I. BACKGROUND OF ECONOMIC CRISIS

To understand the political developments described in the last few sections and those to be dealt with in the following sections in their full import, it is essential to take a look at the world-wide economic crisis that appeared towards the late 1920s and the early 1930s.

It must be noted that the term "world-wide" employed here in relation to economic crisis is not entirely correct, because there was one country in the world which was free from this crisis—the U.S.S.R. Not only was there no crisis but the economic reconstruction there was progressing with amazing rapidity.

The developed capitalist countries like Britain, the USA, France, Germany, Japan, etc., as well as the backward, exploited countries including India were equally engulfed in a deep and widespread crisis. Absolutely free from this, the
economic system of a country which had hitherto remained backward, was being modernized and growing at an amazing speed.

Here we need not go into the question of how this affected the capitalist world in general, nor into the details of its economic impact on India. The relevant question is how it affected the feelings and emotion of the Indian people in general and the different classes in particular. Here we will deal with the question only to the extent it helps us to explain how the anti-imperialist mass feeling which had been swelling for the last few years, how the left political forces which were striving to give an organized form to this feeling and how the Congress leadership which was striving to come to a compromise with the rulers from a rightist standpoint as opposed to the left got crystallized.

As indicated earlier, it was a crisis of unprecedented depth, which affected simultaneously all capitalist countries, whether developed or underdeveloped. It was characterized as the “crisis of production”, because foodgrains and consumer articles produced in factories piled up with no buyers. To save themselves from the consequent fall in prices, the capitalists were ready to destroy a considerable part of the goods produced by dumping them into the sea or by burning them.

But, it was not because there were no people who were in need of these articles, but the people who were in need of them had no money to buy them. Production above the purchasing power of the consumers—this is what is meant by “over-production”. As a result of this crisis, factories were closed and farms were left fallow. Because of the policy of the capitalists to maintain the rate of profit by cutting down production, unemployment increased and the wages of those employed fell. As a result, the purchasing power of the potential buyers reduced further.

All these happened in India as well just as in the imperial countries including Britain. Production fell both in industry and agriculture. The prices of goods produced too
fell sharply. Small farmers and artisans could not get a fair price for the goods they produced, while their burden of tax and debt increased. At the same time, the prices of industrial goods needed for their daily use did not fall to the same extent as the fall in the prices of agricultural produce. For all these reasons, they were pauperized.

The land of the small and middle peasants and the capital investments of artisans and small businessmen were either mortgaged or sold.

Closure, retrenchment, and cut in wages were widespread in industries. A huge army of unemployed job-seekers rose in towns and villages, consisting of people coming out of educational and training institutions, workers retrenched from factories and those who lost their land and trade.

The unrest and discontent that arose out of these conditions formed the basis for the mass upsurge witnessed towards the end of the 1920s. The news coming from the Soviet Union where a new system free from such hardships was being built up, made the people sit up and think.

This was what led to the growth of leftist ideology, an inclination towards socialism, though vague as it was, among the younger generation. The propaganda conducted by Jawaharlal Nehru in favour of socialism and the Soviet Union, the dissent expressed by leaders like Subhas Bose and Jawaharlal too, with the compromising attitude of the Congress leadership including Gandhi—all these were the reflections of the new left wind that had begun to blow over India.

The world capitalist crisis not only imposed new burdens on the labouring masses like the peasants and workers, but also led to a serious political crisis in the entire capitalist world. In the atmosphere of a shrinking market for agricultural and industrial products, capitalist powers began to compete with each other to grab as much of the market as possible. Japan, Germany and the U.S.A. tried to push England back from her position as the leading capitalist force in the world, while England fought back to maintain her position.
As an inseparable part of the competition between the different capitalist powers and between different bourgeois groups in each capitalist country, the imperial powers like Britain began to tighten their grip on colonies like India. As a result, new burdens were imposed not only on the poor and middle classes in towns and countryside but also on landlords and capitalists. Thus, the latter too were forced to take anti-imperialist positions to some extent, that is, in a way that would not be detrimental to their narrow class interests.

In many of the documents prepared by the Congress leadership, including the letters written by Gandhi to the Viceroy, one can see the deep concern at and protest against the sacrifice of the interests of Indian capitalists for the benefit of the British capitalists. The parity of the rupee and the British pound, tariff regulations favouring the British capitalists, ships used for export and import of goods, etc., became issues for sharp criticism. On all these issues, the liberals outside the Congress and leaders like Jinnah who was engaged in caste-communal politics favoured the position taken by the Congress. The attempts made by the rulers to use India as the milk cow for the British capitalists and the resistance of the nationalists against them were found reflected in these issues.

In the background of the economic crisis that affected the entire capitalist world, the rulers of India put forward a proposal which intensified these problems. The proposal was to accord to Britain the most favoured treatment in the matter of import duties. That is, British imports into India would attract a lower duty compared to those from Japan, Germany, etc. This policy, known as "Imperial Preference", came to sharp criticism from the Congress as well as the liberals.

Former Congressmen under the leadership of Malaviya and Dewan Chamanlal had kept themselves aloof from the decision to launch the Salt Satyagraha and Gandhi’s Dandi march. They were continuing as members of the Central
Assembly defying the directive of the Congressmen to resign from all elected bodies. It was at a time when the entire country was discussing the Salt Satyagraha and the Dandi March that the Bill on Imperial Preference was introduced in the Central legislature. Pandit Malaviya, Dewan Chamanlal and others strongly opposed the Imperial Preference and moved amendments to it. Following the defeat of their amendments they staged a walk out and resigned from the legislature. The president of the Assembly, Vithalbhai Patel too resigned along with them and declared his intention to participate in the civil disobedience movement.

These developments showed that the contradiction between British and Indian capitalists got intensified as a natural consequence of the crisis that had affected the entire capitalist world. This also explains why the right wing Congress leaders like Gandhi and Motilal Nehru joined hands with the left wing Congressmen like Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Bose and gave a call for a mass struggle against the British rulers.

There was another important issue which deserves special mention here. The competition between the British, on the one hand, and other imperialist powers like Germany and Japan, on the other, compelled Britain to take an attitude different from what they had hitherto been following with regard to industrialization of India. India was one of the important markets for the British industrial goods. The imperialist powers like Japan were striving to capture it. Hence, it was necessary for the British to protect the Indian market from encroachment by the rival powers. At the same time, it was also necessary for them to provide facilities to British capitalists for increased capital investment in India. It was with these twin objectives that the British adopted the policy of Imperial Preference. This helped industrialization of India to some extent. It also helped the British capitalists to compete with Indian capitalists.

During the 1929-33 economic crisis, a number of new industrial units came up in India, while the old ones were
further expanded. For example, the textile industry which had developed on a large scale in Bombay and Ahmedabad was extended to Madras. The sugar industry which was nonexistent till then began to grow in a big way. Cement and other industries also began to grow during the same period.

A part of these industries was under British ownership. The British realized that, while protecting India from the attack of the capitalist rivals like Germany and Japan, the best way to continue to use India as the milch cow was to establish new industries in India under British ownership. This approach which the British capitalists adopted to save themselves from the growth of the Indian capitalists led to an intensification of the contradiction between them and the Indian capitalists.

During this period, a number of new industrial units under Indian ownership too had sprung up. Among these, the sugar industry deserves special mention. Till then, sugar from Jawa was being imported into India. As such, the British had nothing to lose if sugar industry developed here even if it was under Indian ownership. On the contrary, as a natural corollary to the growth of the sugar mills, sugar-cane cultivation would develop yielding income to the landlords and rich peasants engaged in its cultivation. This was politically advantageous to the British. The consolidation of the relation between the elites in the countryside and the owners of sugar mills would help the maintenance and growth of British influence in India.

Thus, utilizing the protective tariff against Jawa sugar, Birla, Dalmia, Singhania, Thapar, Narang and others began to extend their industrial operation to sugar industry. The surplus of the big landowners in the rural areas was also ploughed into the sugar industry. That is, landowners who invested in industries, capitalist farmers who produced raw materials for industries and the industrial capitalists interested in the agricultural sector had all joined hands in the task of modernizing Indian economy on capitalist lines.
This process was not, however, confined to the sugar industry alone. During the same period, many industries like cement, leather, bidi and so on came up. Big landowners and moneylenders entered the industrial sector for the first time. Thus, 'Imperial Preference,' introduced by the British rulers to protect themselves from capitalist rivals like Japan and Germany, in a sense, helped the growth of Indian capitalists as well.

At the same time, the British tried to prevent the growth of Indian capitalists in other areas utilizing the protective shield of 'Imperial Preference.' This led to the intensification of the contradiction between Indian and British capitalists. The Indian bourgeoisie was guided in general by the self-confidence gained through investment in certain industrial sectors and the resentment at the policy of the ruling powers preventing them from spreading to other sectors.

Along with this was another development which was equally significant. Among the Indian capitalists who grew within the limits of 'Imperial Preference,' a small minority had grown swallowing the assets of small and medium capitalists who were crushed as a result of the economic crisis. Though there was common identity between big capitalists, on the one hand, and the medium and small capitalists, on the other, as a class, contradiction grew between them as rivals in the same class. The big capitalists became confident that they would be able to foster their class interest if they adopted the twin approach of opposition by all means to the British capitalists and of negotiation with them at the same time. For the medium and small scale capitalists competition from British capitalists was proving extremely dangerous.

In the circumstances, differences in policy and approach began to arise among the different sections of the Indian bourgeoisie in conformity with their class interests. One section thought in terms of an uncompromising struggle against imperialism in accordance with the feelings of the left-wing youth and the masses of workers and peasants, while another section thought in terms of safeguarding, to the
extent possible, their class interest by utilizing every opportunity of coming to a compromise with the rulers.

There were a number of instances of these two trends appearing by turn in one and the same group or even the same individual. But there was one group which continuously and consistently adhered to the position that no chance should be lost for a compromise and that was represented by the Congress leadership consisting of the disciples of Gandhi and pro-legislaturists. On the other side, there was another section that stood firm in the path of struggle without any compromise. It included a variety of individuals and groups like communists who had assumed by then an organized form, the emerging socialist groups, the left Congressmen like Bose who, unlike Nehru, were not influenced by Gandhism.

The clash between these two groups broke out at different stages and in different forms with which we shall deal in the following sections. However, the political characteristic of the period of the Salt Satyagraha consisted of the fact that it helped these two groups to stand together.

II. FORMS OF STRUGGLE: GANDHIAN AND NON-GANDHIAN

The salt satyagraha was launched on 6th April 1930. As pointed out earlier, Gandhi organized his struggle subject to severe restrictions. But, because of the emotion-charged situation, the forms of struggle that people resorted to all over the country violated the restrictions imposed by him.

Although the ritual violation of the salt law under Gandhi’s leadership was performed on 6th April as scheduled, Gandhi was left free until 5th May. In between, almost all leaders except Gandhi were imprisoned. Vallabhbhai Patel was arrested in the course of the Dandi march itself. After the Satyagrha was launched, all top Congress leaders,
including Jawaharlal Nehru, were put behind the bars. And as the Salt Satyagraha spread all along the seacoast following the Satyagraha launched by Gandhi, the volunteers as well as the spectators were subjected to unprecedented police brutality.

Protesting against these, hartals, strikes and demonstrations were held all over the country. The movement received wide publicity in the country and abroad. Although there was strict control on newspapers and other publications in India, the arrests, police repression and protest demonstrations, etc., got publicity to a considerable extent. Since Gandhi was free, the statements issued by him encouraged the protest demonstrations. He was determined to see that the struggle remained within the limits set by him. This was reflected in all his statements.

