THE CONGRESS-LEAGUE RELATION

I. THE FAILURE OF NEGOTIATION ATTEMPTS

The political situation changed as Gandhi and some of his associates were released from detention. It became clear that negotiations between the Congress and the government would start soon. The leaders at the lower levels who remained outside the jail started organizational work of different kinds. The question came up whether Gandhi and the Congress approved of the "violent activities" that took place as part of the Quit India struggle. The British authorities adhered to the position that Gandhi and his colleagues were responsible for the troubles and that they would not enter into talks with them unless they renounced the programme.

The leaders outside the jail denied the charge and argued that the programme they envisaged in 1942 was non-violent.
as it was the case with all the earlier struggles. However, the ordinary activists who were active during the 1942 struggle did not agree with this. They believed that whatever incidents occurred in connection with the struggle, including those which were called "violent" were correct and were fully in accord with the call given by Gandhi.

This problem acquired added importance in the eyes of the people after Gandhi's release from detention, since both sides presented their arguments invoking his name while he was in the jail. Now since he had come out of the jail, he himself had to make it clear what the fact was. And he did make clear a few days after his release. Gandhi stated unambiguously that he had adhered to non-violence when the August resolution was adopted by the Congress. He emphasized that since his call "do or die" was not meant for a violent struggle, he had no sympathy at all to the violent activities that took place as part of struggle. However, Gandhi was not prepared to condemn those who were engaged in these activities, for what led to the outbreak of violence on the part of the people was the brutal repression let loose by the government. Thus Gandhi rejected the demand of the authorities either to condemn those who indulged in the violent activities or to approve of these activities. While keeping those who were engaged in activities which may be called "violent" with the Congress, Gandhi rescued the Congress from the responsibility for the violent activities.

Gandhi was facing yet another serious problem. The August struggle had been suppressed and there was no question of its revival. Hence, it had become necessary to start negotiations with the authorities in one form or another. At the same time, the struggle could not be formally withdrawn in the background in which quite a large number of activists including the entire Working Committee were in jail. In the circumstances the question arose as to how the second anniversary of 9th August should be observed. Gandhi advised the Congressmen: "...mass civil disobedience cannot be offered now. But mass disobedience is one thing and individual
action in the sense of self-respect and liberty is wholly another. It is a universal duty for all time, the discharge of which requires no sanction, save that of one’s own conscience.” Further, he advised those who had gone underground to “discover themselves... by informing the authorities of their movements and whereabouts.” He also enjoined everyone to spin and carry out other constructive activities on 9th August. Thus Gandhi’s policy was to maintain the popular support which was required to conduct negotiations with the authorities.

Meanwhile, he had started moves in the direction of negotiations. Soon after he was released from detention he held discussions with congressmen at the different levels and wrote a letter to the liberal leader M.R. Jayakar on 20th May in which he said:

The country expects much from me. I am not at all happy. I feel even ashamed. I should not have fallen ill. I tried not to, but failed at length, I feel that they will imprison me as soon as I am declared free from the present weakness. And even if they do not arrest me, what can I do? I cannot withdraw the August Resolution. As you have very properly said, it is innocuous. You may differ about the sanction. It is the breath of life for me.1

This letter was not intended for publication, but it was published. The rulers properly utilized Gandhi’s statement that he could not withdraw the August Resolution. They interpreted that Gandhi was determined to continue the Quit India struggle.

But that was not the truth. Gandhi only indicated that he could not withdraw the resolution and the struggle in his individual capacity and that it had to be collectively decided by the Congress. In some of the letters he had sent from the jail he had expressed his eagerness to take a collective decision in this regard. But none of them turned out to be effective. Now he was trying to find if it was possible to start

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negotiations through the liberal leaders like Jayakar and Sapru. When this effort also became ineffective, he wrote directly to the Viceroy on 17th June:

Though there is little cause for it, the whole country and even many from outside expect me to make a decisive contribution to the general good. I am sorry to say my convalescence threatens to be fairly long. Even if I am quite well, I could do little or noting unless I know the mind of the Working Committee of the Congress. I pleaded as a prisoner for permission to see them. I plead now as a free man for such permission. If you will see me before deciding, I shall gladly go wherever you want me to, as soon as I am allowed by my medical advisers to undertake long distance travelling.  

Gandhi was undoubtedly knocking at the door of the authorities again to start negotiations with them. Similar efforts made on earlier occasions had often been fruitful and often fruitless. The present attempt also turned fruitless. The Viceroy Lord Wavell in his reply dated 22nd June stated: “I feel a meeting between us at present could have no value and could only raise hopes which would be disappointed. If after your convalescence and on further reflection, you have a definite and constructive policy to propose for the furtherance of India’s welfare, I shall be glad to consider.”  

Wavell also wrote that the same considerations also applied to Gandhi’s request for permission to meet the members of the Working Committee. He reminded Gandhi of his “recent declaration of loyalty to the Quit India resolution” which he considered both unjust and impracticable. Thus the negotiation attempt failed once again. The Viceroy’s letter was an expression of the government’s attitude that the rulers were not prepared to have a discussion with Gandhi as long as he was not ready to unconditionally withdraw the Quit India resolution. Nor would they allow a discussion between Gandhi and Congress leaders. In this

2. Ibid. p. 251
3. Ibid p 251
exchange of correspondence can be found a continuation of the moves made by both the sides immediately before and after the adoption of the Quit India resolution. Gandhi maintained that it was impossible to take a decision either on the resolution or on the struggle in any manner other than as a first step of a negotiation which may be decided upon collectively by the Working Committee. The Viceroy maintained, on the other hand, that there was no question of a negotiation without first withdrawing the resolution and the struggle. These positions were irreconcilable with each other. However the Viceroy was conscious of the fact that the path of negotiation had to be taken eventually. That was why he expressed readiness to consider a “definite and constructive policy” that Gandhi might propose “on further reflection for the furtherance of India’s welfare”.

Behind the differences of opinion which found expressed in the letters exchanged between the two sides lay the evaluation of the political realities of those days made by each side. Gandhi had come to realize that since the Quit India struggle had been suppressed, negotiations would have to be conducted with the authorities and the struggle withdrawn as part of the negotiations without negatively affecting the organized strength of the Congress. The course of the war had also turned in favour of Britain and the final defeat of Germany and Japan had started to appear immanent. In the circumstances, the 1942 approach of starting a struggle to prepare the ground for negotiations had lost its relevance.

As for Britain, even if victory was achieved over Germany and Japan, India could not be taken back to the pre-war situation. When the war ended, a new situation would emerge which would make a negotiated settlement with Indian leaders including Gandhi and other Congress leaders inevitable.

In other words, both Gandhi, the spokesman of the bourgeois leadership represented by the Congress and the Viceroy, the representative of the British rulers, were preparing grounds for an imminent bargain. Gandhi made his own
moves to conduct the bargain in a situation most favourable to the leadership of the Indian bourgeoisie which he represented. Lord Wavell, on the other hand, was striving to protect as best as possible the British vested interests in the process of the transfer of power which was imminent. Each side proposed immediate steps necessary to preserve its own interests in accordance with its long-term perspectives.

In addition to the British rulers and the Congress, there was also the Muslim League on the political scene upholding the interests of the minority communities in general and those of the Muslim community in particular. The League which was only one among the Muslim organizations before the war had now transformed itself into a party representing a majority of the members of the Muslim community. The British rulers readily came forward to accept at least partly its demand for the formation of Pakistan and its 'two-nations theory'. It was in recognition of this reality that Gandhi tried to establish contact and negotiate with the League even while he was exchanging letters with the British authorities. To some extent these attempts were successful. Gandhi met Jinnah and personally held discussions with him. But as we are going to see in the section that follows, these discussions did not turn out to be successful.

II. GANDHI-JINNAH TALKS

We have noted earlier that while in prison, Gandhi had expressed the desire that the Congress and the League must consult with each other and take a unified stand on the future of India. Since the government had stood in the way of his efforts to contact Jinnah, he had to wait till his release from prison to proceed in that direction.

Meanwhile, Rajagopalachari had launched an extensive campaign placing emphasis on the need to arrive at an understanding between the Congress and the League. He had also put forward a certain proposal conceding the
League's demand while maintaining the fundamental unity of India to the extent possible. Gandhi's release from prison and the failure of his efforts to establish contact with the Viceroy had naturally led him to think the way Rajagopalachari had been visualizing.

In addition to Rajagopalachari, many organizations unrelated to both the Congress and the League and certain eminent individuals had also suggested talks between Gandhi and Jinnah. It was, in fact, the main contention of the Communist Party in its campaigns. All of them were of the opinion that a solution to the Indian problem could be found only if Gandhi and Jinnah came to an understanding with each other. Accordingly, on Gandhi's initiative they met in September 1944. Gandhi initiated the talk on the basis of Rajagopalachari's proposal which in effect conceded the demand raised by the League. The main features of the proposal were as follows.

After the end of the war, a commission would be set up to determine the contiguous districts in North-West and North-East India in which the Muslims were in an absolute majority and in the areas thus demarcated a plebiscite of all adults would decide whether or not they should be separated from Hindusthan. If the people in these areas decide to remain as a sovereign country separate from India, that decision would be brought into force. But, the people in the border districts will have the right to decide which country they should join.

Although this proposal was in effect an acceptance of the demand of the League, it did not satisfy the League leaders, because the right to secede from India was subject to a plebiscite. Besides, the plebiscite was to be held not in the Muslim majority provinces but in districts. Furthermore, the people in the border districts would have the right to join either country as they liked.

