only hamper the campaign. It was, apparently, in the course of this debate that Das accused the younger Nehru of being "cold-blooded" (as Jawaharlal records in his autobiography) though, it seems, somewhat obliquely while explaining his position on the Flag Satyagraha which, he said, did not appeal to him precisely because it was a "cold-blooded movement." This was a somewhat strange charge, but in the mood in which he was he believed that the Flag Satyagraha had been engineered to undermine the new party's electoral campaign and he and his group were to abstain from voting on the flag resolution.

Predictably, therefore, when T. Prakasam moved a resolution proposing the holding of a Special Session of the Congress to consider the question of Council boycott, Subhas Chandra Bose raised a point of order on the ground that "no notice had been given of the motion." The point of order was overruled. The debate that followed generated more heat than light. There were

mutual recriminations and charges of bad faith and going back on the earlier compromise solution. But, as Jawaharlal Nehru was to argue, it was possible that even a Special Congress might not settle the question once for all, but "at least most part of the country" would have an opportunity to decide it. All members of the Working Committee, he said, had all along favoured a Special Session as the only solution of the difficulties. "Are you going to keep the Congress intact or let it go to pieces" he asked. If he had been a member of the Swarajya Party he would have tried to capture the Congress and work through it.

But this was a counsel of perfection and the new party was in something of a hurry and was seeking a short cut. This was clear from the strong and vehement terms in which C.R. Das opposed the resolution. He wanted to settle the dispute there and then, he said, like "businessmen, at this very minute and afterwards, if necessary, call a Special Session to give effect to it." If he disobeyed the Congress resolution, it was because everything within him called him to disobey. At the same time he was prepared to give up something if they (meaning the No-changers) were willing to give up something to arrive at an agreement. "If they," he asked, "had not the courage to make that sacrifice, to give up something to achieve unity, how could they call a Special Congress?"

There was something in his argument and it might have carried some weight if the atmosphere within the Congress had not become so embittered as to turn the whole debate into a dialogue of the deaf. The resolution was put to vote and carried by 76 votes to 66. But M.V. Abhyankar called for a division and the result was 80 votes for and 67 against the resolution which empowered the Working Committee to take all necessary action to convene a Special Session of the Congress at Bombay about the middle of August. But it was to be a new Working Committee. For the next day—July 10—the Working Committee elected at the Bombay meeting of the A.I.C.C. resigned in a body.

This new drama—though *contretemps* would be a more accurate description—had resulted from another resolution which the Working Committee had passed and which it had recommended to the A.I.C.C. This took certain Provincial Congress Committees to task for ignoring the resolution passed by the A.I.C.C. at its session in Bombay at the end of May and even



hinted that, if they persisted in such acts of indiscipline, disciplinary action might be taken against them. The Working Committee resolution was moved on July 10 in the A.I.C.C. by Jawaharlal Nehru who stressed the need for discipline. He said that the resolution was not a "slur" on anybody and should not be construed as a vote of censure. "But," he added, "constitution is constitution and it must be respected." Unfortunately, however, the mood in which the various Congress factions were at Nagpur in July it was easy for them to get at cross-purposes. The Working Committee resolution was narrowly defeated—by 65 votes against and 63 for—after a heated and confused debate.

This in turn made the position of the old Working Committee very invidious and they decided to resign *en masse*. The resignation letter was handed in by the President, Dr. Ansari, as soon as the A.I.C.C. reassembled the next day, July 11. It was signed by all the members of the Working Committee except four who were absent. Dr. Ansari explained to the Committee that although the resolution had been defeated by a very narrow vote they could not "consistently with their position continue to be the executive of a body which was unable to protect its own honour." An attempt was made by V.J. Patel, after Dr. Ansari had left the meeting and C.R. Das was elected President to carry on the unfinished business of the A.I.C.C., to move a rather ambiguously phrased resolution which he said might make it possible for the Working Committee to reconsider their resignations. The resolution was carried with but one dissenting vote. But C. Rajagopalachari and his supporters had abstained from voting and, in any case, Dr. Ansari and his colleagues were adamant in their refusal to reconsider their resignations. If anything, V.J. Patel's attempt made the messy situation even more messy.