Realizing that he would not be allowed to remain outside the jail for long, Gandhi issued a number of statements elaborating how the struggle should be conducted in his absence. The last among them, issued just a few hours before his arrest, was as follows:

Let not my companions or the people at large be perturbed over my arrest, for it is not I but God who is guiding the movement...Our path has already been chalked out for us. Let every village manufacture or fetch contraband salt, sisters should picket liquor shops, opium dens and foreign cloth dealers' shops. Young and old in every home should ply the takli and spin and get woven heaps of yarn every day. Foreign cloth should be burnt. Hindus should eschew untouchability. Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Parsis and Christians should all achieve heart unity. Let the majority rest content with what remains after the minorities have been satisfied. Let the students leave Government schools, and Government servants resign their service and devote themselves to service of the people, we shall find that Purna Swaraj will come knocking at our doors. ¹

However, as Gandhi tried to draw the entire people into his non-violent struggle, other forms of struggle too were adopted in many parts of the country. Some incidents may be cited here to enable us to find the depth and form of people’s fighting spirit.

One such incident was the raid of Chittagong armoury which took place before Gandhi issued the above statement. Chittagong town and its surrounding areas (now in Bangladesh) were the centres of bomb-politics. The armoury raid was designed to transform the countrywide anti-imperialist fighting spirit kindled by the call given by Gandhi into a revolutionary form of struggle as distinct from the Gandhian method.

The leader of this raid was Surya Sen, known as ‘Master Da’ among his followers. By a well-coordinated action, these revolutionaries were able to cut off the communication links with the town and capture the police camp. With the captured arms in their hands, they went around the city singing ‘Vande mataram’. They also captured all the police stations on their way and raised barricades to obstruct the movement of the military. The entire town was under their control for several days. They succeeded even in derailing a train carrying troops to quell them.

It was an act which inspired all anti-imperialists not stunted by commitment to Gandhian philosophy. Many of those who participated in the raid later became communists. But then they did not have the outlook of a working class revolutionary party for raising a revolutionary army on the foundations of mass struggles. Besides, they had the notion that they would be able to defeat the police force and the army of the British rulers by the courageous actions of a handful of self-sacrificing brave individuals. Viewed from this perspective, the Chittagong armoury raid was certainly the best organized of all the revolutionary programmes carried out by the politicians who believed in the cult of the bomb. Having been able to defeat the police force in a town and prevent the entry of the military, for a short time though it
was, by sheer grit and organization of a few well-trained young men and women, they set the most inspiring example for petty-bourgeois revolutionaries.

But this had all the weaknesses of the petty-bourgeois revolutionary path. Although they captured all the police camps in the harbour city of Chittagong, they did not capture the Chittagong harbour which was a base of the British army and one of its important communication links, which enabled the British authorities to deploy easily their forces in the harbour against the revolutionaries.

In addition to this weakness, which may be termed technical, they had another weakness which was political in nature. Theirs was not a revolutionary army which had organized the workers, peasants and other masses of the surrounding areas, winning their love and confidence. Therefore, when they decided to withdraw from the town in the wake of the arrival of the British army which they could not resist, they had already become isolated from the people. Even when the army entered the forests where they had taken shelter, the revolutionaries in the town and the rural areas could not organize an anti-British struggle in Chittagong. This is what distinguishes bomb-politics from the working class revolutionary methods practised in the national liberation struggle in Vietnam and in the guerilla war against the Nazi hordes. Thus within a few days, the British were able to capture the revolutionaries and institute proceedings against 30 of them. Though the leaders went underground for almost two years, the organization as a whole collapsed.

The mass upsurge that took place in the North West Frontier region, now part of Pakistan, was different from this. In that region, there was no organization of "bomb-politicians" as in Bengal. The area was inhabited by the Pathans, the Afridis, the Momandis and other tribes. It was an uphill task for the British to defeat them and bring them under their rule. Even after they were defeated, they continued to organize innumerable resistance struggles against the British. They took part in a big way in the anti-imperialist
struggles during the First World War and in the post-war years. The new upsurge that swept across the country in the wake of the Salt Satyagraha also inspired them.

Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, popularly known as the "Frontier Gandhi", was the most outstanding leader thrown up in the struggles. The popular upsurge of the Pathans under his leadership inspired India as a whole. The Satyagrahis who formally belonged to the Congress and the Khudai Khidmatgars (Servants of God) organized by Ghaffar Khan joined hands and raised a mass front of people’s struggle. (Khudai Khidmatgars was a volunteer organization devoted to social reform and cultural progress. And they inevitably became part of the anti-imperialist movement. The colour of the uniform of the volunteers was white in the beginning, but taking into consideration the climate of the region, they changed it to red. Thus the Khudai Khidmatgars came to be known as the "Red Shirts".)

Viewed from a class point of view the satyagraha struggle in this region which turned into a mass movement under the leadership of the Frontier Gandhi, was similar to that in other parts of India. In the Frontier Province the satyagraha was conducted solely under the leadership of the upper sections of the society. But the Pathans led by Ghaffar Khan were able to maintain their tribal fraternity and raise it to the level of a strong anti-imperialist feeling. Besides, they were also able to organize the Afridi and the Momandi tribes on the basis of their tribal fraternity and make them part of the anti-imperialist political movement. Thus what one saw in the N. W. Frontier was an entire people rising against imperialist domination. And this distinguishes the mass movement in the N. W. Frontier from the Chittagong armoury raid.

Just as Gandhi, Ghaffar Khan too tried his best to keep the struggle non-violent. But once the tribals with the tradition of anti-imperialist struggle entered the field, it was difficult to keep it non-violent. Thus a demonstration held in Peshawar under the official leadership of the Congress
ended in a clash with the police. Many Congress leaders who went to the spot pleading with the demonstrators to remain non-violent themselves became the target of people’s anger. Disregarding the advice and direction of the leaders, the people went ahead. In the end, in Peshawar as in many other parts of India, the armed forces opened fire at the people.

A particular incident connected with this firing deserves special mention. That incident provided an indication to the revolutionary atmosphere that existed in those days. One of the army units which was ordered to shoot was the Garhwali tribal battalion, which refused to open fire as they considered it a cowardly act to fire unarmed people, an act against their own military tradition. (It must be noted here that the leader of this Garhwali unit, Chander Singh, later joined the Communist Party after completing his term of sentence.)

Though different from the atmosphere of Chittagong and Peshawar, another demonstration of the anti-imperialist feeling inspired by Salt satyagraha was witnessed in Sholapur in Maharashtra. As in other provinces, the satyagraha in Sholapur was organized by an action council under the leadership of the Congress. Sholapur was a town with a population of industrial workers, though small in number. Besides, it was influenced by extremist politics from the time of Tilak. Consequently the struggle broke the limits of non-violence. On 28th May a few policemen were killed in a clash between the police and the people who participated in the satyagraha. The police opened fire at the people in which five persons were killed and more than a hundred wounded. Restless at the turn of events, the people threw overboard the principle of non-violence and turned against the police. Led by the worker volunteers, the people set fire to six police stations, a military record room, a number of British offices and liquor shops (they took particular care to see that the fire did not spread to the neighbouring residential areas). Along with the British officers, their trusted men and the
police had to flee the town. With the behaviour of the Garhwali soldiers in Peshawar fresh in their memory, the authorities did not send Indian troops to suppress the people of Sholapur. Instead, they used British troops for the purpose.

The nature of the incident that took place in Sholapur was different form those that took place in Chittagong and Peshawar. It was a movement based neither on a handful of brave adventurists as in Chittagong nor on the tribal fraternal consciousness as in Peshawar. In Sholapur, the organized industrial working class, in its primary stage though, a Congress leadership which was striving to bring them and other sections of the masses into the struggle, and political conditions in which extremist politics exercised a stronger influence on the people including the Congressmen than Gandhism were all combined in the organized mass movement. It was, in fact, a pointer to the nature of freedom struggle in the days to come.

In many other parts of India, the organized working class responded to the call given by the Congress leadership and fought vigorously against imperialist domination. They fought with greater determination and vigour than traders, students and other sections of the people. As distinct from the 1920-21 period, now the workers had their own exclusive organizations.

The workers in the 1930s had imbibed the experience of their struggles conducted earlier under the leadership of these organizations. Sholapur was the forerunner of the coming country-wide struggles of traders and students in the towns and of the peasants and other labouring masses in the countryside.

Two of the three events mentioned here—Chittagong and Peshawar—took place before Gandhi was arrested, which showed the character of the anti-imperialist movement of those days. But, Gandhi, who had called off the non-cooperation movement after the Chauri Chaura incident, did not call off the struggle after Chittagong and Peshawar. After Gandhi's arrest, the leadership of the Congress outside the jail (the Working Committee) appealed to the people and the Congress
committees at the lower levels to adopt every from of struggle including a no-tax campaign.

Furthermore, Motilal Nehru who had come out after a few weeks of imprisonment stated that the people in the army and the police force were not bound to carry out illegal orders. The fact that Motilal Nehru, an acclaimed right wing leader of the Congress, did appeal to follow the example shown by the Garhwali battalion was a reflection of the then existing conditions.

In brief, whatever be the intention of Gandhi, the Salt Satyagraha, in effect, turned out to be a programme which inspired the people to enter the field of struggle. That is, limitations of the Gandhian theory of struggle was no hindrance to raising the Salt Satyagraha to the level of a far wider and better organized struggle than that of the 1920-21 period in which a wider spectrum of people from children and women who had hitherto been confined to homes and Hindus, irrespective of caste distinctions, to members of religious minority communities, took part.

III. NEGOTIATIONS

While the people in different parts of the country were enthusiastically engaged in a glorious struggle, the Congress leaders at the top and the bourgeoisie which was giving full support to them were not acting in consonance with the feelings of the masses.

The capitalists, in general, tried to take advantage of the struggle including the boycott of foreign cloth. While millions of people braving the police lathi-charge and firings were carrying out the boycott of foreign cloth and setting fire to them, the Indian cotton mill owners did two things. On the one side, they gave liberal financial support to the struggle, including the picketing, to ensure the success of the programme of the boycott of foreign cloth, and on the other, induced the political workers out of jail to propagate
the use of Swadeshi, a programme which was more “practical” than the programme of boycott of foreign cloth. They reached an understanding with the Congress leaders that the latter would not stand in the way of selling the cloth produced in Indian textile mills.

Congressmen outside jails and non-Congress liberals began to implement a “constructive” programme in which the people were to take the pledge of wearing only Swadeshi cloth, while the mill owners were to observe certain conditions regarding the production of cloth.

Obviously, this was a step capable of serving the interests of Indian textile mill owners. The programmes of boycott of foreign cloth directly under the leadership of the Congress and the programme of propagation of Swadeshi not directly under Congress leadership together created the necessary conditions for the protection of the interests of the Indian mill owners. But the capitalist class was not satisfied with this alone. It also wanted solution to the political issue in which the entire capitalist class, including those in the textile industry, was interested.

The capitalists as a whole desired at least a constitutional change if not full independence as demanded at the Lahore session of the Congress. They desired to use the political atmosphere created by the country-wide struggle in which hundreds were shot dead and tens of thousands beaten up, to exert maximum pressure on the British rulers and thereby acquire as much power as possible. They also wanted the Congress to adopt a “pragmatic approach” necessary for this purpose. In other words, they proposed entering into negotiations with the British rulers, while at the same time, rallying the entire people in the glorious anti-imperialist struggle.

