THE NEW UPSURGE

I. ON THE PATH OF STRUGGLE AGAIN

The decision taken at the Madras session of the Congress to boycott the Simon Commission led to the emergence of a new country-wide anti-imperialist movement. As it happend during the visit of the Prince of Wales, massive protest demonstrations were held throughout the country, ending the stagnation that had set in the Indian politics for about five years. The freedom fighting organizations including the Congress, once again took the path of struggle.

There was a basic difference between the visit of the Prince of Wales and that of the Simon Commission. The moderates had kept themselves away from the boycott of the visit of the Prince. They had even participated in many of the functions arranged in connection with it. Now a big change had come about in moderate politicians. Like the Congressmen, they too now became indignant at the announcement in relation to the terms of reference, powers,
structure and appointment of the Simon Commission. Presiding over the Annual Conference of the Liberal Federation, Tej Bahadur Sapru said:

I do not think a worse challenge had been thrown out even before to Indian nationalism, and notwithstanding the profuse assurance in Mr. Baldwin's speech and the yet more profuse assurances in Mr. Ramsay MacDonald's speech, Indian nationalism of the Moderate school have been compelled to ask if the only way of recognizing the spirit of cooperation is by telling Indians that their lot is to be none other than of petitioners, that they can not be trusted to participate in the responsibility of making recommendations to Parliament for the future of their country, and that all that they may aspire to is to put their proposals before the Commission which may accept them or reject them, and again to repeat the same process of persuasion, argument and discussion before the Joint Committee of Parliament. And now if this is what is meant by co-operation, if this is the new idea of equality of status on which we are to be fed, if our patriotism is a prejudice and if the patriotism of the seven Members of Parliament is to be treated as impartial justice, then we Liberals feel justified in telling the Government here and in England, "you may do anything you like in the assertion of your right as supreme power, but we are not going to acquiesce in this method of dealing with us. Neither our self-respect not our sense of duty to our country can permit us to go near the Commission."

Besides the Liberal Federation of Sapru, there were many political groups outside the Congress which took the same stand. In the Central legislature the resolution moved by Lajpat Rai opposing the proposal to constitute a committee to cooperate with the Simon Commission, received the support of a majority of the elected members. When the resolution was declared passed, the House resounded with

shouts of "Vande Mataram". This was a clear evidence to the clash that was going on between the nationalist opposition and the official side.

Not only in the boycott of the Simon Commission, but also in the efforts to formulate a reforms proposal of the Indians as opposed to the proposal being prepared by the Commission, the different moderate groups cooperated with the Congress. Following the discussions held in February and March 1928, an all-parties conferance was convened, which was participated by the representative of the different parties. After protracted discussions the conference decided to appoint an all-parties committee with the task of deciding the form and content of the future administrative set up and also a generally acceptable formula with regard to the representation of the different communities in the administration and legislature. Since the Congress was the predominant party both in the conference and the committee, the Congress President Dr. Ansari was the chairman of the conference and the leader of the Congress Parliamentary Party and the eminent lawyer, Motilal Nehru, the chairman of the committee. Thus, all the bourgeois political parties came together under the leadership of the Congress to draft a reform proposal as opposed to that of the Simon Commission.

But, none of the organizations of the moderates cared to participate in organizing the mass protest action as decided by the Madras session of the Congress. The main political organization that stood in the forefront was the Congress. The leftist organizations working inside and outside the Congress, youth and trade union organizations which had slowly begun to enter the political field, played a vital role in making the boycott a success. The leftist section in the Congress which stood for complete independence, made invaluable contributions to the success of the protest programme. Similarly, the right-wing Congressmen who were striving to lead the Congress along the path of negotiation to win Dominion Status also played their role for the success of the boycott programme.
On the arrival of the Simon Commission in Bombay on 3rd February 1928, the people all over India observed hartal. Renewing the memory of the Khilafat-non-cooperation days, shops were closed, students boycotted classes and workers went on strike. There were firings and lathicharges in a number of places like Madras, Calcutta, Lahore, Allahabad and Lucknow. Lala Lajpat Rai, Jawaharlal Nehru, Govind Ballabh Pant and other leaders and volunteers were subjected to severe repression. Lajpat Rai died soon after and his death was attributed to the injuries he received in the police beating on that day. The repression aroused great indignation throughout the country.

Although the organization of the moderates to whom mass agitation and struggle were an anathema, in general kept themselves away form the movement, they participated in the boycott programme at least in the form of not taking part in the committees formed to cooperate with the Simon Commission. The Justice Party of Madras, the factions of the Muslim League cooperating with the government, the landlord's organization and the Depressed Castes organization led by B R Ambedkar were however exceptions.

Unlike in the 1921-22 period, the Congress was able to organize the boycott with the participation of the moderate sections, at least in a limited way. This was the result of the changes in the attitude of both the Congress and moderates. This change represented the transformation the bourgeoisie as a class had undergone.

The Khilafat-non-cooperation movement was launched at a time when the question arose before the bourgeoisie whether the path of negotiations or the path of confrontation was more effective. Gandhi and the leaders of the Khilafat were the advocates of one path while the different moderates groups represented the other. The clash between the two groups found reflected on a number of issues like the visit of the Prince of Wales. With the withdrawal of the Civil Disobedience following the Chauri Chaura incident, this chapter in the Indian politics came to a close. The moderate
sections became convinced that the Gandhian path of struggle was not as "dangerous" as they had thought of it at the time of the Khilafat-non-cooperation movement. The performance of leaders like C R Das and Motilal Nehru in the legislature as Swarajists and later on as Congressmen created good impressions among the moderates about the Congress.

The way in which the Khilafat-non-cooperation movement ended led to a serious rethinking in the Congress leadership. They were convinced that the activities both inside and outside the legislature would help them to keep the people prepared to use the ultimate weapon of non-cooperation and civil disobedience. Since the moderates could make valuable contributions to this, they realized the need to maintain close link between the two. This led Gandhi, Motilal Nehru and other Congress leaders to take the attitude of cooperation with the moderates in the boycott of the Simon Commission and in the appointment of the All-Parties Committee to examine the constitutional questions.

While engaged in the discussion on constitution through the medium of the All-Parties Committee in cooperation with the moderates, the Congress leadership had also sought the cooperation of Communists, Socialists and other leftists. A step in this direction was the resolution passed at the Madras session of the Congress adopting the goal of Full Independence.

At the same time, the Congress leadership also maintained relations with anti-imperialist organizations (it formally became a member of the Anti-imperialist League) and condemned the attacks of the imperialist forces against the revolutionary forces in China at the international level, while at the national level encouraged the efforts of the workers and peasants organizations to play active roles in Indian politics. They were convinced of the fact it was impossible to face the challenge of imperialism without the active cooperation of all the forces within and outside the Congress determined to fight imperialist domination.
The moderates outside the Congress were however not convinced of this. They were satisfied that the Congress leadership had adopted a programme of action—discussion on the constitution in the All-Parties Committee—which was immediately acceptable to them. This was basic to the understanding reached between the moderates and the Congress with regard to the boycott of the Simon Commission and the attempt to draft a constitution through the All-Parties Committee.

But the Congress leadership and Gandhi in particular did not stop with this. They were aware of the inevitability of a confrontation with the imperialism. As a preparation for such a confrontation, they wanted to continue to cooperate with the moderate sections, placate the left and revolutionary sections and consolidate the organization for the national struggle through Gandhian constuctive programmes. Along with these, there was also a need to gain strength and capability at least in some places to organize this inevitable confrontation in the Gandhian method. The beginning of such an effort was also going on along with the boycott of the Simon Commission and the activities of the All-Parties Committee.

Here we are referring to the Satyagraha under the Gandhian leadership launched against the enhancement of land revenue in the Bardoli taluk of Gujarat in the early months of 1928. This gained all-India fame just as the boycott of the Simon Commission. It may be recalled that the mass struggle of 1921-22 was called off in the Bardoli taluk. Conducting a mass struggle at the same place, based on the single issue of tax increase though, was considered a pointer to the future. In that sense, the Bardoli struggle was as important as the boycott of the Simon Commission and the work of the All-Parties Committee.

As in other Ryotwari areas, the government had decided to revise the land tax. The result of the revision was a 20 to 25 per cent increase in taxes, which quite naturally led to powerful protests. Although the peasants expressed their
feelings through petitions and in other forms, the government did not budge. The peasants became convinced that some serious step was necessary to make the government revoke the increase and approached Vallabhbhai Patel, a disciple of Gandhi in Gujarat. With the blessings of a large number of Congress leaders, including Gandhi and Vithalbhai Patel (his brother), Vallabhbhai took up the leadership of the struggle.

It must be noted that the Bardoli struggle was not launched for the solution of the general problems of the peasant masses as a whole, as was made out by the bourgeois media. Payment of rent to the landlord, interest and the repayment of debt to the money-lender, and tax to the government constituted the three burdens of the peasantry. The common objective of the peasantry was the liberation from all the three.

The Bardoli struggle was directed against only one of these, viz., the increased land tax. In the forefront of the Bardoli struggle were those who would turn against the struggle the moment it turned against the landlords and money-lenders. Likewise, the top Congress leaders including Vallabhbhai Patel (who earned the title of "Sardar" as the leader of the struggle) led the struggle in such a way as to protect the interests of the rich peasants.

However, the Bardoli struggle helped to unite and rally the entire peasantry of the Bardoli taluk under the Gandhian leadership. The peasants carried out the call by Gandhi and Patel not to pay the increased tax. When the government took action to attach and auction the land and other properties of the peasants who did not pay the tax, the people boycotted the auction. Arrests and other repressive actions did not deter them. Finally the government had to come to a settlement conciliating in effect the increase in the tax.