There was another noteworthy provision contained in Rajagopalachari's proposal. It was proposed that in the event of a division of India, the two countries would sign a
pact with regard to defence, commerce, transport and other essential services, meaning thereby that the governments of the two countries would function in cooperation with each other even after the partition. This provision was allergic to the League. For these reasons, the League denounced the proposal in strong terms. Jinnah described it as "the shadow and outer shell of Pakistan; a wounded, mutilated and moth-eaten Pakistan". The mouth-piece of the League, the Dawn, suggested that the principle of two independent sovereign countries should first be accepted and that once it was accepted, the borders should be demarcated by including in Pakistan as much areas as needed to make it economically viable. Thus arose a situation in which direct talks between Gandhi and Jinnah were not likely to bring about a settlement.

Yet the Indian people looked upon the talks with great expectations. The masses, though divided into the different communities, hoped that these two great leaders would together give shape to the future of India based on Hindu-Muslim unity. The Gandhi-Jinnah talks were given wide publicity by the newspapers, without understanding the meaning of the contents of the talks though.

However, the talks ended in great disappointment. The leaders ended where they began. The differences between them did not narrow down at all; they, in fact, widened. The target of Jinnah’s criticism was not the contents of the proposal but Gandhi’s efforts to maintain the unity of India. Gandhi’s contention was that India had an individuality of her own and that she was a big family of which the Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians and so on were members. Jinnah was fundamentally opposed to this idea and held that the Muslims did not only constitute a minority community, but they were a separate nation. Based on what was known as the ‘two-nations theory’, he visualized Pakistan as a completely independent and sovereign country.

After the talks broke off, Gandhi said that he was not at all agreeable to India’s partition. Jinnah was, on the other hand, jubilant. He told a press correspondent that Gandhi
had "taught him the meaning of Pakistan". He said that to Gandhi's question if the defence and foreign policies of Pakistan would be opposed to India's, he had to simply say "yes".

Another important issue came up in the midst of the talks: Whom did Gandhi and Jinnah represent? Gandhi argued that he represented the Indian people as a whole and even a considerable section of the Indian Muslims. Jinnah, on the other hand, argued that he was the sole representative of the Muslim community and that Gandhi represented only the Hindus. This created a big commotion in the country. The masses rallied behind the Congress, Hindu Maha Sabha and other organizations believed that Jinnah and the Muslim League were an obstruction before Indian independence. Campaigns to this effect were carried on extensively throughout the country. The Muslim masses rallied behind the League blamed Gandhi who refused to accept the demand raised by the League and Jinnah for the failure of the talks. Thus, the talks which ought to have led to communal unity prepared the ground for communal frictions.

Rajagopalachari and others who spoke of the need to have talks between Gandhi and Jinnah went on repeating the same. They desired the differences to be narrowed down and a settlement reached between them. But things did not move in that direction. On the contrary, the differences led not only to the partition of India but also to communal clashes which took the lives of several thousands.

How did things come to such a pass? Since different answers have been given to this question, it is necessary to recapitulate the developments that took place ever since the emergence of the question of Muslim communal representation as described in the preceding chapters.

1. The ideologies and movements of modern nationalism developed in India with the growth of the bourgeoisie in the country. The Indian National Congress emerged and developed as an organization representing these ideologies and movements.
2. In the development of the bourgeoisie, the Muslims as a community was backward as compared to other communities. However retarded its growth, it also gave shape to ideologies and organizations of bourgeois nationalism with its specific characteristics. Thus, a few decades after the formation of the Congress, a political organization of the Muslim community, the Muslim League, emerged.

3. In the progress of Indian politics following this, the Congress and the League developed in parallel. The League rose as an organization capable of consolidating the Muslim community by challenging both the British government and the Congress in proportion to growth of the capability of the Congress to fight for Indian independence by challenging the British.

4. The provincial ministries constituted after the 1937 elections and the war which broke out in 1939 strengthened both the Congress and the League. The Congress ministries that remained in office for about two and a half years and the agitations conducted following the resignation of the ministries which culminated in the Quit India struggle broadened the mass base of the Congress. Similarly, the continuation of the League-led ministries in certain provinces after the resignation of the Congress ministries and the agitations for Pakistan which went in parallel with the Quit India struggle increased the strength of the League several folds. When the Quit India struggle was suppressed and the efforts of Gandhi to move in the direction negotiations failed, the balance of power between the Congress and League turned in favour of the latter.

5. As a result of all this, in 1943-44 the League was politically in a more favourable position than the Congress. Rajagopalachari’s proposal and the talks Gandhi held with Jinnah on the basis of this proposal were, in fact, a recognition of this political reality. Jinnah tried to make the best use of this favourable position to achieve his objective.

6. The economic reality that underlay the political growth of the League needs particular mention. The bourgeois class
which emerged within the Muslim community continued to grow at an accelerated pace during the war. The formation of ministries led by the League in Bengal in which was situated one of the important industrial centers, and in the strategically important province of Punjab helped the growth of the bourgeoisie among the Muslims. Having thus tasted political power in the provinces, they became convinced of the absolute need to have a central government under their control. They began to perceive that a sovereign state including the full control over defence and foreign policies was necessary for their further development, rather than two states cooperating with each other as proposed by Rajagopalachari.

7. Muhammad Ali Jinnah was the real symbol of the growth of this new bourgeois class. Started as a liberal in the early days of Indian politics, he, unlike other leaders of the Muslim community, worked for the interests of the entire Indian bourgeoisie until the Round Table Conferences. This liberal political leader who was the most ardent nationalist of all the leaders of the Muslim community finally turned himself into the best representative of Muslim sectarianism, who gave the call for a direct action on its behalf. This change in Jinnah’s political life can be evaluated only in the light of the constant growth of the bourgeois section among the Muslims and the resultant conflicts between the Muslim and non-Muslim bourgeoisie.

Many eminent personalities like Rajagopalachari and political parties like the Communist Party did not take into consideration this historical reality while looking upon the Gandhi-Jinnah talks as a divine cure for the Congress-League conflicts. That was why the talks held with great expectations disappointed them.

III. PAKISTAN AND THE NATIONAL PROBLEM

Although the Communist Party was among those who wanted Gandhi and Jinnah to reach a settlement between
themselves, the approach of the Party towards the demand for Pakistan was different from that of others. Leaders like Rajagopalachari thought that since it was impossible to confront the British rulers without a settlement between the Congress and the League, it was necessary to accept in part the League’s demand and create an atmosphere for cooperation between the two sectors into which India might be divided. It was because of this that Rajagopalachari proposed to hold a plebiscite in the contiguous districts and to make provisions for co-operation with regard to the administration of defence and so on in the event of a division of the country. The aim was to solve the political problems arising out of Hindu-Muslim disputes.

The Communists were not examining the future of India within the narrow confines of the Hindu-Muslim problems. They had understood that the fact that the people of India belonged to different religions was only one aspect of the political reality of India. They drew the attention of the people to an equally important fact, the fact that the population of India was composed of different nationalities speaking different languages, each with its own specific socio-cultural life and that each such nationality was further divided into different religions and castes. This was the political reality to which the Communist Party pointed.

The Indian National leadership had accepted this reality at least to an extent. Consequently, as the Congress began to develop as a mass movement, the provincial Congress committees were organized on the basis of provinces demarcated on linguistic considerations, rather than on the basis of the provinces artificially created by the British rulers. These considerations had reflected on their understanding with regard to the future Indian administrative set-up. However, their approach in this regard was partial and inadequate. If the idea of linguistic province had to be brought into practice, the distinction between British India and native (princely) states had to be eliminated and the people speaking the same language had to be brought into the province. This entails
an uncompromising fight against the authocratic rules in the princely states and redistribution of the composite provinces like Bombay and Madras and the princely states like Hyderabad on linguistic basis. The Congress was prepared to do neither of these. The Communists, on the other hand, demanded implementation of the concept of linguistic provinces in its full sense. In this the Communists were aided and led by the Leninist perspective of nationalities. As explained by Lenin and Stalin, development of capitalism leads to the development of nationalities with linguistic and cultural homogeneity and economic and political identity. The old composite states and empires disintegrate and in their place emerge new nationalities with their own states and nations.

This was what had happened in the 19th century Europe and the same process would take place in India and in other Asian countries in the 20th century. The tendency of the formation of linguistic provinces as an integral part of the bourgeois national movement in India and the encouragement it received from the Congress were perceived by the Communists as a manifestation of this historical reality.

Viewed form this perspective, it can be seen that neither the League’s demand for Pakistan, nor the slogan of indivisibility of India raised by the nationalists including Gandhi and Rajagopalachari were in correspondence with historical realities. It would be clear that both Jinnah’s theory that Hindus and Muslims constituted two nations and the argument of Gandhi and others are untenable. The problem can be solved neither by the formation of two nations of Hindusthan and Pakistan as demanded by Jinnah nor by preserving the indivisibility of India as demanded by Hindu nationalists. The Communists pointed out that the concept of Indian independence would be complete and clear only if it was accepted that in India there were different nationalities each of which, divided among different religions though, was united in linguistic and social life and that the future administrative set-up of India had to be devised by offering opportunities for the free development of each of these nationalities. They also
pointed out that the Indian people composed of different nationalities were politically united for historical reasons. United, artificially though, under the British rule, the struggle against the British rule consolidated the national unity of the Indian people. The continuance of the national unity which emerged through the anti-imperialist struggle would help the further progress of the people after independence. Standing united in the post-independence national reconstruction, in building a new democratic progressive India, would help the development of each of the nationalities.

However, if the national unity which began to get strengthened during the freedom struggle had to be consolidated, the concept of linguistic province had to be provided with a new revolutionary content. The existing provinces and princely states had to be reorganized into linguistic provinces with maximum autonomy. The Communists analyzed the political future of Indian on this perspective while a clash was taking place between Jinnah’s ‘two-nations theory’ and the ‘one-nation theory’ of the non-Muslim nationalists. They presented the problem in the form of a solution to the problems that arose out of this clash. So, the people naturally thought it as one that supported the demand for Pakistan.