This was exactly what the Congress leaders, including Gandhi, were contemplating. It may be recalled here that within weeks of the adoption of the full Independence resolution at Lahore Congress—at a time when the Independence Day was being observed all over the country in which millions
of people participated—Gandhi wrote to the Viceroy reducing full independence to "eleven points" which made the leftist devotees of Gandhi like Nehru feel uneasy. In all the subsequent statements issued by Gandhi, in the speeches he made and in the letters he wrote to the Viceroy during the Dandi March and after launching the Salt Satyagraha, the approach of conciliation and negotiation was obvious. Just before and after launching the Salt Satyagraha, Gandhi wrote to the Viceroy saying that he was aware of the dangerous possibilities inherent in the path of struggle he had adopted and that since he wanted to avoid it, the government must adopt a helpful attitude. He persisted in making such statements till he was arrested on 5th May.

After the arrest, Gandhi could not make such statements or speeches. But within two weeks of his arrest, he got an opportunity to reiterate his approach from jail and get worldwide publicity. The British rulers themselves helped to create an atmosphere for this.

To understand the import of this development, it is necessary to elaborate the attitude of the British rulers towards the struggle. In Britain, as we have noted earlier, the Conservatives who were in power till 1929 were replaced by the Labour Party which had been advocating a policy of conceding India's political rights. (Labour Party leader Clement Atlee who was a member of the Simon Commission had expressed himself in favour of conceding India's demands.) Besides, many prominent newspapers in Britain had written editorial articles protesting against the repression let loose by the government following the Salt Satyagraha and pleading for a conciliatory attitude towards the Congress. The newspapers in the U. S. A. and other foreign countries, as also foreign social and political leaders, religious heads and others, expressed themselves in favour of India's independence movement. In this international background, the British government could not pursue a policy of repression alone. The rulers had to adopt a dual policy of proceeding legally against the violation of laws, and creating at the same
time the impression that the doors were not closed for conciliation.

This explains why Gandhi was left free for weeks after launching the Salt Satyagraha. It was for the same reason that many top leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru and Vallabhbhai Patel were released immediately after a brief period of imprisonment.

As part of this policy, a British newspaper correspondent was allowed to interview Gandhi in jail and ascertain his views on the terms of a conciliation. And this correspondent was the representative in India of Daily Herald, the organ of the British Labour Party. He had written a number of articles in his paper expressing sympathy towards the struggle led by Gandhi.

It was meaningful that a British correspondent with such a political background was allowed to interview Gandhi. This was a clear indication that the British bourgeoisie and their government were eager to solve the problem by negotiations as well as the Indian bourgeoisie and its political leadership, the Congress. While the latter viewed the struggle as a means to bring pressure on the British rulers, the former viewed the repression and the proposal for the Round Table Conference as instruments to bring pressure on the Congress. They had made it clear that the Conference would be held even if the Congress dissociated from it and that necessary steps would be taken to “protect law and order” if the leadership launched the civil disobedience. While, on the one hand, the authorities took steps to teach the ‘low-breakers’ a lesson by perpetrating violence on tens of thousands of people, they, on the other hand, called the (first) Round Table Conference in London to which all leaders excluding Congressmen were invited.

However, both the sides knew that none of these methods was going to be effective in the final analysis.

The Congress leadership knew that however massive the civil disobedience movement, it would not take them to the goal of full independence demanded at the Lahore
Congress. Yet, it was not willing to adopt the means and forms of struggle proposed by left Congressmen and Communists.

Similarly, the British rulers knew that a round table conference without the participation of the Congress could not solve the political questions of India and also that the civil disobedience movement could not be suppressed by force. Hence, the authorities wished to persuade the Congress to postpone the civil disobedience movement and participate in the Round Table Conference.

The Congress leadership too wished to participate in the Round Table Conference on the condition that at least some limited political rights short of full independence demanded by them and taken by the people as their own, be granted. In fact, the Indian bourgeoisie as a whole expressed the desire to make such a move.

The foreign friends of India sympathetic to the Indian freedom movement as well as the liberals in India itself were wondering if, in the atmosphere of the pressure tactics exercised by both the sides, a compromise could be brought about on the basis of terms acceptable to both the sides.

It was in this background that George Slocombe, the Indian representatives of *Daily Herald*, held a talk with Gandhi in jail. Slocombe sought to know from Gandhi the terms on which the Congress would call off the civil disobedience movement and participate in the Round Table Conference. Gandhi's reply, published in *Daily Herald* and in other foreign and Indian papers contained the following terms:

1) The adoption of a constitution which grants the essence of independence to India should be brought within the purview of the Round Table Conference.

2) Concede the demands put forward by Gandhi with regard to the abolition of Salt Tax, Prohibition and the ban on foreign cloth.

3) Release all prisoners sentenced on political grounds with the suspension of the Civil Disobedience Movement.
4) Leave the remaining part of the ‘11 points’ which Gandhi had submitted to the Viceroy to future negotiations.

Needless to state, these terms constituted a going back not only from the Lahore resolution on independence but also from the position taken by Gandhi in his statements and in the letters he wrote to the Viceroy. The goal of full independence was reduced to the ‘essence of independence’, and the majority of the minimum demand of ‘11-points’ set aside for ‘future negotiations’. Slocombe concluded his report with a warning that unless the authorities were willing to take the path of conciliation by accepting the very much scaled-down demand of Gandhi, both England and India would be caught in “a danger beyond imagination”.

But the government was not willing to accept even this. Hence the struggle continued. A large number of Congress committees were declared illegal and their properties, including Anand Bhavan, the home of the Nehru family in Allahabad which was donated to the congress when the disobedience movement was launched, confiscated. Undaunted the people in tens of thousands continued the disobedience programme in different forms in different places. Side by side, the top leaders of the Congress and the liberals continued their efforts to negotiate with the government.

On 20th June 1930, Motilal Nehru came out of the prison after serving his first term of sentence. Before long, Slocombe held an interview with him following which discussions were held among Motilal, Slocombe and the liberal leader, Jayakar. The subject of the discussion was the terms acceptable to the Congress to participate in the Round Table Conference. The opinions and suggestions that emerged in these discussions were conveyed in a letter to Spru. He in turn approached the Viceroy with that letter. In the light of the talks held with the Viceroy, Sapru and Jayakar visited Motial Nehru, who had been arrested once again, Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru in jail.
The efforts of these two liberal leaders to evolve the terms acceptable to both sides had the full support of the Viceroy. Hence, the Nehrus and Dr. Sayed Mohamud were brought to Yerwada jail where Gandhi had been kept. There, a conference was held which was attended by Gandhi, the Nehrus, Vallabhbhai Patel, Dr Mohamud, Jairamdas Daulatram and Sarojini Naidu. Sapru and Jayakar pleaded with the Congress leaders to climb down further from the position taken by Gandhi in his interview with Slocombe. But Congress leaders could not accept the plea. Some of them, in fact, were of the opinion that the terms put forward by Gandhi represented a backpedalling from the goal adopted by the Congress. Hence a further climb down from that position was out of the question. The authorities on their part were not willing to accept the terms put forward by Gandhi. Thus, the first negotiation held after the launching of the civil disobedience movement failed.

There was one important development which needs special mention here. Before the Yerwada discussion, Gandhi wrote to the Nehrus in the North Indian jails expressing the view that the time was not yet ripe for a negotiation. Gandhi feared that in the then prevailing atmosphere of a country-wide mass struggle, negotiations with the authorities by a few leaders would do more harm than good. That is, Gandhi's intention was to call upon the people to intensify the struggle against the authorities who were not willing to accept even the minimum demands put forward by him.

But this made one thing clear. Unlike the Congress ranks and the people who participated in the struggle, the Congress leaders were not thinking in terms of a "struggle till the goal is achieved". Their assessment of the situation was that there was no alternative but to advance along the path of struggle for the time being till the time became propitious for negotiations.
IV. THE FIRST ROUND TABLE CONFERENCE

We have noted earlier that the British government had decided to hold the Round Table Conference even if the Congress did not participate in it, as a means to exert pressure on the Congress. This conference began on 31st October, 1930. In all 89 delegates attend it, 16 representing the different political parties in Britain, 16 representing the princely states of India, and 57 from the British Indian provinces.

Because of the absence of the Congress, the Conference was held in an atmosphere of unreality. It may be recalled that the Congress leaders had declared that any decision taken in the Conference would not be binding on them. Hence, the Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald’s statement at the concluding session on 19th January, 1931 expressed the hope that those who were not participating in the civil disobedience movement would accede to the appeal of the Viceroy and participate in the future proceedings of the Conference. And in expressing this hope, he was sincere. For the ruling powers were aware that a fruitful decision at a conference would be possible only if the Congress participated in it. Therefore, within a week after the conference, negotiations with the Congress started once again.

The British authorities had made all that was necessary to see to it that the new political setup that might emerge out of the negotiations was favourable to them. The organizational structure and the discussions in the Conference as well as the statement of the British Prime Minister at the end of the conference were orientated that way.

We have seen that there were three groups of participants in the First Round Table Conference. Of these, the representatives of the political parties of England and those representing the Indian princely states were overtly opposed to the goal of full independence put forward by the Congress. They were bent on putting every obstruction on the path of realizing this goal. Among the British India delegates, there were,
besides the liberals like Spri, Jayakar and Srinivasa Sastri, representatives of minority communities like the Muslims, the Depressed Castes, etc. Obviously the liberals had no sympathy with the goal of full independence. The representatives of the minority communities were more interested in furthering their own communal interests than anything else.

And this provided a helpful atmosphere for the British to put into practice their tactics of ‘divide and rule’. The British representatives argued for provisions to safeguard the interests of the British capitalists who had invested in India and of British officers serving in different parts of India in various capacities. Besides, they tried to have the vital departments of defence and foreign affairs to be vested in the Viceroy instead of being handed over to the Indian representatives.

The representatives of the princely states asked for safeguards which would perpetuate their feudal rule. It was amidst all these that the representatives of Muslims and the Depressed Castes fought to bolster their special interests.

The authorities used this situation to widen the gulf that existed among these different interest groups, sharpen the contradiction between them and make it appear that it was because of these differences and contradictions that an agreed solution failed to emerge. The authorities thought that if this tactic succeeded, there would a big hurdle for the Congress to cross, when the Round Table Conference resumed later with the participation of the Congress.

The First Round Table Conference which was inaugurated in this background took certain decisions unanimously. One of the important decisions thus taken was that India’s future constitution should be federal in character and that the British Indian provinces and the princely states should have equal representation in it.

Apparently, it was a good decision. It meant that the rulers of 600 and odd princely states which claimed themselves to be fully independent and sovereign gave up that position and agreed to become part of an administrative system
through elected representatives of the people. However, they gave no assurance that the states which would become members of federal India, would themselves institute democratic governments based on the legislatures with elected representatives. The idea was that this would in effect create obstacles of autocratic rule in the states before the people of India marching along the path of democracy.

This together with the vested interests of the British and the clims of minority communities made it extremely difficult for the realization of a system of bourgeois democratic set up as demanded even by the liberals. However, the moderates hoped that the decision with regard to a federal constitution unanimously taken in the Conference would help to advance along the path they desired. So, they wholeheartedly welcomed the proposal.

But, once the discussions on the problems of minority communities began, complications began to arise one after another. Separate electorate envisaged for Muslims was now demanded by the Depressed Castes leaders and certain other minority communities as well. But the representatives of the Muslim community stood firmly by their "special rights" and emphatically stated in one voice that a constitution which did not recognize this special right would not be acceptable to them.

With this, the conference came to a standstill and it became impossible to proceed further. At this stage the final plenary session of the delegates who were till then divided into different sub-committees was held on 19th January 1931. In that conference the Prime Minister made a statement on behalf of the British government, which included the following points.

1. The view of the British Government is that the responsibility for the Government of India should be placed upon the legislatures, central and provincial, with such provision as may be necessary to guarantee, during the period of transition, the observance of certain obligations and to meet other special circumstances, and also with such guarantees
as are required by minorities to protect their political liberties and rights.