The political gain made by the national independence movement as a whole through the struggle was more significant than the economic gain made by the peasantry. For it demonstrated the fact that the Bardoli peasants were able to defeat the government through the resistance for a few
weeks. The people became confident that if a struggle confined to a taluk could be so successful, a struggle based on other issues including full independence could be won by the same means. The lack of confidence that had grown in the Gandhian leadership following 1922 was to a great measure removed. And the belief spread that another national struggle could now be organized with Gandhi as its "commander-in-chief".

II THE BREAK-OFF AND THE SETTLEMENT

The Congress decided to convene the All-Parties Conference and to form the All-Parties Committee as a reply to the British challenge thrown at the nationalists to draft a constitution acceptable to all sections of Indians. And for the same reason, representatives of the different parties and organizations such as the liberals led by Tej Bahadur Sapru, the followers of Tilak having leanings towards the Hindu Mahasabha, Muslim political leaders led by Jinnah, the Depressed Castes led by B.R Ambedkar, the Justice Party of South India, and so on participated in the Conference and the Committee.

An inevitable consequence of drawing together these disparate elements would have been a deviation of the Congress from its declared objective of full independence, because most of them were standing for Dominion Status and not for full independence. The Congress, on the other hand, not only adopted full independence as its objective at its Madras session, but also had adopted certain anti-imperialist resolutions and appointed Jawaharlal Nehru as one of the General Secretaries who were supposed to implement these resolutions.

This was a paradox. Later Nehru himself had written in his autobiography that the suspicion that the same leadership which had adopted the resolutions moved by him on behalf of the leftist Congressmen and nominated him
as one of the General Secretaries was preventing the implementation of these resolutions had been disturbing him.

In the circumstances, Jawaharlal Nehru and his colleagues decided to form a new leftist Congress organization called the Independence for India League. The League relentlessly tried to warn the people against the toning down of the Full Independence resolution adopted at Madras and to rally behind it the ordinary Congressmen, particularly the youth. The left wing Congressmen, including Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Bose, engaged themselves actively in organizing provincial and district conferences and youth meets at which the issue of Dominion Status vs. Full Independence was debated. (One such provincial conference held at Payyannur, Kerala, which was presided over by Nehru was the first experience of the present author in political debate.) The Congress split into two camps: one section championed the cause of full independence and the other reduced it to an idol for worship.

There were advocates of full independence in the All-Parties Conference and Committee. Their leader, Jawaharlal Nehru, himself actively participated in the All-Parties Committee. But they knew that they were only a minority in the Conference and the Committee. Besides, a galaxy of Talukdars and other recipients of decorations and titles from the British for loyalty and friendship had filled the dais of the Conference. Jawaharlal Nehru, angered at this strange sight blurted out: “Many on the dais are socially unwanted”. This created quite a stir in the conference which later passed a resolution suited to pacify the feelings of the title-holders.

This was only a beginning. It was in fact a prelude to the continuous clash that was going to take place between the advocates of full independence and those who stood for Dominion Status in the All-Parties Conference on the working of the All-Parties Committee and over the steps to be taken following the submission of the Committee’s report.

This was, however, only one side of the picture. The
communal organizations and parties, including the Muslim League, were ranged in one camp, while the Congress and the Liberal Federation in another, with their characteristic differences and disputes. Nehru has recorded that it was with the hope of at least solving these questions that the advocates of full independence took part in the deliberations. But, it was mainly on this question that the All-Parties discussions failed.

There were three aspects of the question relating to the future administrative set-up: (1) the relations between India and Britain, (2) the share of the different religious and caste communities in the new set-up and (3) relations between the Centre and the provinces.

The All-Parties Committee and the Congress leadership were able to arrive at a temporary settlement on the first issue. On the second and third issues, no settlement could be arrived at and the representatives of the various caste-communal organizations walked out of the meeting, ending the year-long All-Parties discussions in failure.

The constitution drafted by the Committee, known as the Nehru Report did not envisage even Dominion Status, leave alone full independence.

The Report proposed that in matters relating to defence, the defence minister of future India should function in accordance with the recommendations of a committee in which the army commanders would have a majority. The advocates of full independence naturally felt disturbed at the scheme giving predominance to the officials in a department of vital importance. They feared that it constituted a departure from the Madras resolution.

The opposition of the different religious-caste parties and organizations, including the Muslim League, to the Nehru Report was much more intense. Here it will be useful to compare the Nehru Report with the proposals put forward by Jinnah on behalf of the Muslim community.

1) Both agreed on the point that the relationship between the Centre and the provinces should be federal
in character. They also agreed that the powers of the Centre and the provinces should be strictly defined. But, however strict the definition, there would still remain some subjects which would come neither under the Centre nor the provinces. The Report proposed that the "residuary powers" on such subjects should be vested in the Centre. Hindu organizations like the Hindu Mahasabha and political parties like the Liberal Federation supported this. The League maintained that the residuary powers should be vested in the provinces.

2) In the election to the Central and provincial legislatures, the Report proposed reservation for Muslims in Hindu majority provinces and for non-Muslims in NWF P and other Muslim majority provinces with representation in proportion to the population of the particular communities. The Muslim League demanded one-third representation in the Central legislature for Muslims and seats reservation in proportion to the population in the Muslim majority provinces of Punjab and Bengal.

3) The Nehru Committee recommended that all communities should have equal voting rights in the election to reserved seats. Jinnah, who was the representative of the Muslim League, did not demand at that stage separate constituencies with voting right exclusively for the Muslims. But other Muslim leaders who had broken away from Jinnah did raise the issue. Later, Jinnah too adopted this position. This was an important subject which came up during the subsequent discussions on the Hindu-Muslim problems.

In the face of opposition on these issues which the Committee refused to concede, Jinnah walked out of the Committee and joined hands with the Aga Khan and other Muslim leaders who had already left the League earlier to demand more on behalf of the Muslims in an aggressive way.

Following Jinnah's walk out, the representatives of the Sikhs, non-Brahmins, Depressed Castes, and the Christians also kept away from the deliberations of the All-Parties Committee leaving the Congress, the Liberal Federation and
certain Hindu organizations including the Hindu Mahasabha in the Committee. In the circumstances, the leaders who remained in the Committee decided to wind up the Committee.

Although the All-Parties Conference and Committee were thus dissolved, the report of the Committee had become a public document. The problem came up before the Congress as to what should be its attitude towards the Committee’s report. The specific question was whether it should accept the scheme contained in the report which fell short of even the Dominion Status or it should remain firm on the objective of full independence rejecting the Nehru Report.

This problem had, in fact, come up even before the Committee’s report was adopted by the All-Parties Conference. Jawaharlal Nehru said that people like him who stood for full independence were in a quandary. If the report would help to solve the communal question, they would not stand in its path, but they could not compromise on the objective of full independence. Accordingly, after consulting his colleagues, Jawaharlal Nehru made a statement in the Conference to the effect that while they did not agree with the degrading of full independence, they did not want to stand in the way of communal unity.

It may be noted that this statement was made while Jinnah was still participating in the All-Parties discussions.

Later when the Calcutta session of the Congress was held in December 1928 with Motilal Nehru, the chief architect of the Nehru Report, in chair, the father and the son were found themselves in the opposite camps. Jawaharlal Nehru has mentioned in passing in his Autobiography the consequent mental agony he had been undergoing.

It is hardly a question of tension between a father and a son, but a question of tension that existed between one another among all from top to bottom in the Congress. Neither side was willing to yield its position. However, both were equally convinced that a split as it took place first in Surat and again in Gaya would be disastrous to the Congress.
It was at this juncture that Gandhi returned to the active leadership of the Congress. Gandhi had not been participating in the activities of the Congress since his arrest in 1922, except on occasions like bringing about rapprochement between the Congress and the Swaraj Party. In the background in which some parties including the League had broken away and doubts persisted if the advocates of full independence would likewise leave the Congress, pressures were brought on Gandhi to be present at the Calcutta session in order to maintain the unity in the Congress. As an experienced bourgeois politician, Gandhi himself was convinced of the need for it. Accordingly, Gandhi attended the Calcutta session and after holding discussion with both the camps, he brought out a compromise solution in the form of a resolution which stated: “Congress will adopt the constitution in its entirety...as a great step in political advance, especially as it represents the largest measure of agreement attained among the important parties in the country...if it is accepted by the British Parliament on or before December 31st, 1929, but in the event of its non-acceptance by that date or its earlier rejection, Congress will organise a non-violent non-cooperation by advising the country to refuse taxation and such other manner as is settled.”

This compromise was not acceptable to Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhas Bose and other leftwing Congressmen. On behalf of the left, Bose moved an amendment to Gandhis' resolution, standing firm on the objective of full independence. It was, however, lost with 973 voting for and 1350 voting against it.

That the section of the Congress led by Gandhi and Motilal Nehru had only a small majority as shown by the voting was an indication of the growing strength of the left in the Congress.

Although the leftwing Congressmen led by Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Bose brought an amendment to the resolution introduced by Gandhi they did not intend to go against the majority of the Calcutta session. They were prepared to wait as specified in the resolution. They decided to go ahead with
the preparation for the imminent direct action. In that sense it can be unhesitatingly stated that the Calcutta session was a compromise between the advocates of full independence and those of the Dominion Status.

But, a highly significant incident took place at the Calcutta session. It was the march of fifty thousand workers into the venue of the session. This was a clear indication to the fact that the working class had risen as an organized political force and that they had begun to enter the platform of the bourgeois politics led by Gandhi, Motilal Nehru and others. The celebrated poet of Kerala, Vallathol Narayana Menon, who was an observer in the Congress session had narrated this incident in one of his poems.) It was a prelude to the strengthening of the anti-imperialist struggle with Jawaharlal Nehru and others fighting inside the Congress and the organized working class outside it.

III. MAIN POLITICAL FORCES IN THE WORKING CLASS MOVEMENT

The mammoth march of workers into the venue of the Calcutta session was not an isolated incident. It was a high level demonstration of the workers' movement which had been growing systematically over the past few years as well as of the political consciousness that had begun to emerge within that movement.