The political set-up visualized by the Communists was, in fact, fundamentally different from the idea of Pakistan. They refused to distinguish between “Hindu India” and “Muslim India” on the basis of religion. They pointed to the fact that even if India was to be divided as demanded by the Muslim League, the resulting two countries would have to face complex nationality problems.

Later events have proved the correctness of this analysis. Pakistan which was considered indivisible was divided into two resulting in the emergence of a separate sovereign republic. In the residual Pakistan, the Beluchis, Pathans and the Sindhis began to fight against Punjabi domination. In India fierce clashes took place on the questions of official language and languages of education. In both India and Pakistan the problems of nationalities created explosive situations.
This, however, does not mean that the approach of the Communist Party towards Pakistan was free from errors. For one thing, the Communist had been campaigning in those days in such a situation as would have helped, at least indirectly, the argument of Jinnah that the Hindus and Muslims were two nations. The Party did not endeavour to expose sufficiently forcefully and uncompromisingly the League stand that borders between the two countries should be determined on the basis of religion. This enabled the opponents of the party to make propaganda that it helped the demand of the League for Pakistan and the subsequent partition of India. The impression spread even among the friends of the Party that Pakistan was the manifest form of the Leninist theory of nationalities.

The Party’s approach had suffered from another and a more serious weakness. It failed to imbibe the truth in its full sense that Rajagopalachari who prepared the ground for the Gandhi-Jinnah talks, Gandhi who initiated the talks on the basis of his proposals, and Jinnah who skilfully utilized these talks and the series of events that followed were all bourgeois political leaders striving to bargain with the British rulers and protect their own class interests. The Party’s campaigners and journals tried, as Rajagopalachari and other national leaders did, to present the Gandhi-Jinnah talks as a divine cure for the disease that had afflicted India. The Party failed to expose the politics of bargain practised by the leaderships of both the Congress and the League by strengthening the morale of those among the ranks of the independence movement who were opposed to compromise and by unifying them. The Party also failed to give sufficient warning to the people on the political developments that were to take place in the next few years.

In a few years after the Gandhi-Jinnah talks two mutually contradictory forces appeared on the Indian political scene, the revolutionary social forces fighting uncompromisingly against the British rulers and the autocratic rulers of the princely states and against all other vested interests on the one
side and the native bigwigs trying to protect their own class interests by continuously bargaining with the British government and the different political parties in India on the other. The communists ought to have firmly stood with the former forces. It was the demand of the latter that Gandhi and Jinnah must together find a solution to India’s national problems. The main weakness of the approach of the Communist Party was that without sufficiently understanding the full import of this demand, it supported in effect the approach of the politicians of compromise.

Nevertheless, the Communist Party made invaluable contribution to Indian politics by campaigning among the people that India was a multi-national country and that the unity of India could be maintained only under the condition of free development of all the nationalities. The activities of the Communists in that period led later to the emergence of powerful movements like the ‘Aikya Kerala’, ‘Vishala Andhra’, ‘Samyukta Maharashtra’, etc., for the redistribution of provinces and the princely states on linguistic basis.

It must be stated that in each of these movements there emerged different views and tendencies, as a result of which contradictions developed in them. Each of these movements had been considerably influenced by narrow bourgeois nationalism leading to clashes and disputes over borders between neighbouring nationalities. The Communists were able to stand firmly against these wrong tendencies because they had been trying right in 1944-45 to examine the problems of nationalities in India as a fight against imperialism and feudalism and for democracy. The theoretical and practical work conducted by the Party in those days laid the seeds to a number of movements and struggles like the tebhaga movement in Bengal, the Telangana struggle in Andhra, and the Punnapra-Vayalar struggle in Kerala in the later years.
IV. THE DESAI-LIAQUAT TALKS

The failure of Gandhi’s attempt to start negotiation with the Viceroy and the Gandhi-Jinnah talks that went parallel to it had brought the Indian politics to a dead end. In the meantime, the World War had reached its final stage. With the Soviet counter-attack from the east and that of the Anglo-American forces from the west, Germany had been moving to the final defeat. After the defeat of Germany, Japan would not be able to hold out for long. The question came up before the Viceroy’s government in India and the British government in England as to what had to be done after the war came to an end. The situation was such that something had to be done without waiting for the end of the war.

Viceroy Lord Wavell and the Secretary of State L.S. Amery were in full agreement over the point that while steps would have to be taken to transfer power to Indians soon after the termination of the war, the interests of the British capitalists in India and those of Indian bourgeois-landlord classes had to be protected to the extent possible and that in preparing the plan to transfer power, the Hindu-Muslim problems and the Congress-League conflicts had to be skilfully utilized. But where to begin? On this question there were two opinions.

Wavell suggested that a government be constituted at the Centre with the participation of the Congress and the League and the ministries in the former Congress majority provinces be revived. If this was done first then only the final stage of the war could be fought effectively. He also suggested that this was necessary to deal with the famine and other economic problems in the country. The government which would thus be constituted should also create the necessary set-up for framing the future constitution of India. The Wavell Plan also envisaged equal representation for Hindus and Muslims and one representative each for the Scheduled Castes and the Sikh community in the Central
ministry. The Viceroy and the Commander-in-Chief would also be members of the ministry,

The Secretary of State for India, Amery, did not agree with this plan. Would the League have the right to nominate all the Muslim members? What was meant by equal representation for the Hindus and the Muslims? He also doubted if the ministry would not get paralyzed if members of mutually irreconcilable parties were nominated to the ministry. Amery therefore suggested the formation of a body with representation to all parties except the Congress and the League to frame the future constitution.

Wavell, on the other hand, was of the opinion that any scheme by excluding the Congress and the League would not correspond with reality. Meanwhile, Amery suggested that the British government should declare that since the Dominion Status had been granted to India, the British Parliament would no longer enact legislation for India. This was in a way an acceptance of the slogan of 'Quit India'.

However, neither Wavell's or Amery's scheme was accepted. On account of the difference of opinion between the two, the British government remained indifferent.

During the same period, a committee had been appointed by a number of non-party political leaders under the leadership of Sapru and with the backing of Gandhi to examine the problems relating to India's future administrative set-up. In April 1945, the committee submitted its report in which it proposed: formation of a national government at the Centre, creation of a constitution-making body with equal representation for Muslims and Hindus except the Scheduled Castes, general constituencies for all communities in place of separate constituencies for Muslims, Christians and others, refrain from partitioning India, implementation of only those decisions of the constitution-making body which obtained a three-fourths majority.

These proposals became the target of opposition from both the Muslim and non-Muslim political leaders. The opposition of the League was against the provision for general
constituencies. The non-Muslim political leaders opposed the provision for equal representation for Hindus and Muslims.

While the deliberations of the Sapru Committee were going on, another important development was taking place. We are referring here to the talks held between the Leader of the Congress Party in the Central Assembly Bhulabhai Desai and Liaquat Ali Khan, the Deputy Leader of the Muslim League Party in the Central Assembly, and to the proposals that emerged from these talks. The talks took place in such a way that it was difficult to say exactly what had happened. The Congress and League spokesmen had different stories to say. The then General Secretary of the Congress stated:

At the instance of the Viceroy, in January 1945, it is believed Bhulabhai had talks with Liaquat Ali to find ways and means to end the deadlock and pay the way for the formation of an interim national government consisting of the members of the Congress and the League in the Central Assembly. Bhulabhai met Liaquat Ali and they discussed the proposal for forming the national Government under the 1935 Act, consisting of an equal number of members of the Congress and the League. The representatives of the minorities would be inducted into the Cabinet by mutual consent. Though such a Government, when formed, would function within the framework of the 1935 Act, it was to be clearly understood that any measure not passed by the Assembly would not be enforced by the Governor-General under his special powers. But if the Governor-General sought to interfere, the Government would resign. Bhulabhai asked Liaquat Ali if this agreement had been seen and approved by Jinnah. He answered in the affirmative. Gandhiji has cautioned Bhulabhai to be careful and to get everything in black and white and signed. However, Bhulabhai in his eagerness to bring about a settlement did not quite take these precautions. The result was that, though there was a draft of the agreement, it was afterwards discovered that Liaquat Ali had not initialled the copy that was with Bhulabhai. Later,
Liaquat Ali declared that there was no agreement and that he had not consulted Jinnah. Thus this effort failed.  

Liaquat Ali had another story to tell. According to him, Bhulabhai Desai met him after the winter session of the Central Assembly and informally discussed with him the economic and other problems being faced by the people in the war-time situation. In the midst of this talk, Desai asked him what the League’s opinion would be towards forming an interim government at the Centre. Liaquat explained the attitude of the League in the light of the resolutions adopted by the League from time to time and told him that the League was prepared to examine any proposal that might come with a view to resolve the complex problems of the day. Desai met him again in January and handed him certain draft proposals with regard to the formation of an interim government at the Centre. Desai asked him to keep the proposals strictly confidential and told that efforts would be made to make changes in the structure of the Central government on the basis of the draft proposals. According to Liaquat Ali, Desai told him that he would meet the Viceroy and Jinnah in this connection. In Liaquat’s opinion, these proposals were worth forming the basis for a discussion, but in order to proceed in that direction, Gandhi himself had to handle it or it should have his approval and open support, because in the absence of the Working Committee, he was the only person who could speak on behalf of the Congress. Liaquat made it clear that this was his personal opinion and not that of the League. He advised Desai that if he felt that he could speak authoritatively on behalf of the Congress, he should meet the League President, Jinnah.  

Despite these divergent versions, it is clear that both the Congress and the League were in a state of mind to utilize every opportunity to arrive at a settlement between themselves. Gandhi was not opposed to the efforts being made

4. J. B. Kripalani, Gandhi His Life and Thought, New Delhi, Publication Division, Government of India, 1970, pp. 221-222.
by Bhulabhai Desai. He only wanted things to get a definite shape in the form of a clearly worded document signed by the parties concerned. In the eyes of Kripalani, the fault of Bhulabhai was that he did not follow the advice of Gandhi in this regard. Liaquat, on the other hand, only wanted either Gandhi or Bhulabhai himself representing the Congress to meet Jinnah. He advised Bhulabhai that a formal discussion between the Congress and the League should be conducted by the authentic spokesmen of the respective parties. In other words, the difference of opinion was not on the contents of the draft proposals presented at the discussions, but on the procedure of the discussions. Both sides were eager to find a solution to the political deadlock.