2. The British Government has taken note of the fact that the deliberations of the Conference have proceeded on the basis accepted by all parties, that the central Government should be a federation of all-India, embracing both the Indian states and British India in a bicameral legislature.

3. With the legislatures constituted on a federal basis, the British Government will be prepared to recognise the principle of the responsibility of the Executive to the Legislature.

4. Under the existing conditions the subjects of Defence and External Affairs will be reserved to the Governor General, and arrangements will be made to place in his hands the power necessary for the administration of these subjects. Moreover, as the Governor General must, as a last resort, be able in an emergency to maintain the tranquility of the State and must similarly be responsible for the observance of the constitutional rights of minorities, he must be granted the necessary powers for these purposes.

5. The Governor’s Provinces will be constituted on the basis of full responsibility. Their Ministers will be taken from the Legislature and will be jointly responsible to it. The range of Provincial subjects will be so defined as to give them the greatest possible measure of self-government. The authority of the Federal Government will be limited to provisions required to secure its administration of Federal subjects and so discharge its responsibility for subjects defined in the constitution of all-India concern.

It also assured that while making safeguards during the transition period as stated above, the reserved powers of the Governor General and the Governors would be framed and exercised “as not to prejudice the advance of India through the new constitution to full responsibility for her own Government”.

Along with this, the Prime Minister made an observation regarding the problem of minority communities. He stated
that the problem should be solved amicably through negotiations among the different communities. He promised the co-operation of his government in this regard.

He concluded his statement with an appeal to all those concerned (the Congressmen) to call off the civil disobedience and participate in the future proceedings of the Conference.

On 21 January, the Congress Working Committee gave a reply to this. It was stated emphatically that the proceedings claimed to have taken place at the Round Table Conference were not acceptable to the Congress. The Committee charged the government with inviting only those whom it liked and not those who really represented the Indian people. The Committee pointedly stated that the Conference was called by a government which had put behind the bars all the leaders of the people striving to give shape to their aspirations, a government which had resorted to ordinances one after another, a government which had subjected thousands of unarmed and peace-loving people to police lathi-charge and firings.

The Committee also made certain observations on the statement made by the Prime Minister on 19th January. It specifically stated that the Prime Minister's statement was extremely vague and general and that it contained no concrete proposal to justify a change in the policy of the Congress. It made unambiguously clear that in the circumstances, the only course open before the Congress and the people was to further strengthen the struggle. As an indication of the continuance of the struggle, the Committee appealed to the people to observe the 26th January 1931 as Independence Day, as a mighty demonstration of their firm determination to march forward undeterred by repression.

Though a resolution to this effect was adopted, the Committee decided against publishing it immediately. This was because, as pointed out earlier, the leaders were determined not to close the doors against any conciliatory move. They were led by the suspicion that there was something in
between the lines in the Prime Minister's statement and the desire to utilize it to go along the path of negotiation.

In this, they soon received an encouraging telegraphic communication from London sent jointly by Sapru and Srinivasa Sastri who had participated in the Round Table Conference. They had sent this message when they were returning to India after the Conference. It was an appeal to the Congress leaders not to take any hasty decision regarding the Prime Minister's statement and also a request for a discussion of the matter with them soon after their arrival in India. In deference to this, the Congress leaders decided to postpone the publication of the resolution.

Events moved swiftly thereafter. On 25th January, the Viceroy issued a statement. The essence of this statement was that his government had decided, with the approval of the provincial governments, to release from jail all members of the Working Committee, both original and co-opted, who were functioning from January 1930, in order to facilitate a discussion on matters contained in the Prime Minister's statement. The statement made it clear that the release would be unconditional. It also made it clear that this decision was an attempt to implement the Prime Minister's statement and that his government would be behind none in finding an amicable solution to the political and constitutional problems once the situation returned to normalcy. The Viceroy hoped that the Congress leaders would favourably respond to the decision taken by the government.

Following this, 26 members of the Working Committee, including those who had assumed charge temporarily, were released. In a statement issued on his release, Gandhi said: "I have come out of jail with an absolutely open mind, unfeathered by enmity, unbiased in argument and prepared to study the situation, from every point of view and discuss the Premier's statement with Tej Bahadur Sapru and other delegates on their return. I make this statement in deference to the urgent wish expressed in a cable sent to me from London by some of the delegates."
With this, the conditions changed as a whole. It may be recalled that the talks which had taken place a few months earlier in Naini Tal and Yerwada jails between Congress leaders, on the one hand, and Sapru and Jayakar, on the other, turned out to be unsuccessful. Gandhi had then expressed the view that conditions prevailing at that time were not conducive to negotiations. Now, the conditions were becoming conducive. It was impossible then to call off the struggle or come to an agreement with the government on the basis of a decision by Congress leaders individually or by a few of them. Now, all the top leaders of the Congress were free. Thus it became possible for them to hold discussions and chalk out future programmes taking into consideration the background of the Round Table Conference held in their absence and the decisions emerging from it. Thus, a new chapter was being opened in the history of the Satyagraha struggle of 1930.

V. THE GANDHI-IRWIN PACT

As the top Congress leaders came out of the jail on the unilateral decision taken by the authorities, the Congress had to face a thoroughly confusing new situation. An impression had gained ground among the people that an agreement between the Congress and the government was in the offing and that the struggle would be withdrawn. This was strengthened by the decision of the Working Committee not to publish its resolution to continue the struggle.

However, the repression let loose against Congress workers with the launching of the Salt Satyagraha did not end with the release of the leaders. Police lathi-charge and other repressive actions continued as before. Moreover, there was a widespread feeling among Congress ranks and the people in general against holding talks with the authorities and reaching a compromise with them. Besides, the Congress leadership which had to conduct talks with the
authorities against popular feelings, had to face innumerable knotty problems in the course of the talks.

However, Gandhi and other top Congress leaders had no doubt that a "situation mature enough for negotiations" had come. So they held talks with Sastri, Sapru and Jayakar soon after their arrival from London. And they came to the conclusion that Gandhi and the Viceroy should begin talks. At the same time, they decided to continue the struggle while proceeding with talks. The Working Committee which met at Allahabad on 31st January adopted the following resolution:

"The Working Committee having, out of regard for the wishes of Syts Sastri, Sapru and Jayakar, suspended publication of its resolution passed an 21-1-31, an impression has got abroad that the movement of Civil Disobedience has been suspended. It is, therefore, necessary to reiterate the decision of the Committee that the movement is to continue unabated until explicit instructions are issued to the contrary. This meeting reminds the public that picketing of foreign cloth and drink and drug shops in itself is no part of the Civil Disobedience campaign, but that it is the exercise of the ordinary right of a citizen, so long as it remains stricty peaceful and causes no obstruction to the public.

"This meeting further reminds the sellers of foreign cloth, including foreign yarn, and Congress workers that the boycott of foreign cloth being a vital necessity in the interest of the masses, is a permanent feature of national activity and will remain so till the nation has acquired the power to exclude foreign cloth and foreign yarn form India, whether by total prohibition or by prohibitive tariff.

"Whilst the response made by dealers in foreign cloth and foreign yarn to the appeal of the Congress to bring about a boycott of foreign cloth, this meeting reminds them that it is not open to any Congress organization to hold out hopes of their being able to dispose of their existing stock in India."2

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It can be seen that though the resolution gave a general directive on the continuance of the struggle, it contained nothing concrete about anything, except on the boycott of foreign cloth and yarn. It was a time when various struggles, including a “no-tax campaign”, were going on in many provinces including U. P., the home province of the Nehrus. The local Congress workers had to face numerous problems in relation to each of these struggles. The Committee which did not bother to give clear directions on these issues, however, made it clear that even if the civil disobedience movement was withdrawn, the boycott of foreign cloth would continue. That the civil disobedience movement might be put off subject to certain conditions was thus implied in the resolution which stated that the struggle must continue until specific instructions were received.

This later led to differences and contradictions between the leadership and ranks in the Congress, which we shall see in the following sections. Within the Congress leadership itself, there were some who looked upon the path of negotiations with subdued opposition out of personal reverence to Gandhi. Knowing all this, the leadership decided to take itself to the path of negotiations.

When these developments were taking place, Motilal was on his death-bed. He invited his colleagues in the Working Committee to Allahabad and expressed his wish to have the discussions, which were to decide the future of India, held in his presence at Swaraj Bhawan. He also made it clear that the path he had chosen was one of negotiations. At the same time, his only son, Jawaharlal, was badly disturbed at the path of negotiations. This difference in approach between the father and the son was symbolic of the difference of opinion that was growing among Congress workers all over the country.

Motilal Nehru passed away on 6th February before Sapru, Jayakar and other delegates returned from England. The impact of Motilal’s death on Gandhi was revealed in several
of his statements. But what disturbed him more was the continuance of the policy of repression by the government even after his and his colleague's release from jail. Gandhi said: "Despite the official peace offer from Great Britain, unprovoked assaults on innocent persons still continue. Respectable persons are summarily and without apparent reason deprived of their immovable and movable property by mere executive action. A procession of women was forcibly disbursed. They were seized by the hair and kicked with boots. The continuance of such repression will make Congress cooperation impossible even if other difficulties are got over."

While all these were going on publicly, the Congress leadership had given certain secret instructions as well. According to Pattabhi Sitaramayya, the leadership instructed the "Congressmen not to start new struggles" and "not to create new situations, although they might vigorously continue the ongoing struggles". In other words, while voicing public protest against the repressive policy of the government, the leadership was in fact containing the fighting spirit of the Congressmen.

It was necessary for the leadership to show that the masses were behind it when it entered into negotiation with the government, and at the same time it did not want to see anything standing in the way of serious negotiations that might be started when the "situation became mature". The tactic they adopted was such that it served both these purposes.

Soon after their return from England, Sastri and Sapru went to Allahabad and held prolonged discussions with Gandhi and other Congress leaders. They suggested that, since the government had taken the initiative for bilateral negotiations in the form of releasing the top Congress leaders, Gandhi must, without hesitation, write to the Viceroy seeking appointment with him for direct talks. Accordingly, the first round of talks between Gandhi and the Viceroy was held on
17th February which continued for two more days. All the members of the Working Committee were summoned to Delhi to become available for consultations during the talks. The talks and consultations went on for quite some days at different levels—between the Viceroy and Gandhi, between Gandhi and the members of the Working Committee, between the Viceroy and the authorities in London and so on. Enquiry into repression, the structure and powers of the Round Table Conference, the release of political prisoners and a number of other subjects came up for discussion. The question of withdrawal or suspension of the struggle launched by the Congress also came up. On each issue, contradictory proposals came up from each side and compromise proposals were worked out on a "give and take" basis.

At every stage the hope that the 'talks were progressing successfully' and the despair that they were 'foundering' alternated. In the end, by 5th March certain proposals acceptable to both Gandhi and the Viceroy were worked out. These proposals which Gandhi had accepted in his individual capacity were immediately placed before the Working Committee.

Nehru has gone on record in his Autobiography that one of the important proposals that Gandhi brought, viz., the proposal on the framework of the future constitution, shocked him. According to that proposal, what remained to be done was only a more detailed discussion of the scheme of administrative reforms which was already discussed at the first Round Table Conference. One of the essential elements of the scheme was Federation; the other elements were 'responsible government' for India and the introduction of the necessary safeguards in matters of defence and foreign relations in keeping with interests of India. Similar safeguards were to be introduced in other matters like the status of minorities, the economic status of India and the liability of public debt.
Nehru felt that the inclusion of these terms in the negotiations which Gandhi conducted, though as an individual, on behalf of the Congress endangered the objective of full independence. He wondered if it was for an administrative system with such 'safeguards' that they laboured so hard. Was it for this that the resolution of full independence and the pledge were repeated several times? Feeling utterly depressed, Nehru wrote in his *Autobiography*: "so I lay and pondered on that March night, and in my heart there was a great emptiness as of something precious gone, almost beyond recall."