Nor did the passing of the resolution calling a Special Congress at Bombay in the middle of August settle anything. The Bombay Congress Committee, for a variety of rather involved reasons, was not very keen to have the honour of hosting this particular Special Congress. This became abundantly clear at the A.I.C.C. meeting held at Vizagapatam on August 3, with K. Venkatappayya, who headed the Working Committee elected at Nagpur to replace Dr. Ansari and his colleagues, presiding. That A.I.C.C. session itself was to become a matter of rather acrimonious controversy. It had been "requisitioned" immediately after the Nagpur meeting

by C.S. Ranga Iyer and 30 other members of the A.I.C.C. from Madras, Bihar, Bengal, the U.P., and the Punjab. The requisitionists, we learn from *The Indian Annual Register* for 1923, wanted the meeting to be held at Bombay or Calcutta. But the President, Konda Venkatappayya, preferred the venue to be in his own Province. This angered the requisitionists who refused to attend. In fact, only 45 members, most of them from the South and Andhra, turned up; a majority of them were C. Rajagopalachari's followers.

To make an already confused situation even more confused, the day before the session the requisitionists withdrew their requisition. But the meeting was held nonetheless. It had only one resolution before it which it passed. The resolution merely said that "the Special Session...decided on at Nagpur" should "be held as early as possible in September in Bombay. If there be any difficulty with regard to the venue the President is authorised to arrange for the special session being held in any other place." The last sentence of the resolution was an oblique admission that Bombay might not be available as a venue. Sarojini Naidu, President of the Bombay Congress Committee at the time, both before and at the Vizagapatam meeting of the A.I.C.C., had told them that the Bombay Committee was not keen on serving as the host and she had remained firm on this point. But she also told them that since Delhi Provincial Committee had issued a cordial invitation on condition that Bombay Committee granted Delhi a loan of Rs. 25,000, Bombay was prepared to help Delhi out if the Working Committee of the Congress so recommended. So Venkatappayya had no alternative but to accept Delhi's invitation and fix September 15 as the date for the Special Session.

It is well at this point to consider briefly what was happening on the other side of the hill, so to speak, and in the country generally while the Congress was caught up in the toils of its internal differences and quarrels of the chapels over the question of Council entry. The Government was fairly well informed on the state of the battle raging inside the Congress and had a shrewd idea that, with Gandhi in jail, the No-changers could not possibly muster enough moral strength to prevent those who wanted to get into the parliamentary fray even if to obstruct the machinery of the "Reformed" Councils from within the Council Chamber. The bureaucratic establishment and the India Office in London

saw this prospect as both a triumph of their policy and a danger to their design: triumph insofar as it had succeeded in dividing the forces of the Congress which they had long since come to recognise as the main challenger to the authority of the Raj, and danger because they could not ignore the fact that influx of Congressmen into the legislatures, however toothless they were, could and in all probability would transform them into a serious source of embarrassment and nuisance to the administration. And this because they could guess that under the powerful leadership of men like Motilal Nehru and C.R. Das the Congress was likely to emerge as the largest party in many of the Provinces and that its gains would be, given the electoral system, at the expense of the Liberals and the Moderates who, even if they had not been altogether pliable tools, had served as a convenient decorative fig-leaf for the bureaucratic despotism which the system of dyarchy brought in under the Montagu-Chelmsford "Reforms" in the Provinces, had left virtually intact.

However, the Liberals or the Moderates, as they were called ringing changes of nomenclature, were shrewd politicians. They knew they had to cultivate their Indian constituencies, such as they were, to carry any credibility with the Government. This, inevitably, set up a dichotomy of calculation and conduct at the root of their political motivation. The anxiety to be "constructive" to please the ruling establishment was intersected at many points by the desire to demonstrate their independence of judgement and that they could not be taken for granted. This led on occasions to fits of recalcitrance and even resistance to official acts and designs. There had been a number of such symptomatic constitutional acts of defiance in the early part of 1923. Unrepresentative and toothless as the provincial legislatures were, on some occasions their elected membership had shown that they could bite as well as bark. In Madras, in the United Provinces and the C.P. the Government had seen its plans go awry. Official motions were either defeated or unofficial resolutions had been carried in the teeth of official opposition.