Generally speaking, the proposals which attracted the leaders of both the Congress and the League and which they wanted to handle carefully were based on the proposals suggested by Lord Wavell. For these proposals also included a new interim government at the Centre with equal representation for the minority communities like the Scheduled Castes and the Sikhs, membership of the Commander-in-Chief in the Cabinet and so on. It was also proposed that as soon as the formation of the ministry, members of the Congress Working Committee should be released from prison. The essence of the proposals was that the Congress and the League were prepared to participate in the proposed set-up.

The leaders of the Congress and the Muslim League understood that these proposals, if accepted and implemented, would increase their strength. The Congress would not only regain the ministries in the provinces which it had lost following the outbreak of the war but also would become a partner in the Central ministry. For the League, it would gain the recognition as a party equal to the Congress, which could be utilized to work more vigorously to achieve Pakistan.

However, neither of them could accept these proposals, for each of them wondered how the other side would utilize the new situation in the event of implementing these proposals.
Gandhi suspected if this was not the first step towards the formation of Pakistan. The League leaders, on the other hand, suspected Bulabhai Desai conducting the negotiations while Gandhi remaining in the background. Above all, both sides suspected if the proposal would be of any use in the background in which a majority of the Congress Working Committee members remained in jail and the British attitude towards Indian problems remained unchanged. This was how the talks broke off.
I. THE SIMLA CONFERENCE

Within four months after the Desai-Liaquat talks broke off, Germany surrendered to the Allied forces. With this the argument of the British that conceding India's demand for independence during the war would defeat the British war efforts became irrelevant. In the circumstance, they realized the need to give up their adament attitude and to take the initiative to resolve the political crisis in India. In Britain, the war-time coalition government collapsed and the Conservative and Labour parties started competing with each other for political power. It was in this situation that the Viceroy was called to London. Since the war was still going on and also since there was a difference of opinion between the conservative and Labour leaders on Indian problems, decisions were delayed and as a consequence, the Viceroy had to prolong his stay in London. Finally, wavell's earlier plan was accepted in a new form.
The next problem was how to form a government at the centre as envisaged in the Wavell Plan.

It was decided to convene a conference of the principal political parties and communities in India as a preliminary to the formation of the government as soon as Wavell returned to India. Accordingly, the British government made an announcement that a conference would be held in Simla on 25th June 1945 to discuss matters relating to the formation of a government at the Centre.

Among those to be invited to the conference would include the Chief Ministers of the existing ministries in the provinces and the last Chief Ministers who were in office in those provinces in which the Governor’s rule was in force. That is, since the Chief Ministers in the provinces in which ministries were existing were either League leaders or non-League Muslim leaders and all the former Chief Ministers in the provinces in which Governor’s rule were Congressmen, these two parties would be represented in the conference. Others would include the leader of the Congress Party and the Deputy Leader of the League Party in the Central Legislative Assembly and also Gandhi and Jinnah, the supreme leaders of the Congress and the League, respectively. In addition, there would be one delegate each representing the Sikh community and the Scheduled Castes. As soon as the announcement on the conference was made, the members of the Congress Working Committee were released from prison.

However, Gandhi wrote to the Viceroy informing him that in place of himself, the Congress would be represented by the Congress President, Abul Kalam Azad and that he and the members of the Congress Working Committee would be present at Simla during the conference. This change was, in fact, the beginning of a dispute which was repeatedly raised later in the proceedings of the conference.

Jinnah’s argument was that the Congress did not represent the Indian people as a whole and that it was the organization of Hindus and that too, of caste Hindus. If Azad attended the conference, this argument would be falsified and
consequently it was necessary for the League to make out that the Congress was represented by Gandhi in the conference. The design of the British was to weaken the position of the Congress as ever before by conceding the claim of the League. Wavell's proposal was part of this design. But, as Gandhi made it clear that neither he nor the Working Committee was ready to accept this proposal, Wavell was compelled to invite Azad as the President of the Congress. Besides, there was Dr. Khan Sahib from the NWF Province among the former Chief Ministers. Punjab Chief Minister Khizr Hyat Khan was not a League man. Thus, Jinnah had to participate in a conference to which these non-League Muslim leaders were also the delegates.

However, the Congress was unable to consistently adhere the stand taken by Gandhi. Although Azad as Congress President represented the organization, it deputed Pandit Pant to hold private negotiations with Jinnah outside the conference. Gandhi and other Congress leaders knew that Azad holding private negotiations with Jinnah as Congress President would do more harm than good.

The same problem was brought up in the formal session of the conference in a different form. According to Jinnah, the Congress was the representative of ninety percent of the Hindus, while there were ninety percent or more Muslims in the League. Therefore, he insisted that there should be no non-League Muslim ministers in the proposed ministry. In the list submitted by the Congress to the Viceroy the names of Abul Kalam Azad and Asaf Ali were included. The first session of the conference ended without arriving at a decision.

In order to break the deadlock, the Viceroy proposed a new formula. He would prepare a list of names whom he considered necessary to be included in the ministry and show the relevant part of the list to the leader of each party. A final decision would be taken after holding discussions with all concerned. Since there was no alternative left, this proposal was accepted. But the list prepared by the Viceroy was not acceptable to Jinnah. For, although the names of
Azad and Asaf Ali did not figure in the list, it contained the name of a representative of the Unionist Party of Punjab. As such, if the list was accepted by Jinnah, it would invalidate his claim that the League was the sole representative of the Muslims. Finally, when the last session of the conference was held on 14th July, the Viceroy declared that the discussions had failed for the time being. He added that he would not blame any party which had participated in the conference except himself for the failure.

The role played by the Viceroy and the leaders of the Congress and the League throughout the conference had been criticized by many quarters. In Britain itself the Viceroy had been blamed for his unwillingness to continue discussions on the basis of his own list when Jinnah rejected it. These critics pointed out that had Wavell stood firm on his position, Jinnah would have climbed down. There were indications to the effect that the influence of the League in the NWF Province, Punjab and Bengal was weaker as compared to the non-Muslim majority provinces and that certain top Muslim leaders like Liaquat Ali Khan were opposed to Jinnah’s adament attitude.

The approach adopted by the Congress following the failure of the Simla Conference is noteworthy. President Azad disagreed with the statement of the Viceroy owning the responsibility for the failure of the Conference. He and other Congress leaders stated that the League and Jinnah were responsible for its failure. Gandhi, on the other hand, stated that since the gulf between the Congress and the League and between Hindus and Muslims had become unbridgeable, the mediation of the British was necessary. Although this statement created surprise and anger among the people including Gandhi’s followers, none of them entertained any hope about the future of India. They felt helpless before the obstinacy of Jinnah and Britain’s encouragement to it.

The critics of Wavell including the leaders of the Congress and other non-Muslim organizations believed that if Wavell had stood firm on his proposal, the partition of
India could have been avoided. They reasoned that if the League had to remain without sharing power while the Congress remained in power, a sense of helplessness would have spread among the leadership and ranks of the League leading it to accept the proposal of Wavell.

This cannot be dismissed as meaningless. A section of the Muslim leaders in Punjab and Bengal had felt apprehended that if the slogan of Pakistan was to come into effect, their provinces would be partitioned as part of partition of India. Therefore they had been trying to keep their provinces away from the agitation for Pakistan. If there had been an indication that the British would not accept any demand raised by Jinnah, the Unionist Party in Punjab and the Krishak Praja Party in Bengal could have opposed more vigorously the demand for the partition of India. The very existence of a Congress ministry in the Muslim majority NWF Province was a weak point for the League.

However, as we have indicated above, the Indian politics had, in general, been divided into two. Although there were large sections of people in the Muslim majority provinces opposed to the partition of India, the demand of Pakistan had started to be raised all over India. A new (bourgeois) class interested in this was growing among the Muslims. The League leadership had been able to fan the fire of anti-Congress feelings among the masses to protect the interests of this class.

It is not difficult to find that even if it was possible to create a Muslim political leadership parallel to the League, the British rulers would have been the real beneficiaries of such an exercise. The Muslim leaders, whom the people knew were attached to the British, appearing on the scene against the Muslim League would not affect the strength of the League. The purpose of Wavell's proposal to form a government with representation to the Unionist Party was, in fact, to bring such people to the scene. Instead of exposing this as part of an imperialist design, the Congress leaders were praising the "neutrality of Wavell". This was what was
meant by the statements of Azad and Gandhi that the person responsible for the failure of the conference was Jinnah and not Wavell and that the British would have to mediate in the dispute between the Congress and the League.

II. "COMMUNISTS IN THE OTHER CAMP"

With the release of the Congressmen from prison before and after the Simla Conference, the Congress which had been remaining inactive for the past three years became active again. Jawaharlal Nehru provided the Congress workers with a new theme for political propaganda, the theme that while the Congressmen were engaged in a grim fight against the British government, the communists were in the other camp. This strengthened the anti-communist feeling which was widespread among the ranks of the Congress who had been conducting secret campaigns while their leaders were in jail. Thus, Nehru who unambiguously proclaimed a decade ago that there were only two paths open before the world, the paths of communism and fascism, and that he chose the path of communism, now turned himself into a top ranking leader of anti-communist propaganda. The "crime" committed by the communist was that they adhered to the stand adopted by Nehru and Azad until the adoption of the Quit India resolution by the Congress and accordingly carried on political activities during the Quit India struggle with the view that nothing should be done which might be helpful to the Japanese and German aggressors! This may sound strange.