To satisfy Nehru and those of his thinking, Gandhi gave certain interpretations to these terms. The explanation was that it had been clearly stated that the safeguards visualized in the compromise proposals worked out by him and the Viceroy would be in the interests of India. Though this did not convince him, Nehru stated, the talks he had with Gandhi soothed his feelings to some extent. Accordingly, despite the mental conflict and physical strain it caused, he decided to accept the compromise proposal as interpreted by Gandhi and make others accept it also.

Although Nehru and some other leaders accepted it out of personal regard for Gandhi and their unshaken confidence in him, discontent spread fast among the Congress ranks particularly among the younger generation. Presiding over the conference of the All-India Naujawan Bharat Sabha held a few days after the conclusion of the Gandhi-Irwin pact, Subhas Bose gave vent to this discontent. A resolution incorporating the feelings he had expressed was passed by the conference. Also, at the Karachi session of the Congress held during the same period, similar feelings were expressed against the Gandhi-Irwin Pact.

One of the reasons for the expression of such feelings was the continuance of the repression by the government and the fact that no political prisoners other than the *Satyagrahis* were released from jail. Bhagat Singh and his
comrades were awaiting the hangman’s noose. The government was not willing to commute their death sentence. Tens of thousands of people sentenced for "violent activities" (many of them were Congressmen themselves) were languishing in jails. What made the ordinary political workers angry was the fact that Gandhi had agreed to discontinue the struggle at a time when the government was resorting to revengeful actions against the activists who had devoted their lives to the service of the country.

Gandhi did try to give expression to this feeling of the people. He did not hesitate to plead with the Viceroy in the most humble manner to save the life of Bhagat Singh and his comrades and the release of all the political prisoners. But his efforts proved to be of no avail. The Viceroy only stayed the execution of Bhagat Singh and others for a few days and promised to re-examine the cases of other political prisoners in a lenient way.

The issue of those who had lost their jobs in the course of the struggle, of political workers and other citizens who had lost their properties, etc., were also brought to the attention of the Viceroy in all their seriousness. But the government was not willing to give any serious consideration to these issues.

At the same time, on the issue of constitution, the Congress retreated not only from its declared objective of full independence but also from Dominion Status. This was what made the ordinary Congressmen and a considerable section of the people uneasy and dissatisfied. However, as far as the Congress leadership, including Gandhi, was concerned, the main consideration was to make maximum gain out of the struggle which had been going on for nearly a year. They had succeeded in making the government recognize the fact that no talks on reforms would be fruitful without the participation of the Congress. The Congress leaders and the majority of Congress workers had been released; and it was possible now to strengthen the organization through the tireless activities of these workers.
In this circumstance, the leadership of the Congress gave formally its approval "unanimously" to the compromise (despite the opposition privately expressed by Jawaharlal Nehru, Vallabhbhai Patel and some others) in the hope that with the newly acquired political stature and influence, it would be possible to meet the manoeuvres of the authorities and reach its goal step by step.
AFTER THE PACT

I. SUPPORTERS AND OPPONENTS OF THE PACT

The Gandhi-Irwin Pact was signed on 5th March 1931. It evoked both favourable and unfavourable reactions in the Congress leadership and among the people. Both these reactions found expression in the Karachi session of the Congress held towards the end of the month.

However, there were certain things in the Pact which caused joy and enthusiasm among ordinary Congress workers as well as the masses. The volunteers who participated in the prolonged civil disobedience movement as well as people at large felt proud and self-confident of the fact that the rulers who realized that the propaganda slander let loose by them against the movement and the brutal repression let loose failed to stem the popular upsurge, were finally compelled to negotiate with the national leadership.
The fact that Gandhi who had been ridiculed as the "half-naked fakir" was invited to the Viceroy's lodge where he held talks with the representative of the British Crown as equals leading to the signing of a pact between the two brought immense prestige to the national leadership in the eyes of millions in India and abroad. This helped to make Indian people confident of their organized strength and to reinforce their determination to utilize it to march forward to full independence.

The terms of agreement were also helpful to create such an impression. On the very issue on which Gandhi had launched his Dandi March a year earlier, the authorities had climbed down to some extent, and the people got the right to make salt subject to certain conditions. The people also got the right subject to certain restrictions to picket foreign cloth shops and liquor shops. The Congress committees which were declared illegal following the civil disobedience movement regained their freedom to function.

Above all, tens of thousands of Satyagrahis who were jailed following the civil disobedience were released. The thousands of meetings which were organized to accord reception to them became full-scale propaganda meetings combined with demonstration. The men and women who underwent imprisonment for participating in the Satyagraha won the recognition and respect of the society. As a reflection of this, the Congress leadership issued the directive to the effect that 50 per cent of the delegates attending the Karachi Congress should be the Satyagrahis released from jails or those elected by the Satyagrahis.

There was, however, another side of the coin. A considerable section of the Satyagrahis and lakhs of people felt that though the authorities were compelled to climb down to a considerable extent from the position they had taken before the civil disobedience movement, the Congress leadership surrendered on many vital issues. The local authorities were continuing their repressive actions, particularly
against the peasant movement of U. P which was started as part of the civil disobedience movement, the "Red Shirt" movement of NWFP, etc. Besides, when people began to exercise their rights granted as per the terms of the Pact, such as making salt and picketing foreign cloth and liquor shops, the local authorities put numerous obstructions before them. Because of all this, even ordinary Congressmen who were not known as leftists got concerned about the desirability of the "Pact" and the future mode of action.

To crown all these, there was the problem of the release of political prisoners. According to the terms of the Pact, only the Satyagrahis were to be released. Hence, those who were put behind the bars for "bomb politics" or communism or even trade union activities did not come within the purview of the agreement. Even among the Satyagrahis, those convicted for "violent activities" would have to continue in Jail. Among them were a large number of ordinary Congressmen. Besides, there were a number of revolutionaries who were confined to jail without trial right from the beginning of the First World War.

In this context, the death sentence on Bhagat Singh, Rajaguru and Sukhdev deserves particular mention. The demand had come from all over the country that they should be saved from the gallows. The very millions who adored Gandhi as the leader of the civil disobedience movement also adored Bhagat Singh as another noble symbol of the national struggle. Hence, it made the people generally uneasy when Gandhi had made a pact with a Viceroy who refused to commute the death sentence on Bhagat Singh and his comrades. A section among them and the leftist political workers publicly criticized Gandhi for such a compromise. And as a protest against this, when Gandhi and the president-elect Vallabhbhai Patel arrived at Karachi for the Congress session, a section of the people came out to receive them with black garlands and flowers.
Even at the time of signing the Pact, Gandhi was aware of the feelings of the people. In a statement to the press issued immediately after signing it, Gandhi said:

I owe a word to hundreds, if not thousands of my erstwhile fellow prisoners on whose behalf I have been receiving wires, and who will still be languishing in jails when Satyagrahi prisoners who were jailed during the past 12 months will have been discharged. Personally I do not believe imprisoning, by way of punishment, even those who commit violence, through political motives, are entitled to claim, if not the same wisdom, certainly the same spirit of love and self sacrifice that I would claim for myself. And, therefore, I could have justly secured their liberty in preference to my own, or that of fellow Satyagrahis, I should truthfully have secured it. But I trust they will realize that I could not in justice ask for their discharge. But that does not mean that I or the members of the Working Committee have not them in mind. The Congress has embarked deliberately, though provisionally, on a career of co-operation. If Congressmen honourably and fully implement the conditions applicable to them of the settlement, the Congress will obtain an irresistible prestige and would have inspired the Government with confidence in its ability to ensure peace as, I think, it has proved its ability to conduct disobedience. And if the people in general will clothe the Congress with that power and prestige, I promise that it will not be long before every one of these political prisoners is discharged, including the detenus, the Meerut prisoners, and all the rest.\(^1\)

In this statement Gandhi dealt not only with the question of political prisoners but also with the parties and groups which had adopted revolutionary means as distinct from his path of non-violence. He appealed to them to give up the

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path of violence, if not as a creed but at least from the practical point of view. He appealed to them to examine what a tremendous people's might was unleashed by the struggle he organized on the basis of non-violence. He requested them: "Let them preserve their precious lives for the service of the motherland to which all will be presently called, and let then give to the Congress an opportunity of securing the release of all the political prisoners and may be even securing from the gallows those who are condemned to them as being guilty of murder."

At the same time, he made it clear that he did not propose to make the people victims to any baseless optimism. He could only declare openly what he personally and the Congress desired; results were always in the hands of God—that was his position.

What prompted Gandhi to issue such a statement was his realization of the stubbornness on the part of the government, on the one side, and the intensity of the people's feelings, on the other. The authorities were not wholly willing even to release the Satyagrahis. In the circumstances, one need not speculate on the position they would take on the question of commutation of the death sentence on Bhagat Singh and his comrades and the release of those sentenced for "violent" activities.

On the contrary, for the people the touchstone of the intentions of the authorities was their attitude towards the death sentence on Bhagat Singh and his colleagues and the release of other political prisoners. In fact, these two issues played a crucial role in the Gandhi-Irwin talks. There were two courses open before Gandhi: Either to end the talks on the basis of disagreement on these issues and restart the struggle or get at least the Satyagrahis released and the restrictions placed on the Congress withdrawn, thereby creating the hope in the minds of the people that it would be possible to get the political prisoners released along with the resolution of other issues through organized activities of the Congress.
clear from Gandhi’s statement that he had chosen the latter course. Thus, the Karachi Congress was held while thousands of political prisoners, who, according to Gandhi himself, were “partiotic and self-sacrificing though working through a wrong method”, were languishing in prisons, and Bhagat Singh and his comrades had already been executed. (Realizing the difficulty the execution of Bhagat Singh and his comrades might create for Gandhi and the Congress, Irwin offered to stay the execution till after the Karachi session. But Gandhi rejected the offer. Gandhi made it clear that if the authorities were determined to hang these young men, he would face its consequence and that he did not need any concession in the matter. Thus, on 23rd March they were hanged. The Karachi Congress began on the 29th.)

The Karachi Congress which met in this background witnessed many a stormy situation. Among the delegates there was a large section which basically challenged the Gandhi-Irwin Pact. At least a small minority in the leadership too was of the same opinion. We have already referred to the speech that Subhas Bose made as the representative of the Congress Youth and the leftists, and the resolution passed at the session of the youth held under his chairmanship. Jawaharlal himself was unhappy. He wrote in his Autobiography:

The principal resolution at Karachi dealt with the Delhi Pact and the Round Table Conference. I accepted it, of course, as it emerged from the Working Committe, but when I was asked to move it in the open Congress, I hesitated. I went against the grain, and I refused first, and then this seemed a weak and unsatisfactory position to take up. Either I was for it or against it, and it was not proper to prevaricate or leave people guessing in the matter. Almost at the last moment, a few minutes before the resolution was taken up in the open Congress, I decided to sponsor it. In my speech I tried to lay before the gathering quite frankly what my feelings were and why I have
wholeheartedly accepted that resolution and pleaded with them to accept it. That speech made on the spur of the moment and coming from the heart, and with little ornament or fine phrasing in it, was probably a great success than many of my other efforts, which had followed a more careful preparations.

This was also the position of a majority of the delegates. They in fact, could not digest this compromise. They felt there was something wrong with it. But, the question as to what other course was open before them worried them. However, the release of a large number of their colleagues and the freedom of activity which came in the wake of the compromise had put some confidence in them. Thus, like Nehru, they too, with hesitation, finally accepted it.