The crowning humiliation for the Government came in the second half of March. On March 20th, the Legislative Assembly in Delhi passed T. Rangachari's motion on a sensitive subject because it concerned increased taxation on an item of

absolute necessity to the poor—Salt—which had figured and was to figure again in India's political history. His motion against the doubling of the Salt Tax was carried by 59 votes to 44. Less than a week later—on March 26—the Assembly threw out the Finance Bill by 58 votes to 47. It did not inconvenience the administration overmuch. The Viceroy could and did certify the increase in the Salt Tax and the Finance Bill. But it was something of an embarrassment, the more acute because it had repercussions at Westminster where questions were asked and later, in June, C.P. Trevelyan, tried to move a cut in the India Office Estimates which was supported by the Labour Party and several Liberals, though the debate on it was postponed till July 5 and the motion was predictably defeated by 213 votes to 74.

What is more, these parliamentary ripples of protest had generated enough public interest and even concern over the state of India for the Labour Party in cooperation with Indian residents in Britain to hold a meeting at the Queen's Hall, London, on June 26, at which Ramsay MacDonald, by now Leader of His Majesty's Loyal Opposition, presided. The speakers included C.P. Trevelyan, grandson of Sir Charles Trevelyan (brother-in-law of Macaulay and author of the *Education of the People of India*) and an M.P., Srinivasa Sastri, and Jamnadas Dwarkadas. Srinivasa Sastri made an ultra loyalist speech though much of it was devoted to the continued iniquities of the White minority regimes in Southern and East Africa against Indians. Nor did Ramsay MacDonald really come to a point in defining any distinctive Labour policy on India beyond saying that the British should be true to their pledges to India, especially those made during the late war. However, it was reported in India, rather generously, as his support for Dominion Status for India.

The moderate politicians, moreover, were looking to the future and the future was soon to be upon them with the elections due in November. They knew that the pro-Council entry party would prevail in the Congress and would, in any case, contest the elections whatever the Special Congress may decide. They knew what a formidable challenge this would constitute to their own prospects of being returned. They were anxious, therefore, to refurbish what in our day would be called their

"image" though in those days image-making was not yet in vogue and no professional image-makers had yet entered the political market. It was, perhaps, partly for that reason that Dr. Tej Bahadur Sapru had resigned from the Law Membership of the Viceroy's Council in early January, though the reason given was ill health.

No ill health, however, accounted for the resignations of C.Y. Chintamani, Pandit Jagat Narayan (both holding "ministerial" portfolios in the U.P. Government), and Chimanlal Setalvad in Bombay. On the contrary, Chintamani's resignation was caused by an act of insubordination on the part of the official Vice-Chancellor of the Allahabad University, Sir Claude De La Fosse, against whom certain allegations of shady deals had been made by some members of the University Senate (among them Iqbal Narain Gurtu and Nanak Chand Sharma) and who had not taken clearance from the Minister of Education before filing a defamation case against Gurtu and Sharma as he should have under the rules of conduct laid down by the Government. Jagat Narayan resigned as Minister in sympathy with Chintamani. On the other hand, Setalvad gave an avowedly political reason for his quitting the office early in June. In his letter of resignation he merely said that he felt "very strongly that in the present state of politics in the country and looking to the needs of his party with the general elections imminent," it was "his imperative duty to resign office and seek re-election."

Certainly, the need for campaigning for his Liberal Party was an element in the reasons which prompted his resignation as was also the need to cultivate his constituency more vigorously. But rumour had it that he was being reticent and there were other reasons too; that although Dyarchy had worked well in Bombay, without ministerial decisions being ostentatiously sabotaged by the bureaucracy, especially its British component, Setalvad was aware of a certain discreet passive resistance to ministerial policies at various levels of the administrative structures. This was not surprising. However liberal the British officials of the Bombay Presidency cadre may have been, they could not be wholly immune to the climate of opinion among the British members of the administration in the rest of India which was generally hostile to any reforms and representative

institutions as had been shown by their resentment at Montagu's mission to India.