But, if one examines the class content of Nehru's "left-wing" politics, it can be seen that there is nothing strange about the transformation Nehru had undergone in a decade. As Gandhi before the Lahore Congress and Birla and other big capitalists immediately after the Lucknow Congress had shown, Nehru was a bourgeois leader prone to be "tamed" by Gandhi and capitalists like Birla. Nehru's
“left-wing” politics was helpful to draw workers and other toiling people to the bourgeois politics of the Congress.

Besides, the Congress Socialist Party under the leadership of Jayaprakash Narayan was a “socialist” party functioning within the general framework of the discipline of the Congress. The Communist Party which had just been reorganized after freeing itself from the repercussions of repressions for a long time and from inner party rivalries had not yet been a strong party. Thus, in the 1930s when a strong left movement was not in existence, Nehru’s “left-wing” politics would not pose danger either to the economic interests of the capitalists or to the political leadership of Gandhi and other right-wing leaders. Consequently, Nehru, who was subservient to Gandhi’s leadership, did not feel that the Communist Party was a dangerous force.

But the growth the Communist Party had achieved during the last couple of years was contrary to the expectations of Nehru and other leaders. Despite the fact that it had to face strong opposition from a majority of the non-communist anti-imperialists at a time when it had to swim against the popular current of the Quit India struggle, the Communist Party had risen to the position of a party standing firmly on its own. The Communist Party had acquired the status as the only party enjoying popular support widely in Kerala, Andhra and Bengal, and locally in many other provinces, as a party which deserved to be considered as a political force capable of challenging the Congress in future. The growth of the Party which had considerable influence among the different sections of the people like workers, peasants and students had become a threat to the Congress.

It must be specifically stated that in addition to this political propaganda carried out against the communists, they also took certain organized actions. It was in this period that efforts were made by them to establish trade unions and student organizations subservient to the Congress politics as against the mass organizations like the AITUC and AISF in
which the communists had a leading role. Efforts made to establish their own organizations by disrupting these mass organizations which were dealing with problems of life of the people above party politics and accepting the general outlook of national independence, democracy and socialism brought the Congressmen later to maintain without any compunction that class organizations of workers, peasants and other sections of the masses were the "feeder organizations" of the Congress. The disunity which we find today in the trade unions and other mass organizations is the evil results of the efforts being made by other parties to establish their own "feeder organizations" following the footsteps of the Congress.

This is undoubtedly a political approach which is against the interests of the working class and other toiling masses. If trade unions, peasant organizations and other mass organizations had to function as feeder organizations of this or that political party, the entire mass organizations would become subservient to bourgeois-petty bourgeois politics. For this reason, communists have always raised the slogan of one union in one industry. The formation of the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC) under the leadership of Sardar Patel in 1945-46 constituted the first act of cutting at the roots of this principle.

We have noted earlier the formation of a peculiar kind of workers' association in Ahmedabad a quarter of a century prior to this directly under the leadership of Gandhi. It was formed as an 'apolitical' organization dealing only with the economic problems of the workers. But even the Congress leaders in other places were not prepared to accept this theory. On the contrary, many prominent Congress leaders had played important roles in the formation and growth of the AITUC which was an organization based on an anti-imperialist and pro-socialist political approach. By 1935-36, Nehru himself came up with the proposal to strengthen the Congress by giving the independently functioning mass organizations like trade unions and peasant organizations
collective affiliation to the Congress. At this stage the right-wing Congress leaders raised the argument that such mass organizations should function subject to the discipline of the Congress. We have described earlier the clash which took place between the right and left wings in the Congress in the 1930s on this issue.

By the end of the Second World War and of the Quit India struggle, the Communist Party with an independent working class outlook and a programme of action challenging the political leadership of the Congress had spread all over the country along with a number of mass organizations on which the Party had considerable influence. It became clear that forming apolitical mass organizations as did Gandhi in the earlier years or bringing under the leadership of the Congress the mass organizations handling left-wing politics as Nehru tried to do later was impracticable. The Congress leaders feared that mass organizations with leftist orientation, in the activities of which had Congressmen also participated, was dangerous to the political existence of the Congress. Thus the Congress leaders came forward to form the INTUC and the National Students Organization.

The political background of the formation of these organizations is notable. The historical role played by the Soviet Union in the Second World War had helped to spread the ideology of socialism. Among the younger generation who had entered the Quit India struggle responding to the call given by Gandhi and Bose, there were wide-spread feelings of sympathy to communism and hatred towards communists in India. The Congressmen with these feelings as well as the communists were working among the masses in accordance with their respective outlooks.

The economic situation that developed soon after the end of the war was such that it provided opportunities to all political parties and groups to carry on their activities extensively. The famine which broke out during and after the war, the increase in the prices of essential articles, the decrease in the real income of wage earners and similar other
hardships gave impetus to organized struggles of workers and middle class employees. The food scarcity that prevailed during the war became acute in 1945. According to the estimate of the Viceroy, Lord Wavell, about 100 million people were affected by scarcity. At the same time, a small minority consisting of landlords and wholesale merchants made enormous profits by hoarding and black-marketing. People in thousands staged demonstrations and resorted to other forms of agitation in protest against scarcity, price rise and black-marketing.

The existence and the activities of trade unions and other mass organizations which, though above party politics, had been considerably influenced by the left political forces, would no doubt bring about a political situation unfavourable to the bourgeois leadership of the Congress and to the economic interests of the bourgeois-landlord classes. The only way for the Congress to avoid such a situation was to stand in the forefront in giving shape to this mounting mass protests. The INTUC created by Sardar Patel and other Congress leaders and the rhetorics of Nehru that hoarders and black marketeers should be hanged on the lamp post were intended to serve this purpose.

In carrying out this scheme it was convenient to concentrate attacks on the communists. This was because the socialists who had earned prestige through their participation in the Quit India struggle and other leftist Congressmen who were the followers of Subhas Bose were most revengeful towards the communists and any political offensive against the communists would be welcomed by them. The Congressmen would get the support of these leftists in forming rival trade unions and mass organizations against those under the leadership of the communists.

The anti-communist political campaign started by Nehru and other top Congress leaders with the support of the socialists and the supporters of Subhas Bose and their scheme to split mass organizations created difficulties for the communists comparable to those they had to face during the Quit
India struggle. Once again they were facing a situation in which they had to move against the current of anti-imperialist sentiment of a considerable section of the people led by the Congress.

However, there was a difference in the conditions then and now. Then the Congress was engaged in an open anti-imperialist struggle. The communists had to work in those days by keeping themselves away from that struggle and cautioning the people that entering into that struggle would be suicidal. That was not the situation now. The Congress now was engaged not in an anti-imperialist struggle but in an effort to negotiate with the imperialists and achieve something less than full independence. Nehru who was shouting that the "communists were in the other camp" and rallying the people against them was now proceeding from there straight into the viceregal palace in Simla. All the prominent Congress leaders including Gandhi were engaged in a bargain with the representatives of the British government.

The fundamental contradiction between the socialists and the supporters of Bose who could not emotionally adjust with the politics of bargain, on the one hand, and the Gandhi-Nehru group, on the other, could not but surface before long. The communists, on the other hand, were in a position in which they could involve themselves fully in the rising mass upsurge. The repercussions of this could not but appear in Indian politics in the near future.

II. SECOND EDITION OF WAVELL PLAN

The Simla Conference broke off at a time when important developments were taking place in the world. As we have noted, the conference was held after the defeat of Germany. Before long Japan too surrendered marking the complete defeat of the fascist and militarist powers in the Second World War. In Britain, one of the anti-fascist powers, the
Labour Party came to power defeating the conservatives in the elections.

As for India, this political change in Britain did not produce any immediate effect. Attlee's Labour Party had all along been with Churchill's conservative Party in dealing with the Quit India struggle, in calling the Simla Conference and in all the policies and approaches towards India. But it was generally regarded that the Labour Party's policies were relatively more favourable to India. Therefore, the Labour Party had the obligation to live up to the expectation arising out of this general belief. Consequently, the British government took steps to restart negotiations with Indian political leaders soon after the end of the Simla Conference, Lord Wavell was called to London and after consultations with the British government he made a declaration on 18th September. One new element contained in the declaration was the government's intention to immediately hold elections to the Central and Provincial Assemblies.

The elections to the existing Central Assembly were held in 1935 and to the Provincial Assemblies in 1937, and the life of these legislative bodies were extended considering the war-time situations. Therefore the decision to hold elections now was quite natural. However, the election contemplated now was not an ordinary routine one; it was, rather, considered as a means to find a solution to the constitutional problems on which the Simla Conference failed to take a decision. In the declaration, Wavell stated that it was the intention of the British government to constitute as soon as possible a constitution-making body. Soon after the elections, discussions would be held with the representatives of the provincial legislatures to ascertain their opinions in this regard. Discussions would also be held with the representatives of the princely states to find out in what way they would be able to participate in the proposed constitution-making body.

Wavell said that the government was going to examine the question of signing a pact between Britain and India. There
were also the problems relating to the day-to-day administration of the country in the midst of making arrangements for transfer of power and India's participation in promoting a new international order. For these purposes, actions would be taken soon after the declaration of the result of elections to provincial legislatures to constitute an Executive Council at the Centre.

Clearly, this was a continuation of the negotiations conducted by Cripps in 1942 and by Wavell in June-July 1945. Here also there are two central problems for which solutions had to be found. First, what should be the nature of India's future constitution and what would be the status of the different communities including the Hindus and Muslims in it? Second, what should be the form and structure of the government which should be in existence in India while framing the future constitution?

While the major problem that stood in the way of finding a solution to these questions during the Cripps mission was the difference of opinion between the British government and the Congress, it was the difference of opinion between the Congress and the League that led to the failure of the Simla Conference. There was serious difference of opinion between the Congress and the League with regard to the proposals making a distinction between Hindu majority provinces and Muslim majority provinces and specifying their respective roles in the constitution-making processes. There was a wide gap between the Congress which was trying its utmost to keep India undivided and the League which was trying to ensure that the constitution-making process would proceed in such a way as would lead to the formation of Pakistan. Similar difference of opinion on the question of the formation of the interim government as well as on the share which each party should get in it. These were the differences that led the Simla Conference to break down.