Earlier, we had described in some details the friendship and cooperation between the anti-imperialist national leaders and the workers and other labouring masses that had begun to grow since the emergence of the extremist political movement under the leadership of Tilak. The political condition that existed during the Khilafat-non-cooperation movements helped to strengthen this process.

But as distinct from the earlier days when it was an appendage of the Congress and other nationalist organizations, now the working class had acquired the necessary
organizational consciousness to organize the primary form of its own class organization, the trade union, and to form an all-India organization, the All-India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) to coordinate the various trade unions. That is, in place of conducting demonstrations and struggles as an appendage of the bourgeoisie which is basically an enemy class, the workers have transformed themselves into a class fighting for their own demand under their own class organization.

This is borne out by the strike struggles waged by the workers during the seven years following 1921, the peak period of the Khilafat-non-cooperation movement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of strikes</th>
<th>Number of workers involved</th>
<th>Number of Man-days lost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>396</td>
<td>600,351</td>
<td>6,984,426</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922</td>
<td>278</td>
<td>433,434</td>
<td>3,972,727</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1923</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>301,044</td>
<td>5,051,704</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>312,462</td>
<td>8,730,918</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>270,423</td>
<td>12,578,129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>189,811</td>
<td>1,097,478</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1927</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>131,655</td>
<td>2,019,970</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These strikes were not conducted under the leadership of any political party. They were conducted by their own organizations, the trade unions, working above political parties, although workers of many political parties had rendered them assistance. Although much after the emergence of the political party of the bourgeoisie, the congress, and the non-political organizations of the same class like merchants' chambers, etc., the working class had started to wage struggles in defence of their own demands under the leadership of the all-India organization of their own.

The accounts of the strikes given above point to an important fact. Though the trade union organizations were organizationally above party politics, the strike struggles conducted under their leadership were inseparably linked with the anti-imperialist struggles waged under the leadership
of the bourgeoisie. Thus, the number of strikes reached the highest in 1921, the peak period of the Khilafat-non-cooperation movement, which went down regularly thereafter. It shows that the stagnation set in Indian politics and the disappointment of the political activists cooled off the fighting spirit of the working class.

The number of workers participated in the strikes and the number of man-days lost also show another feature. It can be seen that the number of strikes, the number of workers participating in them as well as the number of man-days lost decreased in 1922, the year in which the non-cooperation and civil disobedience were called off. In 1923, the number of man-power lost increased in spite of a decrease in the number of strikes as well as the number of workers participating in the strikes. In 1924, though the number of strikes came down to a third of that of 1921, the number of man-power lost in 1925 was almost twice that of 1921, although the number of strikes remained almost the same as in 1924. It shows that the workers' capacity increased year by year to fight determinedly, to stand firm on prolonged strikes facing all kinds of obstructions.

The statistics pertaining to 1926 and 1927 provide direct evidence to show that the stagnation and despondency that afflicted politics had considerably affected the militancy of the working class. The number of strikes, the workers participating in them and the man-days lost were all at their lowest during this period. But the number of man-days lost in 1627 was almost twice that of 1926, indicating the beginning of a new upsurge in struggles.

In order to assess correctly the facts revealed, it is necessary to examine the political forces that were at work in the organized working class movement and the relations that existed among them.

As we have already seen, it was the workers inspired by the anti-imperialist movement under the bourgeois leadership that first entered the field of struggle and that the workers of Bombay, like other sections of the people, had revered
Tilak as “Tilak Maharaj”. Lala Lajpat Rai, Dewan Champanlal, C. R. Das and others has been active in the AITUC in its formative years. But the bourgeois leadership of the Congress was frightened by the growth of the working class as an independent organized force. In 1922, C. R. Das, in his presidential address at the Gaya session of the Congress, underlined the significance of the interest shown by the Congress in the labour issue:

We have delayed the matter already too long. If the Congress fails to do its duty, you may except to find organisations set up in the country by Labourers and Peasants detached from you dissociated from the cause of Swaraj, which will inevitably bring within the arena of the peaceful revolution class struggles and the war of special interests. If the object of the Congress be to avoid that disgraceful issue let us take Labourers and the Peasantry in hand, and let us organise them both from the point of view of their own special interest and also from the point of view of the higher ideal which demands satisfaction of the special interests and the devotion of such interest to the cause of Swaraj.

This was not just the expression of the opinion of an individual, but the beginning of a policy which the Congress as a whole was to adopt in the coming years. The building up of the organizations of agricultural and industrial workers was an important item in the constructive programme approved by the Kanpur session of the Congress in 1925. In 1927, the AICC directed the Working Committee to send propagandists and organizers to the industrial and agricultural workers. In all those years the Congress leaders had made concerted efforts to capture the organizational leadership of the AITUC in which they had been successful to some extent. Lajpat Rai and C. R. Das had been the presidents of the AITUC in its early years.

But this was only one side. On the other, there was a labour organization in Ahmedabad under the leadership of Gandhi and his disciples without keeping contact with organizations like the AITUC. It was functioning in accordance with
the infamous Gandhian theory of "trusteeship". Its leaders were guided by a social outlook of building an organization "above class struggle", as desired by Das in his Gaya presidential address.

Whatever the form, it is evident that the Congress leaders of all persuasions, from Gandhi to Das and Lajpat Rai, were working with a bourgeois nationalist moderate outlook. However, they all were nationalists and anti-imperialists and were trying to link the working class with the anti-imperialist struggle.

Realizing the danger inherent in this approach, the imperialists and the monopoly capitalists under their protection desired to bring the growing working class movement in India under their control without being influenced by Indian bourgeois nationalism. For this purpose, they sent the representatives of the British Labour Party and the British Trade Union Congress to India on several occasions. They tried to affiliate the AITUC and other trade unions to the reformist International Federation of the Trade Unions based in Amsterdam (The Amsterdam International). Although they failed in their attempts with regard to AITUC, they succeeded in bringing around certain other trade unions, including the railwaymen's unions to take a decision favourable with the Amsterdam International.

It was in the midst of these attempts on the part of Indian bourgeois on the one hand, and the leadership of the British Labour Party on the other, to convert the organized Indian trade union movement into their appendage that Communists and other leftists entered the scene with the message of a revolutionary worker's movement independent of these two. We have already referred to the attempts made by the Communist International to form a revolutionary party of the working class in India by unifying the various communist and socialist groups in the country. We have also referred to the formation of a Communist Party of India in 1925 by unifying the various communist groups in India. With this emerged a new political force working
within the organized working class movement with a real working class outlook against the reformist outlook of both the bourgeois nationalism of the Congress and imperialism of the British Labour Party.

This new revolutionary political force was not, however, confined to the Communists alone. There had also emerged in those days various other revolutionary groups including those of the leftist Congressmen all over the country. The Communists decided to unify all these groups and form an organization to fight the reformism both in the Congress politics and in the trade union movement. The formation of the various Workers' and Peasants' Parties in 1926 and 1927 was the result of this decision which was warmly welcomed by other revolutionaries.

The Workers' and Peasants' Parties come into being first in Bengal, Bombay, Punjab and the United Provinces. Journals like Kranti in Marathi, Ganavani in Bengali, Kirti in Punjabi and Mehnatkaksh in Urdu were published by the Party. Muzaffar Ahmad and Sohansingh Josh who later became prominent communists and took initiative in these activities were the editors of Ganavani and Kirti, respectively. Similarly, S.S. Mirajkar and P.C. Joshi were the secretaries of the Party in Bombay and U.P., respectively. Although the Workers' and Peasants' Parties were more broad based organizations than that of the Communists, the Communists were in the leading positions in these parties.

From its inception the Workers' and Peasants' Parties had been issuing appeals on issues affecting the anti-imperialist movement in general and the organized working class movement in particular to synchronize with the Congress sessions and the committee meetings of the Congress. For example, a summary of the resolution prepared by the Party in Bombay on the occasion of the AICC meeting in May 1927 is as follows.

A. The present leadership of the Congress has tied itself and the Congress machinery to a programme of work which is of benefit only to an insignificant section of the
people, the big capitalist and their allies... Therefore, the bulk of the population have lost all interest in and sympathy to the Congress.

B. In the interest of the vast majority of the people it is urgently necessary to free the Congress from the narrow shackles of class interests, and to yoke it to the task of attaining national freedom from the imperialist bondage, as a step towards complete emancipation of the masses from exploitation and oppression.

C. The aim of the Indian National Congress is (should be) the attainment of complete national independence from imperialism and the establishment of a Swaraj based upon universal adult suffrage.

D. It(should)reiterate(s) its faith in civil disobedience, i.e., direct action as the only effective weapon that will ultimately free the people of India from their subject position,

E. but realises that great general awakening will have to be brought before this weapon of direct action can be effectively used.

All efforts must be directed to the attainment...of the general awakening, and for this purpose the Congress(should) adopt(s) a practical programme. 2

The resolution also pointed to the immediate issues affecting the workers and peasants and suggested solutions to these issues.

It must be stated specifically that the Workers' and Peasants' Party with Communists in leading positions adopted this resolution before the Congress adopted the resolution of full independence at the Madras session. For there was a myth widely circulated all over the country that the Congress adopted the objective of full independence solely due to the efforts of certain leftwing Congressmen like Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose. This is not the truth.

---

From the beginning of the Communist International, some Indian Communists had tried to maintain lively contact with the ordinary nationalists who were far more numerous than themselves to build up a united revolutionary movement in the country. In parallel to this, an organized mass movement of the working class was growing. The bourgeois national leadership of the Congress on the one said, and the imperialist reformist leadership of the British Labour Party on the other had tried to capture the leadership of this movement. Against this, the Workers' and Peasants' Parties had emerged under the leadership of the Communists as a broad mass revolutionary front to organize the working class on a revolutionary basis and to establish unity with the leftwing of the bourgeois nationalist movement. The leftwing Congressmen including Nehru and Bose who came under the influence of these developments fought for full independence. This was the fact.