If anything, their opinion had hardened against the reforms after their experience of the functioning of the system of Dyarchy in the Provinces, since 1920. This was abundantly proved by the inspired campaign which the *London Times* launched on their behalf at the beginning of 1923, with Montagu, desperately anxious to work his passage back to the favours of the establishment after his fall from grace the previous year, contributing two articles on the demands of the Covenanted Service, or the Indian Civil Servants who were often neither Indian, nor Civil, and behaved more like Lords and Masters rather than servants. They had their way. With Peel as the Secretary of State for India and Lord Winterton, a dyed-in-the-wool Tory, as his understudy, it could hardly be otherwise. A Royal Commission was appointed to go into their grievances, despite strong opposition from Indians, both Congressmen and Moderates.

No such alacrity of positive response was witnessed when it came to Indian pleadings for revision of reforms with a view to amplifying them in the direction of greater democracy and earlier than the date stipulated under the Montagu-Chelmsford scheme. As early as September 1921, the Legislative Assembly had carried a motion urging the acceleration of the pace of constitutional reforms and, in view of the progress, bring forward the date fixed for the revision of the constitution—that is, to an earlier date than 1929. Montagu had sat on this resolution which the Governor-General had duly forwarded to him. Early in February 1922 he had given some indication of how his mind was working on the issue in a debate on the address in the Commons, and a fortnight later, in answer to a question, he said that he intended to send a despatch to the Viceroy on the subject. But that despatch was doomed never to be written. He had to quit office a little more than a week after his reply in the House of Commons.

His successor, a Tory, was in no hurry to keep Montagu's word. It was not until November 1922 that he could find time and the inclination to take up his pen to write a despatch on the subject, partly because the "Legislators" in Delhi were showing signs of increasing impatience at the way Whitehall

was rewarding their virtue in saving the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms from ending in a fiasco with nobody among the Indian political parties willing to buy them. His despatch was the common stuff of officialese, a mixture of delicate prevarication and procrastination, the argument being that it was too soon for the possibilities of the new constitution to have been tried out and exhausted. Peel asked the Viceroy to place the despatch on the table of both the Chambers of the Indian Legislature, meaning the Council of State and the Legislative Assembly. But it was not until early in January 1923 that the despatch was published. It was not particularly palatable to the Liberals whose credibility in public eyes it did little to reinforce and much to reduce.

There were other reasons for disenchantment with the reforms and British policy generally. Early in 1923 the White settlers in Kenya, inspired by what was happening further South in Africa, were on the war path. They threatened rebellion if Indians were placed on common electoral rolls with them and there was any intrusion by Indians on their Highlands preserve. The Government of India did put up a show of defence of Indian interests, but ultimately yielded to the pressure of the Colonial Office in accepting the "compromise" settlement it had worked out. This was to prompt Tej Bahadur Sapru who, with the Maharaja of Alwar, an ambiguous but amiable Prince, had the distinction of representing India at the Imperial Conference held in London in the first week of October, to declare: "Let me tell you frankly, as a subject of King George, that I fight for a place in his household, and I will not be content with a place in his stable." He was referring specifically to the treatment of Indians in various parts of the Empire and especially in Africa.

However, it was not just a question of how Indians were being treated in some of the Dominions and colonies, like South Africa and Kenya. What was even more relevant, though the eminent Liberal leader did not say anything about it, was the question of how Indians were being treated in their own country. For all the ringing rhetoric of Queen Victoria's declaration of 1858, they had the status of only second class citizens, if that, in India. It is true that in the session of the Legislative Assembly that began early in February 1923, the Home Member,

Sir Malcolm Hailey, an upwardly mobile Civil Servant if ever there was one, sought leave formally to move a Bill embodying some of the recommendations of the Racial Distinctions Committee. He was eloquent in applauding the Bill and affirming that it was an earnest of establishing racial equality in British India and that it breathed the spirit of compromise and goodwill. "Capture it," he exclaimed, "while you can." That phrase "while you can" spoke volumes. In any case, even the moderate opinion was far from being pleased with the provisions of the Bill.