Now the government had come up with the proposal to hold elections as a solution to this problem. The result would test the popular support of the Congress and the League.
Besides, the next series of discussions on constitution-making would be held not with the leaders of the Congress and the League but with the representatives of provincial legislatures which would come into being following the elections to the legislatures of the Muslim and non-Muslim majority provinces. Consequently other parties and political forces would also be able to exert influence in the discussions on constitution-making. If the Muslim League had the support of ninety percent of the Muslim masses, as it claimed it did, then the League would be able to carry matters in such a way as would lead to the formation of Pakistan through the representatives of the Muslim majority provinces. On the contrary, if the claim made by the Congress that it enjoyed the support of a considerable section among the Muslims, it would be able to preserve the integrity of India with the help of the representatives of the Muslim majority provinces. Thus, the questions of framing the future constitution of India and the formation of an interim government were deferred to a later time after the elections.

As for the Congress, this was a totally unsatisfactory and deplorable step. According to Pattabhi Sitaramayya, the Viceroy’s declaration had not recognized India’s independence. For another six months ministries in the provinces would not be formed. Nor would the government at the Centre be reorganized. A corrupt administration would continue when the country was passing through a critical situation. Although it was promised that the elections would be based on a carefully prepared voters’ list, there was widespread discontent on the mode of preparation of the list.

In September 1945, the AICC met at Bombay to evaluate the new political situation and formulate the Congress policy. Although the government had debarred many prominent Congressmen from contesting the elections, the AICC decided to contest the elections. A seven-member sub-committee was appointed for this purpose. The AICC prepared a manifesto which reflected the prestige the Congress had been able to gain during and after the Quit India struggle.
as well as the revolutionary spirit of its ranks. The manifesto had placed particular emphasis on the fundamental rights of the citizens demanded through a resolution at the Karachi Congress, the need for the reconstruction of Indian economy which had remained stagnant under the foreign domination for the past one and a half centuries and the importance of a programme to solve the problems of life of the poor, particularly the problems of land relations. Through the manifesto the Congress claimed itself to be the organization representing the whole India people and that it was striving to lead India to independence and democracy. Reminding the people that the election was only a beginning of the coming mass struggles, the manifesto called upon the people to support the Congress in the elections as well as in the forthcoming struggles.

The manifesto did not overtly criticize other political parties. But, as we have indicated earlier, the Congress leaders had unleashed an aggressive political campaign against the Communist Party. Similarly, the Congress campaigners mounted a powerful attack on the League. Briefly, the Congress got engaged in a campaign to run all other parties down by accusing them of being the tools of the British rulers.

The Muslim League, on the other hand, utilized the election campaign to rally the entire Muslim community behind the slogan of Pakistan and to demolish the claims of the Congress. To suit this purpose, the League refrained from opposing other minority communities and organizations in order to widen the gulf between them and the Congress. It got engaged in the efforts to enhance its prestige and to weaken the Congress to the extent possible in order to consolidate its position in the interim government at the Centre and in the ministries in the provinces which would be formed after the elections.

In brief, the principal issues which were raised at the Simla Conference and the claims made by the Congress and the League were presented before the voters. The election provided the opportunity for the formation of two mutually
opposing camps around these issues. It transformed itself into an open clash on the question of the share the Congress and the League should get in the power to be transferred and in the interim government which was going to be formed after the elections.

Without joining either of these camps and independent of them, the Communist Party came forward to approach the people in keeping with the interests of the working people, holding aloft the banner of real democracy. It was for the first time that the Party was contesting elections on a wide scale on its own programmes and demands. This was a pointer to the future.

However, the main forces in the election arena were the Congress and the League. The programmes and the slogans of the Communist Party could not gain country wide recognition over and above the contests between the Congress and the League. That is, the Communist Party did not come to the stage as a force capable of playing an effective role in the process of constitution-making.

The elections ended by creating a political atmosphere which was likely to accentuate the problems that came up before the Simla Conference, rather than solving them. The millions who rallied behind the Congress and the League stood more resolutely behind them and the demands raised by the leaders of these parties received added strength. There were indications to the effect that if the British government refused to accept the demands raised by them, they might launch a mass struggle to achieve them. Briefly speaking, the second edition of the Wavell plan, like the earlier one, proved futile.
I. THE BEGINNING OF A STORM

Although the leaders of the Congress and the Muslim League were striving to win Indian independence and Pakistan through bargains with the British, the feelings of the Indian people were against this approach. Theirs was, in general, the revolutionary approach of ending the British rule through uncomprising mass struggles as distinct from the bourgeois class approach of bargain and compromise.

Worker's strikes and people's agitations for food which broke out on a massive scale soon after the war led to frequent clash between the people and the police and military forces. In August 1945, 17 demonstrators were killed and about 2,000 were arrested in Varanasi. In Bombay, an atmosphere of revolt prevailed following a strike in September.
However, the efforts made by reactionary politicians and the rulers to give it the character of a tension between Hindus and Muslims succeeded to an extent. In this dozens of people were killed several hundreds injured.

There were indications of the resurgence of people’s anti-imperialist feelings which were remaining in a subdued state during the war. Though with a semblance of Hindu-Muslim frictions resulting from the propaganda of the indivisibility of India conducted by the Congress and that of the need to form an independent Sovereign Muslim nation (Pakistan) conducted by the League, these constituted undeniable evidence of the intense desire of the people to end the British rule. While in many places an atmosphere of tension and clash between Hindus and Muslims was created, almost everywhere demonstrations were taking place with the participation of the entire people above religious considerations.

As distinct from the earlier anti-imperialist mass upsurges, the people participating in them now were considerably influenced by the fighting organizations of workers and other labouring masses as well as the leftist parties which provided a revolutionary perspective to them. The Communist Party which developed as a revolutionary mass Party challenging the Congress leadership during the war and the Quit India struggle, the socialists and other leftists who had provided an organized leadership to the Quit India struggle were able to play significant roles in the post-war anti-imperialist mass upsurges. Although all of them except the Communist Party were under the ideological influence of the right-wing Congress leadership, they were unable to imbibe emotionally the approach of the Congress leadership. They felt sure that the opportunity had come to wage an uncompromising struggle against the British imperialist domination for a final victory and consequently were unable to adjust themselves with the compromising policy of the Congress leadership. Although identified themselves fully with the Congress leadership in their attempts to
"isolate the communists" accusing them of having "betrayed the Quit India struggle", these forces having been caught in the high tide of strikes and anti-imperialist demonstrations began to cooperate with the communists to impart strength and militancy to these movements.

Two events which took place towards the end of 1945 played a significant role in raising post-war anti-imperialist storms: the INA trial and the decision of the government to send Indian soldiers to Indonesia, Indo-China and other South and South-East Asian countries. In organizing huge demonstrations against these acts, communists, socialists as well as the ranks of the Congress and the League played active roles.

With the defeat and surrender of Japan, the INA consisting of about 20,000 officers and men came under the control of the British. The British government charged them with failure to fulfil the obligation of loyalty to the British and decided to try them for treason. As indicated earlier, the Communist Party or even the prominent Congress leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru had no sympathy to the decision of Subhas Bose to help the advance of Japan by forming the INA. But none of them questioned the sense of patriotism of Bose. In fact, anti-imperialists had greatly appreciated the cooperation extended by the former army officers and men to Bose and other patriots who were led by the great objective of liberating the country from the British. Therefore, when Col. Shanavas, Capt. Dhillon and Capt. Sahgal, who played most significant role in the INA, were tried and sentenced to a long period of imprisonment. The people considered it as an attack on the anti-imperialist movement. Demonstrations against the sentence were held throughout the country and the government resorted to all repressive methods including firing to disperse the demonstrators. But, braving these repressive actions, the people surged ahead. These protest actions took the highest form in Calcutta where workers struck work for several days bringing the electric power stations, transport, water supply, etc., to a standstill.
People raised barricades in the southern parts of Calcutta and set fire to military vehicles. The Governor of Bengal deployed the military to bring the situation under control.

Despite these repressive measures, there was no letup in the people’s actions until Sarat Chandra Bose, brother of Subhas Bose and a top Congress leader, gave a call to stop all demonstrations. Bose assured the people that the INA officers who had been sentenced would be released and that the Congress would strive to gain national independence through “lawful and non-violent means”.

Anti-imperialist demonstrations demanding the release of the INA leaders were also held in many other places like Bombay, Mathura, Delhi, Meerut and Peshawar. In the clashes that occurred in the course of these demonstrations, 40 people were killed in Calcutta and 23 in Bombay. Several hundreds were injured in police actions all over the country.

Disregarding the people’s actions in protest against the INA trial, the British authorities went ahead with their decision. In February 1946, Capt. Abul Rashid was tried, which again led to a wave of protest demonstrations in Bengal. This time the appeal to stop the demonstrations came from the newly elected Chief Minister of Bengal, H. S. Suhrawardy.

While the leaders of the Congress and the League were engaged in the bargain with the British rulers to achieve their respective demands, the people were expressing their protest against the government’s decision to send the Indian troops to Indo-China and Indonesia on the pretext of completely liberating the Japanese occupied countries after Japan’s defeat in the war. In each of these countries the people had already set up their own national revolutionary government in place of the imperialist rulers who had fled before the Japanese invaders. Communists like Ho Chi Minh and comrades in Indo-China, and non-communist nationalists like Dr. Sukarno in Indonesia and Aung San in Burma were leading these revolutionary governments. The British government was trying to use the Indian troops to suppress these revolutionary governments and restore the British imperialist
dominance in Burma, Malaya, and Singapore, the French in Indo-China and the Dutch in Indonesia.