The enthusiastic march by 50,000 workers to the pandal of the Calcutta session of the Congress in which Jawaharlal Nehru and Bose were forcefully arguing for full independence was a lively demonstration of this. It was a spectacular demonstration of fraternity and unity between the leftists among the bourgeois-petty-bourgeois sections and the working class which was moving towards the left.

IV. MEERUT AND LAHORE

This surge of the revolutionary working class angered the British rulers who decided to suppress it. Consequently the government filed a conspiracy case in the Meerut magistrate's court against the Communists and non-Communists working among the workers and peasants.

In order to explain the background to this case which is known as the "Meerut Conspiracy Case", it is necessary to bring at least in brief the growth of the movement of the
workers and peasants and also its impact on the nationalists and Congressmen both the left and the right.

As we have seen earlier, the Madras session of the Congress adopted a number of resolutions of anti-imperialism in content along with the resolution on full independence. It was in order to systematize the day-to-day activities of the Congress in accordance with this new approach that Jawaharlal Nehru was selected as one of the general secretaries of the Congress.

With this, an important change began to appear in the general outlook of the Congress. The Congress accepted the fact that India’s freedom struggle was an inseparable part of the world-wide anti-imperialist struggle. Symbolic of it was the relationship that the Congress had established with the international organization of the League against Imperialism. Both the leftwing Congressman Jawaharlal Nehru and the rightwing Congressman Motilal Nehru attended its conference. Their visit to Moscow, followed by the publication of Jawaharlal’s impressions of the Soviet Union, had their impact on the leftists both inside and outside the Congress. The Indian patriots, for once, realized that the constant anti-Soviet and anti-Communist propaganda made by the rulers was intended to protest their own vested interests.

An important section of the revolutionaries outside the Congress was those who were engaged in bomb-politics and known as terrorists. Many of them (especially in Bengal) were Congress workers. Even those who were not Congressmen had the sympathy of a considerable section of the Congress leaders. The first indication of a substantial change in the general outlook of this section was the growth of the Communist movement. The ideas propagated by the Communist and non-Communist activists of the Workers’ and Peasants’ Parties began to spread among them. A clear evidence of such a change was the formation of the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association under the leadership of Bhagat Singh in Punjab which spread to all over
the country. In a letter sent from the prison before his martyrdom, Bhagat Singh said: “The real fight for freedom can only be fought by mobilising *Mazdurs, Kirsans* and the common people...It is my considered opinion that bombs cannot serve our purpose. This is proved by the history of the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association...Our chief aim should be to mobilise the toiling masses.”

This change, however, did not detract them from the ‘bomb-politics’. On the contrary, Bhagat Singh and Batukeshwar Dutt threw bombs at the Central Assembly when it was in session, following which they were arrested and after a prolonged trial, sentenced to death.

Even while engaged in these activities, a political rethinking was going on among them. In those days when people in general were thinking in terms of either the bomb-politics of the revolutionaries or the Gandhian non-violence, the propaganda carried out by the Workers’ and Peasants’ Parties and the Communist Party exerted influence on them in this re-thinking. Many of the co-accused in the Central Assembly bombing case in which Bhagat Singh was sentenced to death became active workers of the Communist Party after their release from prison. One of them, the late Ajoy Kumar Ghosh, was the General Secretary of the undivided Communist Party of India for over a decade. The emotional memoirs he wrote about his former colleagues including Bhagat Singh reflect the change the young generation of the petty-bourgeoisie was undergoing half a century ago. One of their contemporaries Shiva Varma, affectionately called ‘Shivda’, is still an active worker of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) in Kanpur.

In addition to this change among the adherents of the bomb-politics, a revolutionary enthusiasm was spreading rapidly among the petty-bourgeois youth also, including those who had hitherto remained apolitical. This was another important feature of the 1928-29 period. Youth organizations

---

were being formed throughout the country embracing all trends of thought, from Gandhism to the ideology of bomb politics. What linked them together was the idea of direct action rallying the entire working masses for full independence.

The growth of these organizations went parallel with the upswing of the workers’ and peasants’ organizations. These two channels came together to form the great movement of the Independence League under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhas Bose and others.

All these had influenced the Congress leadership as a whole. Those who opposed the British propaganda that the Communists were mischief makers and Russian agents included some well-known right-wing Congressmen. For instance, Motilal Nehru, whose only relation with the left movement was that he was the father of a leftist, stoutly defended the Communists in the Central Legislative Assembly.

This was not an isolated opinion of an individual. Rather, certain events that took place in the Central Legislative Assembly towards the end of 1928 and early 1929 showed that this was the general opinion prevailing among members of the Congress Parliamentary Party who were known to be rightists.

The Government of India introduced two bills, the Public Safety Bill and the Trades Disputes Bill, to face the rapidly spreading revolutionary movement of the working class. The target of both bills was the worker and peasant movement. From a class point of view, the Congress leaders in the Assembly should have been substantially in agreement with the bills. They, however, strongly opposed them. While Motilal Nehru, Lajpat Rai and others in the opposition exposed the monstrous character of the bills, the President of the Central Assembly, Vithalbhai Patel, cornered the Government by his historic rulings.

The stated objective of the Public Safety Bill was to "prevent the activities of foreign Communists in India".
Apparently, the bill would not apply even to Indian Communists. However, the Congress members in the Assembly argued that it could be used against the non-Communist nationalists.

According to the bill, it was an offence to argue directly or indirectly for the overthrow of the "legally constituted government in British India". Pointing to this provision in the bill, Lajpat Rai stated that even Jawaharlal Nehru and Srinivasa Iyengar who argued for full independence would come within the purview of the bill.

It was obvious that the Congress leadership realized that the weapon of the repressive laws being introduced on the pretext of curbing activities of foreign Communists in India would turn against all freedom fighters. In other words, the antagonism of the bourgeoisie as a class towards the Communists and the working class gave way to the opposition of the entire national movement including the bourgeoisie to imperialism.

The plan of the government to get the Public Safety Bill through quickly was defeated by the determined opposition of the members belonging to the Congress and other opposition parties: Despite mustering the full strength of nominated members in favour of the bill, the voting on the bill was 61 for and 61 against. The president of the Assembly, Vithalbhai Patel exercised his casting vote against the bill and consequently the bill was rejected. Following this, the Public Safety bill and the Trades Disputes Bill came to be widely debated. which together with the historic rulings of the President of the Assembly filled the newspaper columns.

It was in the last phase of this, on 8th April 1929, the day on which the Government got the Trades Disputes Bill passed disregarding the opposition that the historic bomb attack inside the Assembly took place. Bhagat Singh and Dutt who dropped the bombs did not try to escape by running away from the scene, but threw the leaflets carried by them, shouted slogans like "Long Live the Revolution", and stood firm to court arrest.
This incident which enthralled millions of young men including the present author was symbolic of the contradictions in the political approach of Bhagat Singh and his comrades who had been moving from the bomb-politics to the politics of mass struggle. Throwing bomb like revolutionaries who have no faith in non-violence, raising slogans and courting arrest, knowing that giving in meant gallows, like Gandhian satyagrahis, distributing leaflets calling for mass struggles like Communists—all these were combined in an action which was, in fact, a pointer to the future revolutionary politics in India.

This was followed by the Lahore Conspiracy Case leading to the hanging of Bhagat Singh, Rajaguru and Sukhdev. Almost simultaneously, the Meerut conspiracy Case was also in progress.

The background of the Meerut case is as follows. In December 1928, an all-India conference was held in Meerut to form a national organization of the Workers' and Peasants' Parties which were started in the provinces of Bombay, Bengal, U. P. and Punjab and later spread to other parts of India. Over a hundred delegates from the different parts of the country attended the conference which adopted a common minimum programme for these parties in the different provinces. Besides, the conference condemned the Motilal Report which satisfied itself with a scheme with less than Dominion Status, and advocated strongly a programme of direct action for full independence.

Over 30 activists of the Workers' and Peasants' Parties who attended this conference were accused in the Meerut Conspiracy Case. They included the well-known communist leaders like P. C. Joshi, Dr. G. Adhikari, S. A Dange, Muzzaffar Ahmad and S. V. Ghate. Besides, three Englishmen working in India representing the British working class and the socialist-communist movements, were also among the accused. Among them, Philip Spratt and Lester Hutchinson later left politics. The third, Ben Bradley, worked tirelessly
till his last days as one of the British Communist leaders paying special attention to India affairs.

The government utilized the Conspiracy Case to 'expose' communism and the Soviet Union. The Communists, on the other hand, used it in accordance with the tradition set by Karl Marx in the historic Cologne trial as a platform to expose the existing social and state structure and to prove the inevitability of a social revolution. The statement signed by all the accused communists, except Dange, and read out by R. S. Nimbkar in the court was a document which analyzed the Indian situation on the basis of Marxist-Leninist outlook. (Dange was not a member of the party and hence not a signatory of the statement. He made a separate statement.)

The fact that the Meerut Conspiracy Case and the Lahore Conspiracy Case were going on simultaneously was meaningful. The reports of these trials contained facts and arguments which helped millions of youth in the country to choose between the path of mass revolutionary struggles and bomb-politics based on adventurism. What is more, the letter sent by Bhagat Singh from jail and the subsequent activities of Ajoy Ghosh, Siva Varma and other accused in the Lahore case revealed that the reports of the Meerut case had influenced them considerably.