While this engaging ebb and flow of argument was going on between the collaborationist school of politicians and the higher reaches of the bureaucratic establishment and their principals in London, the general policy of the Government was a mixture as before of use of the carrot and the stick, or as Dr. Judith Brown might put it, balance of conciliation and repression. Undoubtedly there were conciliatory moves. Early in January the Government of the U.P. withdrew the provisions of the Criminal Law Amendment Act throughout the province which made it possible for them to release Jawaharlal Nehru and several other leading Congressmen. Later in the year quite a number of other leaders were let out of jails, either on the termination of their terms or for other reasons like health. These included men like Shyam Sunder Chakravarty, President of Bengal Congress Committee, Lajpat Rai who was ill and soon after his release from Dharamsala went to Solon to recuperate, Mohamed Ali and other *Fatwa* prisoners. There was, perhaps, a pattern or calculation about these releases which had some bearing on the fluctuating balance of forces as between the main warring factions in the adversary's camp although it would need further investigation to prove it. What is not in doubt, however, is that statements made by some of the released Congress and Khilafat leaders like, for instance, Mohamed Ali on the eve of the Special Session of the Congress at Delhi who talked of "a bird whispering in his ear" that the Mahatma himself would not oppose Council entry under the changed circumstances—could not but influence the course of the battle between the Fundamentalists and the Revisionists at Delhi, and later at Cocanada.



The carrot seemed real enough. But the stick that was wielded was no less real. On January 9, a mass trial ended in mass death sentences. Of the 225 persons committed for trial before H.E. Holmes, Sessions Judge at Gorakhpur, in the Chauri Chaura case, 170 were sentenced to death—probably a record in the history of British justice in India. And this in a trial where most of the substantive evidence had come from the testimony of the two “approvers” which Shahid Amin has analysed in his article in *Subaltern Studies V* (edited by Ranajit Guha) headed “Approver’s Testimony, Judicial Discourse the case of Chauri Chaura.” True, a higher judicial authority commuted the death sentences on all but 19 of the accused, but most of them landed up in the Andamans with life sentences. This case of justice with a vengeance, however, had no repercussions in any Congress deliberations, although a few Congress leaders including Madan Mohan Malaviya, it must be said to their credit, did interest themselves in helping to organise the defence of those implicated in the Chauri Chaura case.

But while it was possible for the Congress to take its distance from the Chauri Chaura accused, it could not disinterest itself from the Akali struggle and the cat-and-mouse game which the Government was playing with them ever since the Akali movement for securing democratic control of the whole community over the Sikh shrines which the *Mahants* or Priests had for generations been treating as their private property. Thousands of Akalis had courted arrest and were in jail ever since the Nankana Sahib massacre. In March 1923 in response to a resolution in the Punjab Legislative Council, some of them had been released in batches, though in some cases only to be roughly handled by the authorities soon after being let out, as happened at Rawalpindi where police, military and even cavalry were called in to disperse a batch of 170 Akalis who had been released. Despite the reservations which the Punjab Provincial Congress Committee for one reason or another entertained regarding the Akali movement, the All-India leadership of the Congress had from the start looked upon it as a kindred movement and extended to it its moral support underlined by Gandhi’s visit to Nankana Sahib soon after the massacre. Later it was also to extend material support to the Akali struggle and set up early in 1924 a Committee called the

Akali Sahayak Bureau which organised financial assistance to Akali victims of repression and their families. For a time the Committee or Bureau worked under the supervision of Acharya A.T. Gidwani and later K.M. Panikkar served on it as a publicity adviser and liaison man.