Demonstrations in protest against this were held all over the country. Port workers in Bombay and Calcutta refused to handle the shipments of military supplies and food to the troops in Indonesia. The leaders of the Congress and the Muslim League openly protested against the government's actions. The Congress leaders called upon the people to observe 25th October as 'South-East Asia Day'.

It may be stated that this was a beginning of the policy of Asian friendship adopted by the bourgeois leadership of the Congress after independence. By observing the South-East Asia Day the Congress was making the claim that they were not only fighting for independence of their own country but also of the neighbouring countries and that they were striving to sent all imperialist powers from Asia along with the British from India. It laid the foundation of the active role played later by the bourgeois leadership of the Indian government in the Bandung Conference and in other Asian developments.

During the same period also appeared another aspect of the Congress policy which revealed itself later, the policy of "cooperation instead of confrontation" with the imperialists. An incident occurred which pointed to these two aspects of the same policy pursued by Nehru as the Prime Minister of Independent India. Nehru expressed the desire to visit Burma, Malaya and Indonesia to meet the national leaders of these countries and to study the conditions of the Indians living there. The British authorities in Malaya gave him permission to enter the country subject to certain conditions. But Nehru was not prepared to accept those conditions. Lord Mountbatten, the Supreme Allied Commander of South-East Asia, realized the possible consequences of refusing permission to Nehru who was likely to be prime minister of Free India in the near future to visit these countries and cancelled their earlier order imposing conditions. He made arrangements for receiving Nehru at the airport with
all official courtesies and for facilities for his visits. This was the first link in the chain of events leading to Mountbatten, as the last Governor General of British India administering the swearing in of Nehru and Jinnah, the former as the Prime Minister of India, and the latter as the Governor General of Pakistan.

This was the beginning not merely of the friendly relation that developed between Nehru and Mountbatten; it was also the beginning of the final effort to be made by the bourgeois leadership of the Congress to achieve their class objective by coming to terms with the imperialist rulers, while, at the same time, giving shape to anti-imperialist feelings of the people and remaining in the forefront of the mass upsurge that gave expression to these feelings. This effort being made by the Congress leaders including Nehru later gave rise to a number of contradictions. As we are going to see in the following chapters, it led to the creation of a gulf between a section of top Congress leaders including Gandhi, on the one hand, and Nehru, Patel, Rajagopalachari and certain other leaders, on the other. But immediately it helped to enhance the popularity of the Congress. It also helped them to create the impression that it was the Congress that was standing in front of the people who were opposed to the trial of the INA men and to the deployment of Indian troops to South-East Asia. It turned out to be an instrument which could be effectively used in its election campaigns.

II. THE NAVAL MUTINY

The Indian soldiers and young officers of the British armed forces in India were not entirely free from the impact of the mass actions in protest against the trial of the INA men. Its impact took the highest form in the mutiny in the Royal Indian Navy in Bombay in February 1946. A month before that the Indian airmen in the Royal Indian Air Force mutinied and went on a strike in protest against racial discrimination in the air force. The same feeling of discrimination
was present among the Indian members in all branches of the British armed forces in India. But none of them reached the form of the February Naval mutiny which was historically the most important incident in the post-war anti-imperialist upsurge.

Fundamental changes had taken place during the war in the structure of the army, air force and navy as well as in the feelings and emotions of those who had joined these branches of the armed forces. During the war, members of the armed forces were not recruited from the so-called "martial races" in selected provinces in India, as was the case with the recruitments in the earlier periods. Now several thousands of young men belonging to all castes and religions from all provinces had joined the British armed forces in India. Besides, there were now Indians in the armed forces who performed technically skilled jobs which required specialized training. Consequently, unlike the soldiers recruited earlier, they were not prepared to submit themselves as mercenaries and refused to put up with discrimination and injustice. But there was no change in the views and behaviour of the British officers of higher ranks towards the Indian soldiers. They behaved as if they were born to rule India and every Indian was obliged to submit himself before them. Another thing that irritated the young Indian officers and men was the racial discrimination meted out to them in regard to pay, accommodation, food, demobilization benefit and other service conditions. The Indians who often excelled the whites in the jobs which required technical skill were lower than the whites in rank. If anyone protested against this, the white officers would shower abuse on them.

The younger officers and men were no longer prepared to tolerate this situation. For, those who had occasions to fight shoulder to shoulder with the British in foreign lands had often witnessed incidents of the British soldiers of the 'omnipotent' imperialist rulers fleeing before the enemy action, while the Indian soldiers stayed and fought the enemy courageously. Besides, a section of Indian soldiers had
acquired a broader outlook as a result of the close contact they had occasion to get with the Allied forces, particularly the Soviet armed forces. They had developed an attitude against fascism and in favour of freedom, democracy and socialism. Above all, the Quit India struggle and the formation of INA and the advance it had made in the initial stages had exerted considerable influence on the Indian soldiers. They had dreamt of the time when leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and Subhas Bose would wield political power in India. They were eagerly looking for the opportunity to serve under the national leaders. In other words, the tide of national consciousness had considerably influenced them.

Unfortunately, no significant attempts have been made to make a detailed and deep study of this process. The kind of efforts to collect and publish historical facts with regard to the 1857 revolt have not yet been made in the case of the naval mutiny and the related incidents. B. C. Dutt, who had played a leading role in the RIN mutiny, stated:

All the relevant records pertaining to the Royal Indian Naval Mutiny are in the archives of the Defence Ministry. A comprehensive account of the Mutiny can be written only at the instance of the Government of India. No official history, however, has as yet been attempted nor has any private initiative been encouraged. Someday, perhaps, the historian of a future generation, free from the prejudices and pressures of the present, will want to record the full and unbiased story of the freedom movement. It is quite likely that he will be both interested and enlightened enough to appreciate the fact that there were many ways of being an Indian patriot in those days before Independence. When he comes across the story of the RIN Mutiny he may not be inclined to dismiss the motive behind the upheaval as just a violent agitation for a better quality rice-and-daal ration, as was given out to the people.1

In his book, Dutt describes the formation of a secret organization called the 'Azad Hind' to work in a self-sacrificing manner in accordance with the national sentiments kindled by the INA movement and also the several incidents which took place with its initiative.

The developments in HMIS Talwar began with the carefull organized demonstration on the Navy Day of 17th December. Slogans like 'Quit India', 'Down with Imperialism', etc., were inscribed on the Talwar. Although the authorities were able to wipe off these slogans, they failed either to discover the organized force behind it or to eliminate it. That force was advancing step-by-step culminating in the mutiny of about 20,000 naval ratings in all the ships stationed in Bombay. The mutiny soon spread to the port cities like Vishakhapatnam, Calcutta and Karachi. In Bombay, workers went on strike and the people observed hartal in sympathy with mutineers. The encounter that followed between the workers and the police and military forces in the streets of Bombay on 22nd February is well-known. This was the highest form of the post-war revolutionary upsurge.

The very title of Dutt's book, *Mutiny of the Innocents*, is significant in that it indicated the lack of correspondence between the political reality and the inspiration they had drawn from the Quit India struggle and INA. They entered in the mutiny on the belief that the role they were playing in the struggle for Indian independence would be decisive and as such they believed that the national leadership would bless them and render all assistance to them. Dutt's compliant was that they did not get any assistance from the national leadership as they had anticipated. The essence of Dutt's evaluation was that they had not understood that the national leaders were not striving at ending the British rule by driving them out of the country but at sharing the power through negotiations with the British rulers. S.Natarajan, then editor of the *Free Press Journal*, a Bombay newspaper which gave wide publicity and assistance to the mutineers, stated in the preface to Dutt's book:
I was greatly amused at one stage to receive a message from Mr. Asaf Ali who was in Bombay on a short visit. His host dropped in one evening...and taking me aside said very solemnly: “Asaf Ali has told me to remind you that Indians will soon be in power. It will be very difficult for the Defence Minister if the strictest discipline is not upheld now.” There was more of this, with the suggestion that Asaf Ali was expected to be the Defence Minister himself...It was indicative of the new attitude of Congressmen who feeling that Independence was at hand feared that the last delicate negotiations would be upset by anything the British disapproved.  

Natarajan blamed the Congress and the League, the two main elements of the national leadership, for neglecting the naval mutiny. Basing themselves on the British propaganda that the naval ratings were engaged in a struggle to “improve the ration of rice and daal”, the leaders of the Congress and the League gave them the assurance that these problems would be solved. They refused to recognize the fact that the naval mutiny was a revolutionary struggle against racial discrimination and for ‘Quit India’ and other demands. They failed to imbibe the feelings of the ratings and the young officers who were engaged in such revolutionary acts as taking up arms and arresting the senior officers. The national leadership was not prepared to promote it to the level of a general armed revolt of all-India scale by spreading the naval revolt and the strike that took place in Bombay in connection with it to the ranks and young officers of army and air force.

Dutt did not exclude from criticism Aruna Asaf Ali and other left-wing Congressmen who had risen to the leadership of the left revolutionary movement through the Quit India struggle or the Communist Party which was regarded as the symbol of revolution. At the same time, he did not deny the fact that they, as distinct from the leaders of the Congress and the League, expressed themselves in favour

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of the mutiny through their statements. They however, took the attitude that only the national leadership was able to carry forward the revolutionary movement which started with the naval mutiny. That is, Dutt accused the leftists as well as those known to be revolutionaries that their activities were dependent on those leaders who had adopted the method of negotiations, rather than the method of revolution.

It must be admitted that there is an element of truth in this accusal. Aruna and her colleagues of Quit India fame looked upon themselves as leftists within the Congress. They never had the perspective of creating a revolutionary leadership as opposed to that of the Congress. Although the Communist Party had been working during the war challenging the Congress leadership, it was of the view that a struggle based on the unity of the leaders of the Congress and the League was the only solution to the national problems of India. In other words, although both the left Congress leaders like Aruna and the Communist Party had visualized the path of revolution, they considered either the Congress alone or the Congress-League unity as the main instrument for revolution.