But during the discussions on the resolution on the execution of Bhagat Singh and his comrades, the emotion of the delegates became evident. The resolution which began with, “This Congress while dissociating itself from and disapproving of political violence in any shape or form”, placed on record “its admiration of the bravery and sacrifice of Bhagat Singh and his comrades, Sukhadev and Rajaguru”. The resolution further stated that by their execution, “the Government have lost the golden opportunity of promoting good will between the two nations, admittedly held to be essential at this juncture, and of winning over to the method of peace, the party which, being driven to despire, resorts to political violence”.

Many delegates demanded deletion of the introductory part of the resolution. While a heated debate on this was going on inside, a huge black-flag demonstration was going on outside. It was a demonstration of the feelings of the leftist who held that Gandhi and the Congress leadership which was holding fast the Gandhian method of “non-violence”, were mainly responsible for not commuting the death sentence of Bhagat Singh and his comrades.
The resolution ratifying the Gandhi-Irwin Pact was adopted formally without any serious opposition. But the resolution against the execution of Bhagat Singh and his comrades was adopted in the face of opposition of an organized minority. Although this clearly indicated the gap that existed between Gandhi and his followers, with the adoption of the resolution with the approval of the large majority of the delegates, the unity of the Congress and the leading role of Gandhi in it were consolidated.

II RESOLUTION ON FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS

The Karachi Congress adopted a few more resolutions besides the one ratifying the Gandhi-Irwin Pact and the one protesting against the execution of Bhagat Singh and his comrades. The most important of these was the one enunciating the fundamental rights which were to be adopted as the "directive principles of the future constitution".

The Policy of Gandhi and the Congress High Command was one of making such declarations as would satisfy the 'leftists' and of bargaining with the authorities under that cover to bring about such changes in the administrative set up as would protect their own (bourgeois) class interests. It was as part of this strategy that they came forward, with much hesitation though, to adopt the resolution on full independence at Lahore. It was with the same intention that Gandhi and Vallabhbhai Patel, who commanded much larger support withdrew to make Jawaharlal Nehru, the known leftist leader, the president of the Congress. The resolution on fundamental rights adopted at Karachi was only a continuation of this strategy.

As already indicated, there was bitter resentment among the people against the Gandhi-Irwin Pact and the execution of Bhagat Singh and his comrades. This had spread among the ranks of the Congress as well. In the words of
Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, "At Karachi, there was a certain cleavage between the younger and the older sections. People were not wanting who began to doubt whether, after all, the Congress was not drifting with the old current of Dominion Status, British Imperialism and a Brown Bureaucracy and whether the labour problem—of the peasants and the workers—and socialistic ideals were not going by the board. It was necessary to reassure the country on this subject. Gandhi was game for any issue provided it was an issue based on Truth and Non-violence, and it was an issue too of the village and the poor man." 2

It was in these circumstances that Jawaharlal Nehru raised the question of fundamental rights in which he was specially interested and presented it in the form of a resolution before the Working Committee. Sitaramayya states that there were many who doubted if it was proper to adopt a resolution in such a hurry. Consequently the AICC was entrusted with the task of reviewing the resolution to be presented at the Karachi session and introducing suitable amendments to it.

It is thus clear that Gandhi and his colleagues came forward to adopt the left-oriented resolution prepared by Nehru as a means to appease a section of the Congressmen and the people at large who felt dissatisfied at the compromise which Gandhi made with the rulers who had ordered the execution of Bhagat Singh and his comrades.

In a sense, the very introduction to the resolution on fundamental rights revealed the real situation. It said: "This Congress is of the opinion that to enable the masses to appreciate what swaraj as conceived by the Congress, will mean to them, it is desirable to state the position of the Congress in a manner easily understood by them. In order to end the exploitation of the masses, political freedom must include real economic freedom of the starving millions. The Congress, therefore, declares that any constitution which

2. Pattabhi Sitaramayya. Ibid, p.462
may be agreed to on its behalf, should provide or enable the swaraj government to provide for the following:"

As an inseparable part of the resolution ratifying the Gandhi-Irwin Pact, it was decided that the Congress should participate in the Second Round Table Conference subject to certain conditions. It was doubted, quite justifiably, if a conference called by the British with the participation of such disparate groups as the native princes, organizations of communal and caste politics and the liberal political leaders would lead to the declared objective of full independence. (It was, in fact, this doubt which created discontent among the people and the Congress ranks.) In order to resolve this problem, the resolution while ratifying the Pact, made it clear that the Congress delegates to the Round Table Conference would be working for a system in which India would have the right to sever relations with Britain at any time and the people's representatives would have the real right to exercise power over all departments, including deference. But, even with this, the discontent among Congress ranks, particularly the youth, could not be met. The resolution on fundamental rights was yet another attempt designed to serve the purpose.

It is worth noticing in this connection what Nehru states in his Autobiography:

(The resolution on Fundamental Rights) interested me especially, partly because of what it contained, and even more so because it represented a new outlook in the Congress. So far the Congress has thought along purely nationalist lines, and had avoided facing economic issues, except in so far as it encouraged cottage industries and Swadeshi generally. In the Karachi resolution, it took a step in a socialist direction by advocating nationalisation of key industries and services, and various other measures to lessen the burden on the poor and increase it on the rich. This was not socialism at all, and a capitalist state could easily accept almost everything contained in that resolution.
Though Nehru declared that there was surely no socialism in it, the contents of the resolution on fundamental rights which he got adopted on his own initiative made a tremendous impact all over the country. Hundreds of thousands of Congressmen and the masses of people who had no particular links with socialism or communism till then were happy at and inspired by this resolution unanimously passed under Nehru’s initiative with Gandhi’s blessings, by the Congress.

However, the official circles, the feudal-bourgeois interests and the bureaucracy got panicky over it. It was widely propagated following the footsteps of imperialism and its agents, that behind the Karachi Congress were hidden “Bolshevik conspiracy” and “Russian gold”. Nehru himself has mentioned in his autobiography about the rumour spread by these circles that “an unknown person with communist leanings” met him at Karachi and the resolution he moved was drafted by that man. Nehru emphatically stated that all these were false and he only placed before the Congress certain proposals which he considered right. None who has studied his nature and read his autobiography could ever question this statement. Though Nehru used to maintain contacts with communists and socialists and tried to understand their ideas, at no time did he show any indication of being amenable to the suggestions of any group other than the Congress. Other than picking an idea helpful to his “left” bourgeois outlook and pleading for that inside the Congress, at no time did he adopt working class politics against left bourgeois politics. This was, in fact, the “principal merit” that Gandhi and other Congress leaders had found in him.

However, one could still discern certain communist and socialist ideas reflected in the Karachi resolution on fundamental rights. Though the Communists had ceased to be an organized force following the Meerut Conspiracy Case, many of them were still working within the Congress and outside, in co-operation with individual Congressmen. There were
also other political groups which, though not communists, were working for the class interests of workers and peasants. They were all with the Congressmen in jails for participating in the civil disobedience movement. Also with Congressmen in jails were the revolutionary groups which were more numerous than the communist and socialist groups.

Traces of intimacy and friendship with them were evident inside the Congress and among the delegates to the Karachi session. Besides, M. N. Roy who played an important role in the growth of the Indian Communist movement in its early days had arrived in India and started working in contact with different political groups, after being expelled from the Communist International. It was rumoured in the official circles that the "unknown person" mentioned in Nehru's autobiography was M. N. Roy.

Though under the influence of different revolutionary groups, the resolution on fundamental rights which Nehru got passed at the Karachi Congress was a programme which, in his own words, "a capitalist state could easily accept". The Karachi resolution on the fundamental rights did not contain anything beyond the bourgeois democratic slogans raised by those who led bourgeois revolutions in France and other European countries. To enable the readers to appreciate this, the Declaration of Fundamental Rights contained in the resolution, as varied by the AICC meeting held in Bombay in August 1931, is reproduced below. Under the head "Fundamental Rights and Duties" 14 items are listed, as follows;

1. Every citizen in India has the right of free expression of opinion, the right of free association and combination, and the right to assemble peacefully and without arms, for purposes not opposed to law and morality.

2. Every citizen shall enjoy freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess and practise his religion, subject to public order and morality.
3. The culture, the language and script of the minorities and of the different linguistic areas shall be protected.

4. All citizens are equal before the law, irrespective of religion, caste, creed or sex.

5. No disability attaches to any citizen, by reason of his or her religion, caste, creed or sex, in regard to public employment, office of power or honour, and in the exercise of any trade or calling.

6. All citizens have equal rights and duties in regard to wells, tanks, roads, schools and places of public resort, maintained out of State or local funds, or dedicated by private persons for the use of the general public.

7. Every citizen has the right to keep and bear arms, in accordance with regulations and reservations made in that behalf.

8. No person shall be deprived of his liberty nor shall his dwelling or property be entered, sequestered, or confiscated, save in accordance with law.

9. The State shall observe neutrality in regard to all religions.

10. The franchise shall be on the basis of universal adult suffrage.

11. The state shall provide for free and compulsory primary education.

12. The state shall confer no titles.

13. There shall be no capital punishment.

14. Every citizen is free to move throughout India and to stay and settle in any part thereof, to acquire property and to follow any trade or calling, and to be treated equally with regard to legal prosecution of protection in all parts of India.

A close examination of these 14 items reveals that not one of them goes beyond the scope of bourgeois democracy. In fact, they constituted the basis for the Fundamental Rights enshrined in the constitution of free India adopted in 1950. Suffice it to say that the Constitution was framed by limiting
the scope of many of the items included in the Karachi resolu-
tion and by incorporating certain rights which it had
originally denied to the vested interests (e.g., the right of
religious bodies to conduct their own educational institutions).
Obviously, there was not an iota of socialism in it.

Another paragraph in the resolution is concerned with
labour. It includes the following items.

1. The organisation of economic life must conform to
   the principle of justice, to the end that it may secure
   a decent standard of living.

2. The state shall safeguard the interests of industrial
   workers and shall secure for them, by suitable legis-
   lation and in other ways, a living wage, healthy
   conditions of work, limited hours of labour, suitable
   machinery for the settlement of disputes between
   employers and workmen, and protection against the
   economic consequences of old age, sickness, and
   unemployment.

3. Labour to be freed from servitude and conditions border-
   ing on servitude.

4. Protection of women workers, and especially, adequate
   provision for leave during maternity period.

5. Children of school going age shall not be employed
   in mines and factories.

6. Peasants and workers shall have the right to form
   unions to protect their interests.

It needs no particular mention that this does not provide
any rights to workers and employees beyond those granted in
capitalist countries, including England, where social democratic
parties were in power. But the Congress till then was not
willing to adopt even these provisions officially. It may be
stated that these were the provisions which did not find a
place in the programme formulated by Gandhi when the
Khilafat-Non-cooperation movements were launched or befo-
re launching the Salt Sathyagraha, but demanded by the AITUC
and the socialist-communist groups from their very inception.
It is, therefore, important that they were now included in
the official resolution adopted by the Congress.
Equally important were the following items listed in the paragraph on "Taxes and Expenditure":

1. The system of land tenure and revenue and rent shall be reformed and on equitable adjustment made of the burden on agricultural land, immediately giving relief to the smaller peasantry, by a substantial reduction of agricultural rent and revenue now paid by them, and in case of uneconomic holdings, exempting them from rent so long as necessary, with such relief as may be just and necessary to holders of small estates affected by such exemption or reduction in rent, and to the same end, imposing a graded tax on net income from land above a reasonable minimum.