The years 1928 and 1929 were crucial. A new mass upsurge, new sections of people entering into the political arena for the first time, new attempts to link the Indian freedom struggle with the world-wide anti-imperialist movement and the resultant new streams of thought in the old parties and organizations themselves—these were the factors that gave vitality and life to the Lahore session of the Congress held towards the end of 1929 and to the subsequent civil disobedience movement under Gandhi's leadership and made them historic.
TOWARDS FULL INDEPENDENCE

I. THE DIVIDE AND RULE TACTICS

Whenever there was a mass upsurge, the British used to resort to the divide and rule tactics to beat it back. As we have seen earlier, they rallied the moderates against the extremists and turned the Muslim big-wigs against the Congress in 1905-06, and in 1919-21 used the moderates and several communal and casteist organizations against the Khilafat-non-cooperation movement. The same tactics were used against the new mass upsurge which was started in 1928-29.

The first and foremost success they achieved was in the field of trade union movement. As we know, workers’ organizations emerged in India linked with the freedom movement in the wake of the extremist politics. We also know that the attempts made by the British to stop this trend and to make it an appendage of British imperialism and its agent.
the Amsterdam International, had failed. In 1928-29, they adopted new tactics to make up this failure and to achieve their objective. And they were successful in that attempt.

Along with the Simon Commission which was appointed to go into the question of constitutional reforms, certain other commissions and committees had also been appointed by the Government to draw the attention of the elite sections of the Indian society to its side.

It had become necessary for the British monopoly capitalism to bring about a capitalist transformation in agriculture in India. Changes in the agrarian structure too had become necessary to rally the landlord classes behind them. For this purpose, an agricultural commission was appointed with Lord Linlithgow as chairman. Similarly, a committee with Sir Philip Hartog as chairman to prepare a report on educational reforms to suit capitalist development and a labour commission with Whitley as chairman were also appointed. Whitley had the distinction of having drawn up a number of planned schemes of industrial relations in Britain which skilfully transformed the British trade union movement into an appendage of British imperialism.

Since all these commissions and committees were intended to protect the British imperialist rule, the militant sections both inside and outside the Congress were against extending cooperation to them. We have referred to earlier the successful boycott of the Simon Commission, the most important of the these commissions, thanks to the unity of the left and right forces inside and outside the Congress. A similar approach was adopted by the leftists including the Congressmen with regard to the Whitely Commission.

Although the left Congressmen and Communists had considerable influence in the All-India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), the moderates were not an insignificant minority in it. True, the AITUC was far ahead of the Congress in raising the immediate demands of the workers and in adopting the objective of socialism. It may be noted that it had adopted the objective of socialism in 1928, some three
decades before the Congress adopted, formally though, "socialistic pattern" as its objective.

However, the AITUC was lagging behind the Congress on matters relating to the general political issues of anti-imperialism. For instance, on account of the opposition of the moderate leadership, AITUC could not adopt a resolution to affiliate to the League against Imperialism whereas, the Congress had affiliated itself to the League and sent delegates to its world conference.

This becomes further clear from the approach adopted by the Congress towards the Simon Commission and the attitude of the moderates in the AITUC towards the Whiteley Commission. Both the left and right sections in the Congress were united in the boycott of the Simon Commission. But there was no such a unity between the right and left sections in the AITUC in the boycott of the Whiteley Commission. Further, the AITUC split on this issue, the first split in the Indian trade union movement.

Although a large number of top Congress leaders including Tilak, Lajpat Rai and C. R. Das, had played a significant role in the growth of the trade union movement, there was a section of leaders under the political influence of Gokhale and other moderates in the AITUC. Just as the world Communist movement had influenced the leftists in the AITUC, so the Amsterdam International had influenced the rightist trade union leaders. Thus, the leftist section including the Congress who cooperated with the Communists and other leftists and the rightists section under the influence of the Amsterdam International came to a clash with each other.

The central point of dispute between these two groups was the approach towards the Whiteley Commission. The ruling circles who saw the depth and the extent of the people's protest against the Simon Commission were shrewd enough to take the necessary precaution to see that the commission on labour had Indian representatives.
Thus, the Whitley Commission had two representatives of Indian workers on it. The moderate labour leaders, N. M. Joshi and Dewan Chamanlal unilaterally agreed to serve in the commission without consulting either the AITUC or the different political groups in it. In fact, it was only after they had accepted the membership that the very issue of approach to the Commission came up before the AITUC. Naturally, it aroused deep resentment among the delegates to the Nagpur session of the AITUC in 1929.

It was in the atmosphere of this resentment that the decision to boycott the Whitley Commission was adopted. Simultaneously, two resolutions were passed, one demanding the release of the accused in the Meerut Conspiracy Case the other for affiliating the AITUC with the League against Imperialism. Protesting against these resolutions adopted by the majority, the moderate leadership walked out of the conference and formed a rival trade union organization based on moderatist outlook.

The British rulers realized that the success they had achieved in splitting the trade union movement could not be repeated easily in the political field. All shades of opinion from the moderates outside the Congress to the leftists inside the Congress and the different revolutionary groups outside, had raised in one voice the demand of “at least a Dominion Status”. An ultimatum had already been served by the Congress to the effect that if this demand was not conceded before 31st December 1929, direct action, including non-payment of tax, would be launched. In the circumstances, the British were forced to evolve a new tactic to engineer a split in the political front.

Meanwhile, a political change favourable to this had come about in Britain itself. In May 1929 the Labour Party came to power defeating the ruling Conservatives. Although the Commissions referred to above were appointed by the Conservative Government, the Labour Party had played its own role in all actions intended to tighten the British monopolist grip on India. Therefore, it was clear that there would not be any
change in the government policy despite the Labour Party being in power. But the Labour Party leaders had to pretend that theirs was a government trying to protect the interests of the British workers and the Indian democratic movement to the extent possible. So, the Labour Party government came up to take certain seemingly conciliatory steps without effecting any fundamental change in the structure or terms of reference of the Simon Commission. Thus, the Labour Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald, called the Viceroy to England for consultations. Further, it was proposed to hold a conference in London with leaders of the different political parties and sections to ascertain the Indian public opinion before enacting an appropriate bill in accordance with the report of the Simon Commission.

The Government accepted this proposal and the Viceroy Lord Irwin accordingly issued a statement on 31st October. In the statement, the Viceroy declared that the perspective before the government in all considerations with regard to constitutional reform, in general, was Dominion Status. It marked the beginning of a calculated move to create disunity between the Congress and the moderates, between the leftists and the rightists in the Congress, among the different organizations which dealt with communal-caste politics, including the Muslim League and between these sections, on the one hand and the Congress, on the other. As we shall see later, these proposed (Round Table) conferences turned out to be a platform to stretch out these disputes and quarrels endlessly.

However, these tactics of the government failed for the time being. An all-India leadership conference was held in Delhi within 24 hours after Irwin issued the statement. The Conference in which Congress leaders like Gandhi and Motilal Nehru and the liberals like Sapru and the President of the Central Assembly Vithalbhai Patel participated, decided to accept the Viceroy's proposals subject to the following conditions.
1. The scheme which should form the basis of discussion at the Conference should be the implementation of Dominion Status.

2. A majority of the delegates to the conference should be from the Congress.

3. All political prisoners should be released forthwith.

4. The functions of the existing government of India, as far as possible in the present context, should be befitting a government of Dominion Status.

This resolution adopted by Congress and the moderates outside it was, according to Jawaharlal Nehru, a success as a decision of a conference in which the leftists and moderates were participants; but as far as the Congress was concerned it was a step backwards”.

For the Congress, the four conditions included in the resolution were not negotiable. If the government were not willing to accept them, the Congress would be unwilling to cooperate with it. But, for liberals, this constituted their maximum demand. Hence, they were willing for a compromise. This was Nehru’s evaluation of the resolution.

Thus the leadership conference of November 1929 ended in creating conditions for a break between the Congress and the liberals. However, it helped to keep the liberals with the Congress at least for the time being. The resolution also helped to prevent a rupture between the left and right wings inside the Congress and to move them together into a struggle to be launched under Gandhi’s leadership.

In accordance with the Calcutta resolution, the leftists were obliged to wait for a year; meanwhile, if the government granted Dominion Status, then the Congress would accept it. On the contrary, if the government was unwilling to grant this demand, the Congress, including Gandhi, was obliged to launch a struggle.

Gandhi and Motilal Nehru used the leadership conference as a means to fulfil the obligations of both sides and at the same time to maintain the unity of the Congress. They utilized the developments following the leaders’ conference to
accede to the demand of the left wing Congressmen to move along the path of direct action as directed by the Calcutta session, since the government had refused to concede even the very moderate demands of a liberal leader like Sapru.

II. PREPARATIONS FOR THE NEW STRUGGLE

The general thinking prevalent among the Congressmen after the Calcutta session was that since the granting of Dominion Status within one year as demanded at the session was highly improbable, the Congress must make all preparations to launch a struggle. However, Gandhi had his own view on the nature of such preparations. The form of struggle that Gandhi had visualized was one of "complete non-violence", and of mobilizing the national force of the masses patiently tolerating all the repressions that might come form the "other side". And this must be achieved through the "constructive" programmes he had formulated.

Soon after the Calcutta session, the Congress Working Committe appointed a number of sub-committees to strengthen mass contact and also to implement the "constructive" programme. The sub-committees were intended to take care of boycott of foreign cloth, prohibition of liquor, removal of untouchability, Congress organization, volunteer organization and redressal of women's grievances.

The sub-committees on all these issues (except on the last which remained on paper only) worked vigorously. Gandhi himself was the chairman of the committee for the boycott of foreign cloth. Rajagopalachari was in charge of prohibition and Jamnalal Bajaj was to lead the activities for the removal of untouchability. The tours and other activities of these leaders, though conducted in connection with the discharge of their specific responsibilities, did help to create a general awareness among the people about the Congress
session scheduled for the year-end and the developments that were likely to take place subsequent to it.

The work of the Congress and volunteer organizations served to create a wide mass base, unprecedented except perhaps for the 1920-21 period. This showed that the Congress had begun to grow with a base firmer than what it was in 1920-21.