Partly as a result of the sympathy which the Congress had for the Akali struggle, the Congress extended support to the Maharaja of Nabha, Ripudaman Singh, in his litigation with the Government. Rare among the so-called Ruling Princes of India, he had shown ever since his accession to the *gaddi*, or "throne" impressive but eccentric independence of spirit and even mild nationalist leanings. He was also sympathetic to the Akali movement. There had long been a kind of rivalry between the rulers of Nabha and the neighbouring State of Patiala—a much larger state whose Maharaja at the time was an ultra "loyalist" of the Raj. This had led to increasing tension and several border incidents. The Paramount Power, that is the Government of India, intervened in the dispute by appointing a British judge, Mr. Justice Stuart, to go into charges and counter-charges, who, predictably, gave his verdict against the ruler of Nabha.

This was in May 1923. For the next two months or more, the Political Department of the Government of India through the Political Agent, a certain Col. Minchin, engaged in a series of arm-twisting exercises in order to persuade Ripudaman Singh, "voluntarily" to abdicate which could not be reconciled with any notion of fairness. Subjected to humiliating pressures the hapless Maharaja was forced to abdicate on July 9 and taken away from the palace by military guards in the early hours of the morning—in the first instance to Dehra Dun and eventually Kodaikanal, a small hill station in the Eastern Ghats—to life-long exile.

As irony would have it, earlier in the year Royal Assent had been given to the notorious Princes Protection against Disaffection Act passed at the Viceroy's bidding by the Council of State in 1922. The Act imposed rigorous censorship to stifle criticism in the Press of acts of gross maladministration and injustice in the Princely States. The legislation to provide the Indian Princes protection against "disaffection" had been thrown out by the new Legislative Assembly and had needed

the Viceroy's power of certification to enact it. It was also to be debated in the House of Commons on a motion by Col. Josiah Wedgwood (Labour) that the Royal Assent to the Act be withheld. The motion was rejected by 279 votes to 120, but the debate had its moments: first when Col. Wedgwood said that even subjects of Henry VIII and Louis XIV had the right of rebellion which the Indian Government was denying to the subjects of Indian Princes by providing the latter the protection of "British bayonets;" and secondly, when Saklatvala intervened with a speech which tried to widen the scope of the debate by stressing the "barbarity" of "political imperialism" on which the system of governance in India was based, and went on to say:

There is a danger in this sort of Debate having, perhaps, a misguiding effect. By our very effort to save the Government from rushing into a mad act we are liable here on the Labour benches to be surreptitiously drawn into an Imperial policy, as if we wanted Imperialism to be run more correctly than they desire. . . . There is also a danger, on the part of our Indian friends that, by this kind of struggle, by this kind of tug-of-war with the Imperialist, foreign, dominating power, they are tacitly accepting the right of this country to send a Viceroy at all.

There was something in the paradoxical point he made even if it trailed clouds of revolutionary perfectionism. Inevitably the enforced abdication of the Maharaja of Nabha had led to further alienation of the Sikhs from the British Government. As a statement of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee put it: "The venom of the old political regime of Sir Michael O'Dwyer's time has combined with the venom of the new regime to bring about the Maharaja's ruin on the convenient and opportune basis of the inter-state dispute." There was a widespread movement of protest against the act among the Sikh community which was indirectly to involve Jawaharlal Nehru in the Nabha affairs and land him in Nabha Jail with Gidwani and K. Santanam for a time, the story of which he tells with an engaging sense of humour in his autobiography in a brief chapter headed: "An Interlude At Nabha."

There were other preoccupations even more worrying than the continuing repression tempered with calculated acts of selective clemency by the Government. The consensus at the top among the two great communities—Hindu and Muslim—still held. But at the popular level not only the sense of fraternity generated by the common struggle and suffering had largely been dissipated, but the endemic confessional tensions had acquired an epidemic character in Northern India. In April and May there had been communal riots in several cities and towns in the Punjab, like Amritsar and Multan, and the U.P., Nawabshah near Hyderabad (Sind) and elsewhere. Then there was a temporary lull. But in August the troubles erupted again at Saharanpur and Agra where firearms were used by the rival groups. The troubles were often the result of accumulated local irritations and grievances accentuated by mafia elements masquerading as religious zealots. But the responsibility for the deterioration in the inter-community relations was widely shared and by a section of the leadership on each side.