2. Death duties on a graduated scale shall be levied on property above a fixed minimum.

3. There shall be a drastic reduction of military expenditure so as to bring it down to at least one half of the present scale.

4. Expenditure and salaries in civil departments shall be largely reduced. No servant of the state, other than specially employed experts and the like, shall be paid above a certain fixed figure, which should not ordinarily exceed Rs. 500 per month.

5. No duty shall be levied on salt manufactured in India.

The influence of the organized peasant movement can be seen in the first item. Even here, apart from the reduction in the rates of tax and rent, the question of elimination of big landlords was not raised. Thus, in the matter of land relations, the Congress, at that stage, did not adopt even the path of bourgeois transformation, let alone that of bourgeois revolution.

The last paragraph of the Karachi Resolution dealt with the "Economic and Social Programme". It contained:

1. The state shall protect indigenous cloth; and for this purpose the policy of exclusion of foreign cloth and foreign yarn from the country and adopt such other
measures as may be found necessary. The state shall also protect other indigenous industries, when necessary, against foreign competition.

2. Intoxicating drinks and drugs shall be totally prohibited, except for medicinal purposes.

3. Currency and exchange shall be regulated in the national interest.

4. The state shall own or control key industries and services, mineral resources, railways, waterways, shipping and other means of public transport.

5. Relief of agricultural indebtedness and control of usury—direct and indirect.

6. The state shall provide for the military training to citizens so as to organise a means of national defence apart from the regular military forces.

It is clear that even this paragraph did not contain anything beyond the scope of a bourgeois government. Later events demonstrated the realization on the part of the bourgeoisie that those sectors of industries which are of vital importance even for capitalist development should be under the ownership and control of the government. Only this idea was included in the Karachi resolution.

But, as pointed out by Nehru in his *Autobiography* and by Dr. Sitaramayya in his *History of the Indian National Congress* this resolution helped to meet, to an extent, the discontent of the leftists. While continuing the policy of bargaining with the rulers either through Gandhi and others leaders participating in the Round Table Conference or otherwise, they were thus able to tie down the leftists to their own organized political leadership by creating confidence in them that they could approach the people with the resolution on fundamental rights.
III. ATMOSPHERE OF TENSION AND COMPROMISE AGAIN

As we have noted, the Gandhi-Irwin Pact was signed on the understanding that the Congress would participate in the (second) Round Table Conference. Consequently, when the Karachi Congress adopted the resolution ratifying the Pact, it was decided that Gandhi and those nominated by the Working Committee would participate in the Conference.

In the first Working Committee meeting following the Congress, the question came up as to how many should participate in the Conference. It was proposed first that because many difficult problems were to be handled, a team of 15 to 20 representatives should be sent. In the discussion it was, however, made clear that the task of the Conference was not to frame the future constitution of independent India, but to negotiate with the British rulers on the future administrative set up of India. As such, it was finally decided to send Gandhi as the sole representative of the Congress. Besides, Gandhi had got an assurance from Viceroy Irwin that besides the official representative of the Congress, Pandit Malaviya, Sarojini Naidu and Dr. Ansari would be nominated by the Government.

But, by the time the delegates had reached home after the Karachi Congress, the situation had begun to deteriorate. There were constant frictions between the Congress workers and the local authorities. Before going into details, a central fact needs to be stated here. The understanding arrived at between Gandhi and Lord Irwin, and between the bureaucrats under Irwin and Gandhi was absent in the case of Congress workers and the government officials at the local level. As a result of the struggle that had gone on for a year, the Congress workers had gained the confidence that theirs was an organization with its own political individuality and they were determined to utilize it to further consolidate their rapport with the people. They engaged themselves in
arranging heroic welcomes to the leaders and volunteers coming out of the jail, revitalizing the Congress committees which were banned in the wake of the civil disobedience movement, and organizing Congress committees wherever the organization did not exist before the struggle. The leaders and workers at all levels were also engaged in propaganda campaigns explaining to the people the issues involved in the civil disobedience movement, the stands taken by the Government and the Congress on each of these issues and the terms of agreement reached between Gandhi and Irwin on them.

As part of this, campaign meetings and demonstrations were held constantly in different parts of the country. The Congress flag flew aloft all over the country. In accordance with the terms of the agreement, the popularization of *swadeshi*, the picketing of foreign cloth and liquor shops, volunteer training, etc., had also begun. Thus Congressmen demonstrated through their action that they were the leaders of a movement which was surging ahead challenging all the repressions unleashed by the government.

These things disturbed the local authorities. They accused the Congressmen of running the organization as a parallel government. Violating the terms of the Pact, they resorted to lathi-charge against Congress demonstrations in a number of places. In many places, officers refused to release those who were still in jail or to return the fines realized from the people. They also refused to reinstate the dismissed government employees; nor did they care to pay off the due benefits to those who had resigned their jobs. Restrictions were imposed on the number of volunteers and the places chosen for picketing.

In short, conscious attempts were made by the local authorities to take back some and to restrict all the rights which the Congressmen regarded as having won through the year-long struggle.

As a natural consequence of this, the question arose as to who was violating the terms of the Pact. The government and the Congress accused each other of violating it.
In the circumstances, Gandhi suggested that the only way left for the government was to refer the issue to a tribunal. But this was not acceptable to the government. Thus the relations between the two sides began to deteriorate more and more.

This situation prevailed all over the country. But it came up with greater importance in the Bardoli taluk of Gujarat, in U. P. and NWFP. In these areas, the friction between the two was more acute.

These three provinces had one characteristic in common. During the period of the civil disobedience movement, these areas witnessed the growth of movements and organizations based on the most broad based popular unity and the deep-rooted day-to-day problems of the people. Along with this common characteristic, each area had its own special features. Frictions developed between the local officials and the Congressmen in each of these areas in different forms. But because of their common character, these turned into a friction at the all-India level, i.e., between Gandhi and the authorities in Delhi.

The Bardoli taluk was renowned for its peasant struggles. We have already referred to the no-tax campaign conducted there with the blessings of Gandhi and under the direct leadership of Vallabhbhai Patel. It continued even in the months after the launching of the Salt Satyagraha. But with the Gandhi-Irwin Pact, the situation changed. Gandhi and the Congress advised those who had refused to pay land tax during the campaign to pay the arrears as much as possible. At the same time, Gandhi brought to the notice of the authorities that on account of the fall in the prices of agricultural produce, the farmers might not be able to pay the tax arrears in full. He also made an appeal to authorities to take into account the losses the peasants had to suffer as a consequence of the civil disobedience movement.

He further reminded the authorities of the fact that because of the persuasive efforts made by himself and his colleagues, an amount Rs 2.1 million had been paid out of
Rs 2.2 million due from the taluk and so it would be wrong to resort to repressive measures to collect the balance. He further pointed out that the government had already given concessions to the tune of more than a lakh of rupees to the peasants who had not taken part in the movement considering their financial difficulties and as such it would be an injustice to take actions to collect this amount from those who had participated in the movement. Therefore, he asked the authorities to stop all actions to recover the amount.

The reply given by the provincial government was that there were established rules and procedures to determine to whom and on what reasons remission of current tax or tax arrears might be allowed. The government’s stand was that the remissions allowed earlier were in accordance with these rules and procedures and that they were yet prepared to allow it to those who deserved it, again, in accordance with these rules and procedures. The government also pointed out that instead of trying to get tax remission to those who deserved it in accordance with these rules and procedures, the Congress was raising it as an issue of the relationship between the Congress and government to which they could not agree.

The situation in U. P. was different. An organized peasant struggle as in Bardoli had not taken place there. However, before and during the Salt Satyagraha widespread activities had been going on among the peasants. Jawaharlal Nehru himself had actively participated in these activities. (During the Salt Satyagraha, when he was released from jail for a few weeks, he had set his attention mostly on peasants.)

Unlike in Bardoli, what worried the peasants and Congress workers in U. P. was not the Ryotwari system and the land tax. The collection of rent and other oppressive extractions by the big landlords, the Zamindars and the Talukdars, the dominant position these elements held in sociocultural fields and the suffering of the people under them were the live issues in U. P. That is, the peasant movement in U. P. emerged not as much against exploitation in the
form of land tax by the government as in the case of Gujarat, as against the all round exploitation and oppression by big landlords like Zamindars and Talukdars.

Nonetheless, this movement, too, was directed against the British rule. For the Zamindars, Talukdars and other vested interests in the countryside constituted the social base of the British rule in the areas. It was against this that the Congress and the peasant movement under its leadership directed its onslaught, as a natural consequence of which the Congress was emerging as a militant mass movement firmly entrenched in the millions of the countryside. So, it was necessary for the British rulers to block this development at any cost in the interest of their own existence.

The conditions in NWFP were still different. There, an organized peasant movement as in Bardoli or U. P. had not yet developed, nor was a form of struggle like the no-tax campaign adopted. But, as pointed out earlier, mass movements of the Pathans and other sections of the people based on tribal fraternity had begun to rally under the banner of the Congress. After the launching of the Salt Satyagraha these tribal sections as a whole had been waging anti-British struggles under the Congress. After the Gandhi-Irwin Pact, their tribal organization, the ‘Afghan Jirga’, was formally affiliated to the Provincial Congress Committee, and the ‘Red Shirts’ under Ghaffar Khan to the Congress volunteer force. Thus, the entire tribal people of the area became an inseparable part of the Congress organization. The political status of the Congress as an all-India organization together with the tribal organization of the frontier region made it a great political force in the region.

We have merely mentioned the situations prevailing in these three regions in some detail. In other places too disputes arose in one way or the other around the interpretation of the terms of the Pact and the behaviour of the authorities. Gandhi proposed that an impartial permanent arbitration be constituted to settle all such disputes. The main issues which were proposed to be referred to the board were as follows:
1. Does picketing of liquor shops and liquor shop auctions include in picketing referred to in the terms of agreement?

2. Do the Provincial governments have the authority to specify the spot of picketing the liquor shops so as to keep them away from the immediate vicinity of the shops?

3. Do the governments have the authority to restrict the number of picketers, thereby preventing them from picketing all the entrances to the shops.

4. Do the government have the authority to prevent peaceful picketing of the sale of liquor at the place and timing other than those for which licences were issued?

5. Does it come within the authority of the government to demand and undertaking from the students who had participated in the civil disobedience movement to get re-entry into schools and colleges and from those who were denied pension and grants during the struggle for reinstating the pension and grants, that they would not participate in the civil disobedience movements in future?

Gandhi also proposed that the scope of meaning of the different terms used in the terms of agreement and the usages of such terms should also be left for arbitration.

The appeal made by Gandhi to the Government of India for constituting a permanent arbitration board to settle the disputes in respect of these issues and the appeal made to the respective provincial governments to settle the disputes in Bardoli and in U. P. were rejected. The result of exchanging letters and holding negotiations for about three months was disappointing. Therefore, on 11th August 1931 Gandhi sent a telegram to the Viceroy in which he stated:

I exceedingly regret to inform you that a letter from the Bombay Government just received renders impossible my departure for London. The letter raises issues of first magnitude, as well as of facts as of law, and contends that
the Government must be the final judge on both. In naked terms, this means that the Government should be both the prosecutor and the judge with reference to matters arising out of a contract to which they and the complainants are parties. This is impossible for the Congress to accept. When I read the Bombay Government's letter together with Sri Malcolm Hailey's telegram received in answer to my enquiry, and the reports of continuing harassment in the U. P., Frontier Province, and other Provinces, they seem to me complete indication that I must not sail as I promised. To communicate with you before coming to a final decision, I have brought the foregoing facts to your notice. I shall await reply before making an announcement.