It was during this period that the Hindusthan Seva Dal, a volunteer organization of Karnataka, became an all-India organization. The Seva Dal and its camps were utilized to impart elementary physical training as well as political education that were essential for the volunteers. Decisions were taken to enrol a certain percentage of the total population of the provinces as members of Congress and establish functionally effective committees in at least a minimum number of districts with active members of the Congress contributing a fixed percentage of their income towards the Congress fund. Work based on these decisions helped transform the Congress into a well-knit mass organization.

Work in the legislatures had begun to bear the mark of the impending struggle. In the Central Assembly, President Vithalbhai Patel gave the ruling that a debate on the Public Safety Bill in the House would prejudice a fair trial of the Meerut Conspiracy Case which was going on simultaneously. The ruling and the speech made by the Viceroy in utter disregard to the ruling caused a havoc in the Assembly. In Bengal, following the repeated defeats of the government in the legislature, the legislature itself was dissolved. The general impact of these events was so great and the fighting mood of the people so high that it was decided that the Congress members in the Central and provincial assemblies needed attend the legislatures only to retain their membership, utilizing the rest of the time for political work.

The Congress moved on these lines at a time when the activities of the revolutionaries were going on with increased vigour. The Lahore Conspiracy Case trial involving Bhagat
Singh and his colleagues was progressing. The fast undertaken by the accused in the jail and the death of one of them (Jatin Das) had made the Indian people in general and the youth in particular indignant. Proceedings of the Meerut Conspiracy Case involving many prominent Communist, and non-Communist trade union workers were also going on. A large number of nationalist activists including many prominent Congress leaders were imprisoned on various counts.

In this background, there was a widespread feeling that the “constructive programme”, organizational work and partial boycott of the legislature, etc., being carried out by the Congress leadership were inadequate to meet the situation. All this turned out to make the soil fertile for bomb-politics.

It was in these backgrounds that the leaders of the Congress and the moderates entered into negotiations with the British. This evoked sharp protests from the ranks, as a reflection of which Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose who were regarded as leftist leaders tendered resignation form the Congress Working Committee. The revolutionaries outside the Congress who were engaged in bomb-politics intensified their activities. They even tried to blow up the train in which the Viceroy was travelling, injuring some of his attendants. It was obvious that the attack on the viceregal train was intended to prevent the negotiations between the Viceroy and the Congress leaders or at least to make them fruitless.

It was in this background again that the question came up as to who should be the president of the Lahore session. The general consensus was that at a time when a struggle for independence was imminent, Gandhi was the only individual strong enough to be its commander-in-chief. Ten provincial committees proposed his name. The name of Vallabhbhai Patel was proposed by five PCCs. Patel’s nomination was obviously in recognition of the leadership that he had given to the successful Bardoli peasant struggle and of his capability to lead the forthcoming struggle. Jawaharlal Nehru with the support of three provinces was placed in the third position in the list of presidential candidates.
Gandhi, however, declined his nomination. Nor did he approve of the nomination of Patel who was in the second position. Instead, he expressed his opinion in favour of Jawaharlal Nehru whose position was third in the list. The entire Congress leadership including Patel accepted Gandhi’s proposal. Thus, Jawaharlal Nehru who had never concealed opposition to the policies pursued by the Congress leadership including Gandhi and Motilal Nehru, was elected president of the Congress.

This was an incident that invited considerable debate in the political circles. What was the secret behind Gandhi, the trusted leader of the majority, giving up the presidency of the Congress in favour of Jawaharlal Nehru, the representative of a minority in the Congress? Why did the entire Congress leadership decide to transfer the Congress presidency from the renowned moderate leader Motilal to his son Jawaharlal? How far personal sentiments like Gandhi’s interest in Jawaharlal and Motilal’s affection to his son influenced the decision?

We have referred to above certain facts helpful in finding answers to these questions. No matter how extensive the popular force the Congress was able to rally behind itself through “constructive programmes” and organizational work, this alone was not sufficient to conduct a bitter anti-British struggle. For the leftists inside and outside the Congress were not less active and militant than the Congress workers who were engaged in constructive programmes or organized in Seva Dals. Only a leadership capable of mobilizing their sense of self-sacrifice and cautious activities would be able to inspire the millions in the struggle. Realizing this fact, it was necessary to create the impression both among the people and the Congress workers that the young generation of leftists was being brought up to the leadership position.

Another factor that prompted Gandhi to propose Jawaharlal to the presidency of the Congress was his opinion about his personality. However strongly he might express his leftist ideology in his articles and speeches, Jawaharlal
Nehru was in the final analysis a "disciplined" disciple of Gandhi. True, he was a staunch opponent of the views of his father and leader; but when faced with practical politics Jawaharlal transforms himself into a devoted Gandhian—this was Gandhi's assessment of Jawaharlal's personality.

For instance, nominating Jawaharlal to the presidency Gandhi stated: "And if he has the dash and the rashness of a warrior, he has also the prudence of a statesman. A lover of discipline, he has shown himself to be capable of rigidly submitting to it even where it has seemed irksome. He is undoubtedly an extremist, thinking far ahead of his surroundings. But he is humble and practical enough not to force to pace to the breaking point. He is pure as a crystal, he is faithful beyond suspicion. He is a knight sans peur, sans reproche. The nation is safe in his hands."

Subsequent events have proved the correctness of this assessment. In his first presidential address and in numerous speeches, statements and articles that followed, Nehru formulated his leftist thoughts. Often it brought crises in the leadership circles of the Congress and on occasions, he had to give up the leadership position to freely express his dissent. But on all such occasions he remained a trusted follower of Gandhi. Whenever formidable challenges were raised against the Gandhian leadership, its outlook and programmes, Jawaharlal created the impression among the people that he stood "between Gandhi and the leftists". In effect, however, he had been saving the Gandhian leadership from the challenges it had been facing. In the following pages, we shall see this repeating again and again. Here we will only point out the understanding Gandhi and other leaders had on the forthcoming struggle following the Lahore Congress and the role played by the election of Jawaharlal Nehru in the struggle.

It would be useful here to make a comparative analysis of the struggles of 1920-21 and the forthcoming struggle of 1928-29. The basis of the former was the popular reaction

to the deepening economic and political crises in the post-war years. Gandhi tried to provide an organized form to this popular reaction for which he was the most skilful and experienced of all the bourgeois political leaders. He was successful in accomplishing this by raising such simple slogans as “Swaraj in one year”, collecting the Tilak Swaraj Fund and propagating the spinning wheel. And the limitations of this approach were demonstrated themselves through the Chauri Chaura and other incidents.

The situation in 1928-29 was different. There were now not only the masses who had imbibed the spirit of mass struggles, but also organized movements borne out of their struggles as well as the revolutionary ideologies leading them. There were the trade unions and their strike struggles, the youth organizations and their forms of struggle, the agitations and struggles of the peasantry and the revolutionary organizations imbibing the communist and socialist ideologies which had tremendously influenced these movements and struggles. The impact of all these was found on the ranks and active workers of the Congress as well as on a section of its leadership. Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhas Chandra Bose and other leaders of the younger generation, in fact, emerged as the representatives of these sections.

It was a necessity for the bourgeois Congress leadership including Gandhi, to rally under its own banner these new forces which had not yet emerged in 1920-21. At the same time, they had to see to it that these revolutionary forces did not cross the bounds set by the bourgeois leadership on to ‘dangerous’ paths. In other words, they had to “tame” these revolutionary forces which were likely to constitute themselves a challenge to the bourgeois leadership. The most suitable means for it was to install as Congress president a widely accepted “young leader” like Jawaharlal who was a devoted disciple of Gandhi and to exercise the control of the right wing leadership on him.

Although the present decision pertained only to the question of who should preside over the Lahore session of
the Congress, it marked the beginning of the future developments. Through this decision Gandhi declared that his successor in Indian politics would be none of the well known Gandhians like Vallabhbhai Patel, Rajagopalachari and Rajendra Prasad, but Jawaharlal Nehru who was known to be an opponent of himself. The kind of freedom struggle Gandhi visualized would not be complete even with leaders like the eminent parliamentarian, Motilal Nehru and constructive workers like Patel and Rajagopalachari. For that purpose the leftist forces represented by Jawaharlal Nehru must also be mobilized. Not only that. There must be a guarantee that the leftist forces thus mobilized did not go beyond the control of the social forces which he represented. Gandhi was able to accomplish all this. And he knew that Jawaharlal Nehru would be of greatest assistance to him in “taming the leftist forces”.

We have referred to earlier the statement of Tilak that Gandhi represented the new mass upsurge and that he would not stand in his way. Now the situation was somewhat different from what was known as the “end of the Tilak era”. In 1928-29, Gandhi could not claim the sole representation of the mass upsurge; Gandhi’s leadership would become useful and effective only if the new revolutionary forces represented by Jawaharlal Nehru were mobilized. However, without Gandhi and his right wing leadership, Jawaharlal would not become the full representative of the new popular upsurge. In other words, the bourgeois national leadership would be complete only if the disciples of Gandhi, the parliamentarians and the younger generation of the left forces were brought together. The election of Jawaharlal Nehru was an open declaration of this fact.

III. THE LAHORE SESSION

At the midnight of 31st December 1929, the hour at which the one year grace period given at the Calcutta session
of December 1928 ended, the Lahore session of the Congress passed the resolution affirming full independence as the national objective. Soon after, the delegates led by President Jawaharlal Nehru left the Pandal to unfurl the Indian independence flag.

The resolution was adopted almost unanimously, with hardly 15 hands raising against in a gathering of thousands of delegates. It was a rare spectacle of the disciples of Gandhi, advocates of participation in legislature, leftists and all other sections rallying behind the objective of full independence and the imminent struggle to achieve the objective. A new voice of mass upsurge reverberated throughout the country.