Thus the movement of militant defensiveness which called itself the *Sangathan*—or unity—movement among the Hindus combined with the launching of a proselytising campaign which styled itself as the *Shuddhi*, or purification, movement by Swami Shraddhanand and other Arya Samaj leaders was hardly well-conceived. It certainly did not improve the climate of communal harmony when Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya presiding at the Kashi session of the Hindu Mahasabha in the second half of August pronounced his benediction on the *Shuddhi* campaign. Equally, with the Khilafat issue having lost its importance with the success of Kamal Pasha (the future Atatürk) and the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne, which was seen as a triumph for the Turks, a section of the Muslim leadership no longer felt the need for cultivating Hindu support or even respecting Hindu susceptibilities and sensitivities.

Such was the murky backdrop to the Special Session of the Congress which opened at Delhi on September 15. It was attended by under 2,000 delegates and some 3,000 visitors. The session had been preceded by a number of informal meetings among the leaders to bring about a meeting of the minds on the two major issues which were preoccupying political India.

and were to dominate the session's debates—between the No-changers and those who favoured Council-entry and relations between the two major communities. If anything the latter problem, which touched the whole future of the nation, took up much of the time at preliminary meetings beginning on September 11. Both sides were allowed to air their grievances. The Muslim case was presented, among others, by Ahmad Said, Secretary Ulema' (learned men's) Conference and several other Ulema hailing from the Deoband Seminary. The Hindu spokesman was none other than Madan Mohan Malaviya who a fortnight later was to preside over the session of the Hindu Mahasabha at Kashi. No significant progress was made in these preliminary discussions although a number of suggestions emerged and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, who was to be President of the Special Session of the Congress, proposed that a sub-committee be formed to go into the various suggestions and report before September 15. This was accepted. Similarly on the question of Council-entry Maulana Mohamed Ali and Motilal Nehru drafted a resolution which would allow contesting of elections and Council-entry but subject to conditions and terms determined by a committee to be set up for the purpose.

Both the No-changers and the protagonists of the new party within the Party had tried to muster their forces for the Special Session to the full. On the face of things, given the actions of the Government, No-changers ought to have been more successful than the Swarajists. But the reverse turned out to be the case, partly because one of the most eminent among them, C. Rajagopalachari, was inclined to be too dogmatic and had not yet acquired the flexibility of statesmanship which later came to be associated with him and which at times verged on seeing the adversary's viewpoint to the detriment of his own side.

But views in the party favouring Council-entry were by no means unanimous. For instance, Lajpat Rai did not attend either the Special Session or the preliminary talks to work out a compromise formula on the two issues facing the country which were interlocking. Motilal Nehru had wired him at Solon: "Doctors permitting your presence at Delhi when preliminary conference held 10th September will be invaluable will arrange your stay at Qutab only select parties seeing you there. Wire...."

But, as his biographer, Feroz Chand, writes, "Lalaji had to keep away from the preliminary meeting as well as from the session itself." This was perfectly intelligible on health grounds. He was not at all well and it would have strained his reserves of strength to the breaking point to get involved in exhausting political discussions even though the elder Nehru promised to allow only "select parties" access to him. But, in the light of his subsequent political evolution, it is safe to surmise that he did not see eye to eye with either party and, moreover, was "rethinking" his whole position and role in Indian politics—not necessarily for the better.

The pattern of the Special Session differed in no way from that of the ordinary annual session. It opened with a speech by the Chairman of the Reception Committee, Dr. M.A. Ansari, which was followed by the address of the President, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad. Both were men of deep culture and humanistic to the core. Both speeches, therefore, reflected anguish at the state of Indian polity and divisions within the Congress. Referring to the problem of unity between the two major communities, Dr. Ansari said:

The basic condition for Swaraj is inter-communal unity. We are being torn by communal strifes. Complete Hindu-Muslim Unity which ought to have been a settled fact today is conspicuous by its absence. Years of hard work in various fields have failed not only to make unity a permanent and solid factor of civic life but even to check the present recrudescence of communal discord, the neglected disease, which now threatens the very existence of Indian Nationalism.