The reply received from the Viceroy was not at all satisfactory and on 13th August Gandhi conveyed to him his final decision not to go to London. At the same time, the Congress Working Committee informed the lower committees that with the decision not to participate in the Round Table Conference, the Gandhi-Irwin Pact should be considered as non-operative but they could continue with the activities which they had been conducting so far until further instructions.

Following this, Gandhi and the Congress leaders issued statements explaining the reason for taking such a decision. They blamed the government for adopting an approach which, in effect, negated the understanding reached at the time of signing the Gandhi-Irwin Pact. The response of the government to the statement helped only to increase the tension between the Congress and the government.

It was in these circumstances that the other delegates to the Round Table Conference embarked on their journey to London. Malaviya and Sarojini Naidu, the two nominated members, decided not to proceed to London in the circumstances in which Gandhi would not attend the conference. (The government had violated the earlier understanding that
Dr. Ansari also would be nominated.) Among the other representatives, only Prabhashankar Pattani decided not to participate in the conference because Gandhi was not attending it.

This created a new crisis. It was for holding a Round Table Conference with the Congress participation that the government came forward for the Gandhi-Irwin Pact. Congress and the bourgeois leaders, of course, wanted to adopt the path of negotiation and avoid a struggle as far as possible. Hence, the moment it appeared that the government and the Congress were drifting apart, attempts were made once again to bring them together.

Thus, on 15th August, Gandhi, Vallabhbhai Patel, Jawaharlal Nehru and Prabhashankar Pattani met the Viceroy again. Following this, the government issued an official communique. Gandhi and the top government officials exchanged correspondence on the details of this communique, leading Gandhi to retract his earlier decision and decide to proceed to London.

An examination of the official communique and the correspondence exchanged between Gandhi and the authorities would reveal one thing: On none of the issues raised by Gandhi after the Karachi Conference did the government accept the terms to the satisfaction of the ordinary Congressmen or to the people at large. It was not that Gandhi saw any "change of heart" in the government which motivated him to go to London. As Gandhi had made it clear at the time of signing the Pact with Lord Irwin, the Congress had consciously decided to adopt the path of negotiations at least for the time being. Accordingly, any statement from the authorities, however inconsequential, which would pave the way for Gandhi's journey to London must be seized upon. There was no other justification for this second compromise.
IV. THE SECOND ROUND TABLE
CONFERENCE

The Second Round Table Conference had been formally started even before Gandhi and his colleagues reached London. After the plenary session, the delegates had been divided into different committees. It was in these committees that discussions were really held.

The subject of discussion in one committee was the form of federal set up in future India. Another one was to go into the different aspects of the main problem relating to the position the minority communities should have in the new administrative set up. The discussions in these two committees were of the utmost importance. Consequently, Gandhi was a member of both these committees. And it was in the proceedings of these committees that he actively participated.

Before examining the discussions held at different levels and in different committees as well as the conclusions that emerged from these discussions, it is necessary to look back into the fundamental transformations that the British politics and the economy had undergone. The Labour Party which was in power during the First Round Table Conference and the Gandhi-Irwin Pact went out of power in the middle of 1931. MacDonald, who was the Labour Party's Prime Minister, and few of his colleagues left the Party, and joined hands with the Conservatives to form a new government. MacDonald was formally the Prime Minister of that government also. But most of his former colleagues (Labour Party ministers) were in the opposition. In their place, ministers belonging to the Conservative Party were installed. Wedgwood Benn of the Labour Party who was the Secretary of States for India was replaced by Sir Samuel Hoare of the Conservative Party.

What led to the change of government was the deep economic crisis which had affected the capitalist world in
general and Britain in particular. We have already referred to the economic crisis which began in 1929 which had affected Britain very acutely. Goods piled up unsold, factories remained closed and millions of workers were out of employment. The adverse balance of payment became a grave problem. As a natural consequence of these and as a temporary solution to the difficulty arising from this, the pound sterling was delinked from the gold standard.

A majority of the members in the Labour Party was opposed to this policy of their leader, MacDaid, for they feared that it would inevitably lead to rise in the cost of living of the workers and that the capitalists and the government would come out heavily against them. It was precisely for this reason that the Conservative Party decided to lend support to the Prime Minister and his colleagues who adopted this policy. Thus, it was, in fact, a Conservative government under the leadership of a (former) Labourite Prime Minister. It is but natural to expect such a government to pursue a policy against the freedom lovers in India as well as against the working class in England.

Some historians hold the view that but for this change in government, the Second Round Table Conference would have proved much more useful. But that was not the fact. It may be noted that the First Round Table Conference was held when the Labour Party was in power. Yet the British rulers utilized the Conference as a platform to rally the princes, organizations and parties which indulged in communal-caste politics, and isolated individuals with no following against the Congress. The Second Round Table Conference in which the Congress was brought in was but a continuation of the first.

Moreover, it was a Labour Party government with Mac-Donald as Prime Minister and Wedgwood Benn as Secretary of State for India that tried to suppress the Salt Satyagraha and the subsequent struggle as forcibly as a Conservative government would have done. On the other hand, only after realizing that the freedom movement under the leadership of
the Congress could not be suppressed even by the most repressive actions and that any round table conference without the participation of the Congress would only end in a failure, did the then Labour Party Government decide to bargain with Gandhi. But this new policy had the support of the Conservative Party.

The well-known journalist Durga Das, who was in London during the months immediately before the Second Round Table Conference has given in his memoirs the talks he had with the former Conservative Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin (who later became the leader of the Opposition) and the Labour Party leader, Attlee.

The statement made by Viceroy Lord Irwin as directed by the Labour Party government on India’s right to Dominion status had the support of Baldwin. As Attlee had told Durga Das, “Baldwin’s heart was with the Labour Party”. With this background in mind, Durga Das wrote on his conversation with Baldwin, as follows:

Baldwin traced the hostile climate to the hurt inflicted on Lancashire’s textile industry by the Congress through its boycott of British goods. The financial crisis precipitated in Britain by World War I had been aggravated by this boycott. The burden of Empire, he admitted candidly, was becoming more and more oppressive. It was more than likely that before long Britain would be compelled by sheer necessity to cut her losses.

India, Baldwin declared reflectively, might secure self-government much earlier than anybody now thought possible .... He himself was convinced of the need for a meaningful dialogue with the Congress. He would urge the Indian leaders to employ to the maximum advantage whatever instruments were available to them now and whatever others were placed at their disposal under the coming reforms.”

Along with this, Baldwin gave another piece of advice to Indian leaders: Reach a compromise with the Muslims. It was the aloofness of the Muslims, for reasons which may be real or imaginary, that would be used by the British enemies of India’s self-rule.

Two things became evident from the views expressed by Baldwin, who was the spokesman of monopoly capitalism and also a realistic political leader. First, when the position of Britain in the capitalist world had eroded and the Indian freedom movement had strengthened, any attempt to keep India under its iron thumb would be a disadvantage rather than an advantage for the British ruling class. Second, the British ruling class was striving to protect their interests in India as much as possible, making use of the claims of Muslims and others.

In this respect there was no fundamental difference between the Labour and Conservative parties. Like the Labour Party, the Conservative Party also was of the opinion that efforts must be made to come to terms with the Congress by bargaining with them on the principle of self-rule for India. The Labour Party was equally interested in protecting the vital interests of Britain in India while arriving at any settlement. Both parties look upon the native princes, the Muslim, Christian, Anglo-Indian and European communal bigwigs and liberal political leaders as social forces helpful in implementing the basic policy which both the parties equally accept. Again, there was absolutely no difference between the two parties in creating the impression that the Indian question remained unresolved not because they were unwilling to give up power but because of the opposition from the above-mentioned sections.

There is, however, no denying the fact that there were minor differences between the Labour government and the Conservative government on the practical steps they took in implementing this common policy. But the policy that the Labour party and its government pursued in relation to the British working class as well as the Indian people was, in
the final analysis, one of protecting the class interests of the British monopolists.

Right from the early years of the 20th century when, under the leadership of Tilak and his colleagues the objective of Swaraj was adopted and the means of struggle to achieve it were evolved, the British rulers had been pursuing the policy of rallying the Muslim communal leaders and the big-wigs of other minorities as well as the moderate politicians against the Congress. Not only the earlier Conservative and Liberal governments but also the Labour government which came to power later, consistently followed these same tactics. What was witnessed in the Round Table Conferences was only a new revised edition of this strategy.

As against this, the Congress adopted a two-pronged counter-strategy: (1) to organize the people on a large scale under its own flag to bring the necessary pressure on Britain to make them accept the Indian demand of Swaraj and bargain with the British from the position of this organized mass strength, and (2) simultaneously try to negotiate with leaders of the Muslim and other minority communities in order to find a solution to the minority problem acceptable to them.

What was witnessed at the Second Round Table Conference was a clash between these two policies being pursued by the rulers and the Congress. The authorities argued that the transfer of power to the Indian hands was impossible without solving the "Muslim question" which had been there for the past quarter of a century and also without a guarantee that the interests of the Christians, Anglo-Indians, European traders and the depressed communities would be protected. Gandhi, on the other hand, argued that the main question was not that of the minority communities but the unwillingness to give up power on the part of the government. Besides, each side competed for making the leaders of the minority communities accept its view-point. The Second Round Table Conference was a scene of this competition.
In the midst of this controversy, the speeches made by Gandhi in the Constitution Committee and the Minorities Committee reflected clearly the position of bourgeois leadership which the Congress represented. Only certain relevant points are summarised as follows.

1. The need of the day was not the preparation of a political constitution as Britain wanted to do, but to decide on the conditions for co-operations between India and Britain as two independent nations.

2. All other delegates were arguing for their respective communities or sections but he and the Congress which he represented were arguing for the entire Indian people.

3. All the proposals put forward by the government were intended to evade the vital issue of transfer of power to peoples' representatives in the name of minority communities. The talk of the authorities who were unwilling to part with power, of the share of the minority communities was like a talk of sharing a corpse.

4. Gandhi claimed that he was also arguing for the princely states. He made it clear that the policy of the Congress was not to participate in the internal political struggles in the princely states. Accusing the British government of refusing to part with power on the pretext of safeguarding the interests of the princes, Gandhi urged for the latter's co-operation.

5. Gandhi pointed out that he could understand the claims of other minority communities, but not those which were raised in the name of the depressed communities. The Muslims, Sikhs, Christians and others would continue to remain as separate religion groups. He asked his opponents whether they wanted the depressed communities to remain depressed in perpetuity. Gandhi stated:

   I would far rather that Hinduism die than that untouchability lived. I will not bargain away their rights for their kingdom of the whole world. Those who speak of political rights of untouchables do not know India, do not know how Indian society is today constructed, and, therefore,
I want to say with all emphasis that I can command, that if I was the only person to resist this thing, I would resist it with my life."

With all his persuasive speeches in the different committees, Gandhi could not influence the direction of the Round Table Conference. The representatives of the minority communities, including the Depressed Castes, signed a joint statement. It was a document which enumerated the demands of each of the minority communities and pledging support to the claims of each by all others. This was not acceptable to Gandhi, nor was Gandhi’s proposal to them.

In the circumstances, the proceedings of the Conference as a whole were dead-locked making it evident that there was no use in continuing it. MacDonald told the Conference that if each representative gave him in writing their willingness to abide by his decision on issues which the delegates could not solve by mutual discussions, he was willing to mediate in the matter. Gandhi said he was willing to accept his mediation if it was confined to the problems of the Muslim and Sikh communities. But the government was not willing to accept Gandhi’s proposal.

Thus the conference ended without coming to any decision and Gandhi returned home empty handed. The authorities were to make a world-wide propaganda that the conference failed because Gandhi and the Congress could not solve the problems of the minority communities.