But behind this demonstration of unity revealed the intense clash that took place among the various trends of political thought and groups. On a number of occasions, divisions were taken for voting and issues decided with a narrow majority. Even in the case of the main resolution on full independence, its different clauses came under heavy attack before they were adopted with a narrow margin of votes.

Though the president of the session was an acknowledged leftist leader, the leftists moved a number of amendments to many resolutions and to many clauses of the main resolution moved officially. The point by point fight they put up ended in votings. In the final stage of the session, Subhas Bose and other leftist leaders who could not agree with the leadership on the composition of the new Working Committee, formed a new organization called the Congress Democratic Party. Only the civil disobedience movement which was launched a few weeks after that could save the Congress from another split.

As we know, Jawaharlal Nehru was installed president of the Congress as the representative of the younger generation with leftist ideologies. In fact, his presidential address was in consonance with the expectations of the delegates as well as of the people at large. In the address, Jawaharlal
Nehru declared that he was a socialist and republican fighting against all royal and feudal privileges. It was for the first time that a Congress President was delivering such a speech. And it was on this basis that he handled issues like full independence and opposition to Dominion Status.

Based on the experience he had gained through the participation in the Anti-imperialist League and the visit to the Soviet Union, he tried to link the freedom struggle with the world-wide anti-imperialist struggle and to the advance of socialism. At the same time, he was of the view that the struggle under the leadership of the Congress must be valued as high as or even greater than his own views as a leftist. In the Presidential address, he made clear that he was endeavouring to get along well with his colleagues including the Gandhians, on a number of issues such as the role of non-violence in the struggle. Consequently he remained firm with the leadership rather than with his leftist colleagues like Subhas Bose on questions of the composition of the Working Committee and the subsequent formation of the Congress Democratic Party.

The position taken by Nehru as president in no way influenced the leftist delegates. As mentioned above, they fought out issue by issue. They even defeated some of the proposals put forward by Gandhi by joining hands with other non-Gandhian sections. For example, Gandhi suggested that the programmes of the boycott of foreign cloth, prohibition and removal of untouchability should be conducted under the auspices of organizations independent of the Congress. (The manufacture and sale of Khadi had already been entrusted to the Spinners’ Association, an organization independent of the Congress.) This suggestion was rejected. Similarly, as with the means of struggle, Gandhi suggested that “peaceful and just” be replaced by “truthful and non-violent”. This too was rejected.

However, the sharpest confrontation was between the leftists on the one hand and the disciples of Gandhi and the advocates of participation in the legislature on the other. It was
as a sequel to this that the leadership had secured only a narrow margin of votes. For example, the leadership had moved a resolution condemning the bomb attack of the train in which the Viceroy was travelling just a week before the Lahore Congress. It was passed by a margin of only 48 votes.

Again, the resolution on full independence began with an appreciation of the statement of the leadership made in response to the Viceroy's announcement of 31st October and the efforts made by the Viceroy. This part of the resolution evoked heated discussions. The left wing contended that the statement of the leadership was a backpedalling from the objective of the Congress and the Viceroy's announcement a trap. On this issue the leadership could carry only a narrow majority of 180 votes with them.

The main resolution *inter alia* stated that "nothing is to be gained in the existing circumstances by the Congress being represented at the proposed Round Table Conference." The phrase "in the existing circumstances" was subjected to severe criticism. The left argued that this phrase was a loophole left by the leadership in the resolution to enable them to participate in a round table conference in the future on the pretext of "changed circumstances". Here also the combined force of Gandhians and the protagonists of parliamentary activities defeated the left wing with a narrow margin.

The main resolution finally emerged in the session was one that inspired a large majority of the delegates and even the entire country, except a few among the protagonists of parliamentary activities. The major features of the resolution are as follows.

1) Although appreciating the Viceroy and leadership which issued the statement following his announcement and with the phrase "in the existing circumstances", the resolution declared that the Congress would not attend the Round Table Conference to be called by the British.
2) Since the grace period allowed by the Calcutta session had come to an end and also since the moves made by the government in conceding the national demand was not satisfactory, the session declared that the immediate demand of the Congress was full independence. As a corollary of this, the Motilal Nehru Report envisaging Dominion Status had become out-dated.

3) As a preliminary step towards organizing a campaign for full independence, the session called upon complete boycott of the legislatures and committees constituted by the government and directed Congressmen and others taking part in the national movement to abstain from participating in the future elections and the present members of the legislatures to resign their seats.

4) While appealing the people to zealously carry on the constructive programmes of the Congress, the resolution authorized the AICC "where it deems fit, to launch upon a programme of civil disobedience, including the non-payment of taxes, whether in selected areas or otherwise and under such safeguards as it may consider necessary".

The Lahore session adopted two other resolutions which deserve special mention. One of them requested the rulers of the princely states to establish responsible governments in the states and guarantee the protection of civil liberties of the people. This represented a change in the policy of "non-interference in the internal affairs of the princely states" which had hitherto been followed by the Gandhian leadership of the Congress.

The other resolution was more sensational. It was a reiteration of a resolution passed earlier at the Gaya session making it clear that the Indian people would not be held responsible for the unjust public debt imposed by the British rulers on India. It also warned the prospective creditors of future debts that free India would be liable to pay back the debt only if it was convinced that it was just and reasonable.

These resolutions showed that the Congress which was preparing for a struggle to achieve the immediate objective
of full independence had started taking a different attitude towards the rulers of the princely states who were the henchmen of the British and towards those who were giving the British government financial assistance. In other words, the bourgeois leadership became convinced of the need for such a new approach to inspire the people to take part in the freedom struggle which was going to be launched within a few weeks.

However, the composition of the new Working Committee formed after the Lahore session was not in accord with the leftist ideology expressed in the presidential address and in the resolutions passed in the session. The leftists did not get representation in the Working Committee in proportion to their strength among the delegates as displayed by the pattern of voting on the different resolutions. All members in the committee, except President Jawaharlal Nehru, were either the disciples of Gandhi or the advocates of parliamentary participation. It may be noted that the demand of the leftists that the election to the Working Committee must be democratic was rejected by the leadership. Thus, Jawaharlal Nehru became the head of a leadership which was formed in a manner which was not in correspondence with the political thinking current among the delegates and the common people.

But surpassing all these issues and pushing them to the background, the problem of the imminent struggle for full independence came up before the people. The new Working Committee met soon after the close of the Congress session and decided to observe 26th January as Full Independence Day throughout the country as the first step towards making preparation for the struggle. The Working Committee also prepared a declaration to be read and adopted throughout the country, as part of the observation of Independence Day. The text of the declaration which inspired the entire people and was repeated many a time is as follows.

We believe that it is the inalienable right of the Indian people, as of any other people, to have freedom and to
enjoy the fruits of their toil and have the necessities of life, so that they may have full opportunities of growth. We believe also that if any government deprives a people of these rights and oppresses them, the people have a further right to alter it or to abolish it. The British government in India has not only deprived the Indian people of their freedom but has based itself on the exploitation of the masses, and has ruined India economically, politically, culturally and spiritually. We believe, therefore, that India must sever the British connection and attain Purna Swaraj or Complete Independence.

India has been ruined economically. The revenue derived from our people is out of all proportion to our income. Our average income is seven pice, less than two pence, per day, and of the heavy taxes we pay, twenty percent are raised from the land revenue derived from the peasantry and three percent from the salt tax, which falls most heavily on the poor.

Village industries, such as handspinning, have been destroyed, leaving the peasantry idle for at least four months in the year, and dulling their intellect for want of handicrafts, and nothing has been substituted, as in other countries, for the crafts thus destroyed.

Customs and currency have been so manipulated as to heap further burdens on the peasantry. The British manufactured goods constitute the bulk of our imports. Customs duties betray clear partiality for British manufacturers, and revenue from them is used not to lessen the burden on the masses, but for sustaining a highly extravagant administration. Still more arbitrary has been the manipulation of the exchange ratio which has resulted in millions being drained away from the country.

Politically, India's status has never been so reduced, as under the British regime. No reforms have given real political power to the people. The tallest of us have to bend before foreign authority. The rights of free expression of opinion and free association have been denied to
us, and many of our countrymen are compelled to live in exile abroad and they cannot return to their homes. All administrative talent is killed, and the masses have to be satisfied with petty village offices and clerkships. Culturally, the system of education has torn us from our moorings, our training has made us hug the very chains that bind us. Spiritually, compulsory disarmament has made us unmanly, and the presence of an alien army of occupation, employed with deadly effect to crush in us the spirit of resistance, has made us think that we cannot look after ourselves or put up a defence against foreign aggression, or defend our homes and families from the attacks of thieves, robbers, and miscreants.

We hold it to be a crime against man and God to submit any longer to a rule that has caused this four-fold disaster in our country. We recognise, therefore, that the most effective way of gaining our freedom is not through violence. We will prepare ourselves by withdrawing, so far as we can, all voluntary association from the British Government, and will prepare for civil disobedience including non-payment of taxes. We are convinced that if we can but withdraw our voluntary help, stop payment of taxes without doing violence, even under provocation, the end of this inhuman role is assured. We, therefore, hereby solemnly resolve to carry out the Congress instructions issued from time to time for the purpose of establishing Purna Swaraj.

This Independence Pledge is a milestone in the history not only of the Indian National Congress but in the journey of the entire people of the country.

IV. THE DANDI MARCH

The Independence Day was first observed on 26th January 1930 all over the country. There was no province
or district which kept aloof from it. The thousands of public meetings and the tens of thousands people who took the pledge of complete independence made the resolution adopted at the Lahore Congress and the pledge prepared by the Congress Working Committee the common property of the people of the country.

The rulers got into a panic about the popular emotion that swept across the country. They tried to meet it with lathicharges and firings. Many, including the renowned leftist leader, Subhas Bose, were arrested and sentenced to long terms of imprisonment.