He was not, he said, suggesting that complete communal understanding was not attainable, but he was making a painful confession that they had failed in their duty. "Misled by superficial appearances," he went on, "we became content with what really was but a courteous *entente*. As if the neglect itself was not most deplorable, there arose differences in the Congress and drove this vital necessity of national life out of our minds." This was true. And he pleaded with both parties to consider the question in a non-partisan spirit and "to make sacrifices for the higher purpose of attaining unity...."

The President spoke in much the same vein. Azad's was a longer speech in which he referred to the decision regarding Kenya by the Colonial Office which had "disillusioned the Moderates." He spoke of Turkey which had grown "strong in spite of British intrigues and designs" and of the Near and Middle East and North Africa whose fate was linked with that of India. Turning to the situation in India, he was not pessimistic but historically philosophical. "The lightning which has stricken us," he said, "is one of the ordinary accidents of this venture. . . . There are rises and falls. We make a mistake in interpreting a fall as a cessation and rise as a new birth. . . . Thus our struggle suffered by suspension at Bardoli. . . ." He argued that the rupture of Hindu-Muslim unity was "the natural results of the Bardoli shock" and seemed to interpret Reading's speech offering talks at the end of 1921 as proof "that the course of Non-cooperation was effective and unerring. But the Bardoli mistake brought a reaction and a fall," he maintained, "which was aggravated by undue importance being attached to the Council controversy."

Thus Maulana Abul Kalam Azad seemed to be taking his distance both from Gandhi and C.R. Das and Motilal Nehru. The question to consider, he said, was whether the difference about Councils was one of principles or details, because where a policy was involved each was entitled to hold his opinion but in the matter of details the discipline of the organisation and its mandate must be observed. He considered that "the Council issue was really not one of the principle of Non-cooperation. . . . Freedom is our goal and non-violence and Non-cooperation our principle. . . . We cannot change the creed or renounce the principle, but we can change our tactics any moment at will." He was sorry that so much energy had been wasted on the Council-entry controversy. He chided both sides in the controversy—the No-changers for their "total inertia" and those who wanted to go into the Councils to non-cooperate from within for ruining the discipline of the organisation for the sake of a minor difference.

This was, perhaps, a simplification. But, for his part, the principal focus of his concern was the need for Hindu-Muslim unity which had been fractured and "without which freedom of India must remain a dream." Therefore, towards the end of

his presidential address he reverted to the question, tracing its history from 1912 onwards, and ending with a fervent appeal:

Today in the name of our common Motherland from this platform, the cradle of United Indian Nationalism, I appeal to both communities not to trample so cruelly upon the national aspirations and hopes. Today we can achieve the greatest possible success but the greatest possible failure may fall to our lot. Our determination, our courage, our patriotism are under a very great trial. Come, let us succeed in our task by devoting ourselves to the building up of our common destiny.

From this high plane of edificatory and exhortatory rhetoric there could only be a falling away during the next three days when the resolutions on the crucial issues were debated. Altogether there were nineteen resolutions on the agenda, though as usual quite a few of them concerned organisational matters. Others were non-controversial, like the one appealing to the press that there was "extreme necessity of exercising great restraint when dealing with matters likely to affect intercommunal relations, and also in reporting events and incidents relating to inter-communal dissensions and commenting on them." There was a resolution congratulating the Akalis on their courageous stand against repression to which they were being subjected; another congratulating the Turkish people and their leader Kamal Pasha on their victory. There was condemnation of the Government "in bringing about the forced abdication" of the Maharaja of Nabha which was seen as "unconstitutional and establishing a very dangerous precedent." There was a resolution conveying deep sorrow of the people of India to the people of Japan "at the terrible catastrophe" which had befallen them (meaning the earthquake) and an appeal to the Indian people to contribute "their mite" towards the mitigation of the suffering of the Japanese people. Nearer home there were resolutions congratulating the organisers of the Flag Satyagraha movement at Nagpur; welcoming back Lajpat Rai, Maulana Mohamed Ali and other prisoners released from jail; and condoling the death of a veteran Punjab Congress leader, Pandit Rambhuj Dutt Chaudhry, "who served the motherland nobly