However, it would be wrong to maintain that leftist Congressmen or the socialists or communists were indifferent to the naval mutiny. The strike of the workers in Bombay was not a spontaneous action. The left Congressmen, socialists and communists had worked in an organized manner behind it. In the clash that took place between the striking workers and the armed forces of the government many of them had sacrificed their life. The truth was that they could not raise the struggle to the level of an all-India revolutionary movement or to spread the mutiny to the other branches of the armed forces.

Either the leaders of the Congress and the League give up the path of negotiations and adopt the path of revolutionary struggles, or the communists, socialists and the leftist Congressmen gain sufficient strength to challenge the leadership of the Congress and the League and organize mutiny
in the other branches of the armed forces and also to combine it with the higher forms of struggle of the workers, peasants and other working masses—one of these conditions should be present for raising the naval mutiny to an all-India revolution.

Indian politics was proceeding before and after the war in a manner in which it was impossible to realize either of these conditions. The leaderships of both the Congress and the League had already adopted the method of negotiations. The left including the Communist Party, on the other hand, had not risen to the position of the national leadership of the Indian people including the members of the armed forces, although they had risen to the position as the leader of the working class in certain places like Bombay and Calcutta. It is significant to note that the leaders of the mutiny were looking upon the leaders of the Congress and the League, not upon the leftists, with expectations. Therefore, although the naval mutiny became a great event in the history of Indian revolution, it did not become the forerunner of Indian revolution as expected by the organizers of the mutiny.

III. THE FATEFUL ELECTIONS

The elections to the Central and provincial assemblies were going on in parallel to the naval mutiny. Since it had been declared that actions with regard to constitution-making would be taken through the legislatures which would be formed following these election, they were considered to be of great importance.

The country-wide strikes and demonstrations in protest against the INA trial which took place after the announcement of elections, had brought about a new political atmosphere in the country. The British government which was convinced that they would not be able to carry on for long by denying the national demand of India, decided to send a group of Members of Parliament to India. Since the visit of
the Parliamentary delegation visited when the leaders of the Congress and the League were engaged in a vigorous election campaign, much attention was not paid to it. But with the outbreak of the naval mutiny in the midst of the election campaign, the government realized the need to resume discussions with the participation of the Congress and the League.

As soon as the naval mutiny broke out, the British government decided to send a Cabinet Mission to India. This was a clear indication of their realization that they would not be able to bring the situation under control without creating an impression among the people that efforts were being made to start serious negotiations on the transfer of power. Accordingly, the three-member Cabinet Mission included the Secretary of State for India, Pethick-Lawrence, as the leader, and Stafford Cripps who was known to be connected with India in different ways. With this the British government appeared as determined to see that this mission did not meet the fate of the earlier Cripps Mission and the Simla Conference.

This move on the part of the government gave rise to expectations among all the political parties that elected people's governments would be formed at the Centre and in the provinces and problems with regard to constitution-making solved soon after the elections. Moreover, the claim being made by the Congress that it represented the entire Indian people including the Muslims and that of the League that it was the representative of the Muslims were going to be tested. Further, the character of the future Central and provincial governments and that of the future constitution would be dependent on the results of these elections. Political parties participating in the elections and others looked upon it in that way.

With the announcement of the election results, both the Congress and the League came out to argue that their respective claims had been confirmed. However, the election results also contained certain facts that could be utilized by each of
them to make out that the other's claims were untenable. Consequently, arguments and counter-arguments were forcefully raised by both of them. The post-election political situation in the country was such that the British would be able to utilize these controversies to protect their own interests.

The Congress won a majority of seats in the Central legislature (57 out of 102). The Muslim League annexed most of the seats reserved for Muslims. The Nationalist Party which was influential among Hindus and the Unionist Party in Punjab which was popular among Muslims failed to get representation in the Central Assembly. Using the election results, Jinnah continued the argument that the Congress was the Party of Hindus and that the League was the only party of the Muslims.

The situation in the provincial legislatures was different. Demolishing the claim of the League that it was the sole representative of Muslims, the Congress won a majority of seats and formed its own ministries in the Muslim majority provinces of NWF Province and Assam.

In Sind and Bengal, the League failed to command a majority in the legislature. But they were able to form ministries there which could be sustained only with the support of European members. Similarly, in Punjab, the League failed to command a majority. But unlike in Sind and Bengal, it was unable to form a ministry of its own there. Consequently the Unionist Party formed a ministry headed by Khizr Hyat Khan with the support of the Congress and the Sikhs.

With the formation of the ministry in Punjab, an important change came about in the political situation in Punjab and other provinces. The British had, in fact, tried to foster the Unionist Party as a Muslim party independent of the League but loyal to the British. It may be recalled that at the Simla Conference, Viceroy Wavell had included a representative of the Unionist Party in his list of members in the proposed Central Executive Council and that Jinnah had strongly opposed his proposal. The League put up a
determined fight to defeat the Unionist Party in the elections in Punjab. Thus, the League won 79 out of 86 Muslim seats leaving the remaining seven Muslim seats to the Unionist Party which with three non-Muslim seats it had won formed a ministry with the support of 22 Akali Sikhs and 51 Congress members. With this also failed Wavell's plan to foster the Unionist Party as a counter to the claims made both by the Congress and the League.

This new situation raised a question before the rulers: which party they should favour now? The Cabinet Mission was divided over this question. Wavell was of the opinion that, since the Unionist Party had no future, their favour should go to the League. But Cripps was in favour of the Congress. The leader of the Mission, Pethick-Lawrence supported Cripps, while the third member of the Mission, A. V. Alexander, favoured Wavell. This difference of opinion reflected in the entire work of the Mission.

There was a similar difference of opinion within the Congress leadership also. There emerged the opinion that considering the proved influence of the Congress throughout the country and that of the League in the Muslim community, it would be wise to form Congress-League coalition ministries in all the provinces. The other opinion was that since it had been proved that the League was weak even in those Muslim majority provinces which it claimed to form part of Pakistan, the right way was to utilize all anti-League political forces and destroy League's influence among the Muslims.

Even if Congress-League coalition ministries were to be formed, the League would not allow non-League Muslim ministers in the cabinet. Since this was not acceptable to the Congress, attempts made to form coalition ministries in Sind and Punjab failed.

Clearly, this was the continuation of the controversy which was raised at the Simla Conference. But the situations then and now were different. Wavell then tried to induct a non-League non-Congress Muslim into the ministry disregarding the claims made by both the Congress and the
League. But now even Wavell could not make such of attempt. Consequently, he had now moved to the position of accepting the stand taken by the League. Even Cripps could not make him change his stand. Thus, Congress ministries were formed in the Muslim majority provinces of NWFP and Assam, while in two other Muslim majority provinces of Bengal and Sind the League formed ministries which depended entirely on the European members for their existence. In Punjab, although the League won in a majority of the Muslim constituencies, a ministry opposed to the League was formed with the participation of the Congress in it. This made the Congress-League conflict sharper.

Gandhi who understood that this would take the country to a dangerous situation began to think in terms which were not likely to be appreciated by his colleagues. He felt not only that the gulf between the Congress and the League was widening but also that the British rulers were utilizing the situation to endanger the future of independent India. With a view to avert such a situation, Gandhi suggested in his first interview with the Cabinet Mission that Jinnah should be invited to form an interim government at the Centre. Gandhi was prompted by the consideration that Jinnah, on assuming the position of Prime Minister, would have to deal with problems with a sense of responsibility and would be compelled to adopt an attitude of conciliation. Herein lay hidden the source of the difference between Gandhi and his Congress colleagues which surfaced when the Congress accepted office in accordance with the Mountbatten plan in August 1947.

A majority of the members of the Working Committee who were known to be disciples of Gandhi were eager to take office as soon as possible by forming an interim government. To suit that purpose they were prepared to accept, at least to an extent, the claims made by Jinnah. It was this eagerness that influenced them in the discussions first with the Cabinet Mission and later with Mountbatten.

As for Gandhi, there was no eagerness to take office. He thought that the claim made by Jinnah was not an
independent and isolated phenomenon and that there was a strategy of the British rulers behind it. He was of the opinion that if Congressmen yielded to schemes which would water down the national stand of the Congress without perceiving the designs of the rulers, it would lead to widespread communal riots. Gandhi repeatedly cautioned his colleagues against its consequences.

Whatever be the merit of Gandhi's approach, it suffered from a weakness on the practical plane. The political power which a majority of the Working Committee members were eagerly awaiting would not pass into the Congress. Instead, he was suggesting that power should be passed into the hands of Jinnah whom the Congressmen considered to be adopting all methods to destroy the Congress. Consequently, the Working Committee rejected Gandhi's proposal and conducted negotiations with Jinnah and the Cabinet Mission on sharing power.

Now, imagine that the Congress leadership had accepted Gandhi's proposal. Then, would it have been acceptable to the Viceroy and Jinnah? Supposing that it was acceptable to them, then to what end Jinnah would have used the new political power which had passed in his hands? What repercussions it would have created among the non-Muslim communities in the country? It is impossible to answer these questions.

Gandhi himself had not examined the problems in details. Finding no alternative in ending the tensions in the relationships between the Congress and the Muslim League on the one side and those among the Hindu, Muslim and Sikh communities on the other, which were deteriorating day by day, Gandhi put forth the proposal on a "let-us-try" basis.

This, however, did not create any impact either on Jinnah or any other political party. For, while making the suggestion to invite Jinnah to form an interim government at the Centre, a government with the participation of the Congress had already been formed in Punjab excluding the League which had won a majority of Muslim seats. The attempts
made in provinces to form Congress-League coalition governments had failed on account of the controversies with regard to the political character of the Muslim ministers. As such none considered Gandhi's proposal as of practical importance.