However, the rulers realized that the people’s upsurge for complete independence could not be suppressed by these actions. Consequently they initiated certain “conciliatory” moves. Within 24 hours of the Independence Day observation, Lord Irwin issued a statement to “remove the doubts” in the minds of the Indians on the nature of the Round Table Conference. It was a repetition of the statements made earlier by the Viceroy himself and the British ministers. However, it was couched in a language of appeasement.

In response to this, Gandhi made a statement which deserves particular attention. The statement revealed the gulf and contradiction that existed between the mass sentiments expressed through the observation of Independence Day and the political approach of the leadership represented by Gandhi. The contents of Gandhi’s statement can be summarised as follows:

1. It thanked the Viceroy “for having cleared the atmosphere and let us know exactly where we (the rulers and the Indian people) stand”.

2. The Congress is striving for the liberation of the starving peasants. In the struggle for its liberation, the Congress will make every effort to prevent it turning violent.

3. The Viceroy can take certain practical steps, if he desires to avoid a confrontation between the British rulers and the Indian people.
Gandhi explained these steps as follows:

a. Total prohibition.
b. Fix the rate of exchange at 1s. 4 d. per rupee.
c. Reduce the land tax at least by 50 per cent and bring that department under popular control.
d. Abolish the salt tax.
e. Reduction of military expenditure at least by fifty per cent as a first step towards reduction of military expenditure.
f. Reduction of salary of the highest paid civil servant at least by 50 per cent in proportion to the reduction in revenue incomes.
g. Protective tariff against foreign cloth.
h. Enactment of a bill reserving shipping to Indians.
i. Release of all political prisoners except those who are sentenced for or undergoing trial for murder or attempted murder; withdraw prosecution on political grounds; repeal of section 124 (a) relating to treason and the 1918 Act relating to detention without trial. Allow Indians living abroad to return to India.
j. Abolition of the CID or bringing it under popular control.
k. Issue of licences for fire-arms for self-defence, subject to popular control.

It is obvious that these eleven demands put together would not even mean Dominion Status, let alone full independence. Hence the statement aroused concern and doubts among the leftists. Even Jawaharlal Nehru who was officially the head of the Congress, was doubtful about these “eleven-points”.

But one who critically examines the events that took place at each stage since Gandhi’s entry into politics, needs to have no doubt on that score. The bourgeois leaders—both Gandhians and pro-legislaturists—were utilizing every opportunity to protect and develop its own (bourgeois) class interest through negotiations with the British rulers and to organize the common people, under strict control, in order
to create conditions for that. Gandhi’s attempt to reduce the national demand into the “eleven-points” within a month after the adoption of the full independence resolution was another form of this method of struggle.

A close look at the “eleven-points” would reveal the class interest that lay behind them. Most of them were the demands raised by the industrial and commercial bourgeois. While the demand for reduction or abolition of land tax, salt tax, etc., which was of vital interest to the large majority of poor peasants, the landless and workers, helped to rally the large majority of the poor and the middle-classes, it did not in the least hurt the interests of landlord-capitalist classes. It is meaningful that Gandhi did not include such issues as the heavy rent and interests borne by the peasantry and the just wages for workers and middle class employees among the burning problems faced by the poverty stricken people of India.

Even after the Lahore session, the congress leadership, including Gandhi, was eager for starting negotiations with the British. In fact, there were many intermediaries working between the British Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald and the Congress leaders to arrive at a compromise and Gandhi’s “eleven-points” formed the basis of such a compromise.

However, the situation prevailing at that time was not conducive for such negotiations. The mass sentiment that swept across the country before and after the Lahore Congress was against negotiations. Even if the Congress leaders were willing to disregard this factor and start negotiations with the British, the British rulers at that time were not willing for talks. However great the mass support of the Congress, there were the forces of communal-caste politics ready to rally against it. The rulers thought that by using these forces they could reject the national demand raised by the Congress. This was evident from the repeated statements made by the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for India in England and the Viceroy in India.
Thus, the politics of Gandhi who descended to the "points" ended up in political kite-flying. The kite raised by Gandhi, however, snapped in the storm of opposition from the British government.

As a natural consequence of this, the Congress—its bourgeois leadership—was compelled to take an approach of struggle. The Working Committee which met at Sabarmati for three days in the middle of February 1930 called upon the people and Congress organizations to prepare for a struggle. The Committee insisted that only those who take non-violence as a creed (i.e., not as a practical policy) should take part in the struggle. The Committee welcomed Gandhi's willingness to lead the struggle subject to this condition and authorized him and others who had accepted non-violence as a creed to organize the struggle. The Committee appealed to Congressmen and the people to extend all cooperation to the non-violence civil disobedience to be launched under the leadership of Gandhi. The Committee also suggested that with the launching of the movement all those connected with official institutions, including lawyers and students, should withdraw their cooperation to the government.

An examination of this decision together with the statements made by Gandhi before and after that would make two things clear. First, the bourgeois leadership including Gandhi visualized a mass struggle in which people would be brought to participate on the broadest possible scale. Second, the leadership was particular that this mass struggle should not go beyond the limits set by it and that if the doors of negotiations with the British government were opened at any stage of the struggle, that opportunity should be utilized to negotiate with them.

As Gandhi himself had made it clear in a letter to the Viceroy later and in many of his statements, the struggle under his leadership was organized, on the one hand, against the organized violence of the British government and, on the other, against the tendencies of violence spreading widely
among the people. That is, the aim of struggle was to convert the mass upsurge which Gandhi characterized as the "violent tendency spreading rapidly all over the country" into a mass movement that could be held in the grip of the bourgeoisie and from that position of strength bargain with the British rulers.

Gandhi who had been authorized to lead the struggle decided to organize country-wide civil disobedience on an issue which was suited most for the purpose. Salt was an essential article of the daily life of every family. The rules and duties imposed by the British government for about hundred years had deprived the people of their freedom to make salt. On the immediate minimum demand that the people should have the freedom to make salt, the Congress under Gandhi evolved a form of struggle of breaking the laws relating to the manufacture and distribution of salt.

This received country-wide publicity. While one section ridiculed the form of struggle of breaking the law by making salt from sea-water, another section was inspired by it. The "Salt Satyagraha" was discussed all over the country. The new wave of struggle swept across the country.

When statements regarding Salt Satyagraha began to come out, questions relating to its form and how and who would lead it came up before the people. Things became clear before long. It was made known that Gandhi himself would inaugurate the Salt Satyagraha, accompanied by about 75 inmates of the Sabarmati Ashram. They would start on a march on foot from the Ashram on 12th March and reach the village of Dandi on the coast of Gujarat on 5th April. On the next day which coincides with the 11th anniversary of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, they would make salt from the sea-water.

What would happen if Gandhi was arrested during the 26 day long Dandi March? Once Gandhi and his colleagues reached Dandi and broke the salt law, would civil disobedience be launched in other parts of the country? If so, how?
Would any other law besides the salt law be violated? If so, who would decide it, how would it be conducted?

Innumerable questions of this nature came up before the people and the Congress workers. Gandhi himself had thought over these questions and discussed them with his close colleagues. But, neither the people in general nor the Congress workers knew what the decisions were. As for them, this was of no consequence. They knew that India was going to witness an unprecedented country-wide mass struggle and that the Dandi March under Gandhi’s leadership was its beginning. They had read the reports on this march in the newspapers. Articles comparing the Dandi March with other earlier historic marches had attracted their attention. They were thrilled by the idea that they were the eye-witnesses to a historic event which would decisively influence the future of the country as a whole. And they did not demand anything more than this.

Meanwhile, Gandhi made another attempt to knock at the door of negotiations. On 2nd March, ten days before the start of the march, Gandhi wrote one more letter to the Viceroy. Enumerating the misdeeds of the British rule which was plundering India, he made it clear to the Viceroy that he did not “intend harm to a single Englishman or to any legitimate interest he may have in India”. He also added that his was an attempt also to convert the British people. He appealed to the British to change their policies at least at that late stage, and warned the Viceroy that if there was no indication of such a change, he and his colleagues would proceed to disregard the provisions of the salt law.

In response to the Viceroy’s negative reply, Gandhi wrote: “On bended knees I asked for bread and I have received stone instead”. He added: “It is open to the Viceroy to do any other things except sending the usual reply. But the time is not yet. He represents a nation that does not easily give in, that does not easily repent... It readily listens to physical force... The Viceroy’s reply does not surprise me... the only public peace the nation knows is the peace of the
public prison. India is one vast prison-house. I repudiate this law, and regard it as my sacred duty to break the mournful monotony of the compulsory peace that is choking the heart of the nation for want of free vent."

It had become obvious even before the Dandi march began that it would develop into a great country-wide movement. Therefore Gandhi and the Dandi marchers led by him were left free, while other Congress leaders were arrested and sentenced. Vallabhbhai Patel who was on his way to organize receptions to the Dandi marchers along their way, was arrested and sentenced even before the march started. Other Congress leaders were subjected to the same treatment all over the country. But the national sentiments that had been aroused around the Dandi March did not weaken. On the contrary, the situation in the country as a whole had never been so militant. In the place of one arrested, several more came forward to take up his position. On one side were the reports on the daily arrests, the trials and sentences, etc., and the touching descriptions of the Dandi March which appeared daily in the newspaper. On the other, there was the growing determination on the part of the people in millions to surge ahead braving all repressions until the victory is achieved.

It was in this emotion-packed background that Gandhi and his followers reached Dandi on 5th April. Gandhi stated that they would disregard the salt law the next morning, followed by similar actions in different forms. Gandhi once again wrote to the Viceroy with an appeal to abolish the salt laws. Gandhi thus once again made it clear on behalf of the national bourgeoisie that positive response would be forthcoming from the Congress if the rulers were willing to adopt the path of negotiation even at that late stage. But the government was not willing to oblige, which made the struggle inevitable.