

India's Right To Secede

SIR S. CRIPPS ON BRITISH OFFER

NEW DELHI, March 29.

In the course of a two-hour Press conference—probably the longest on record in India—Sir Stafford answered and elucidated, and sometimes parried, with exemplary patience and easy mastery some 500 questions on the draft declaration.

He made it clear that the status envisaged for the new Indian Union included the right of secession. This was explicitly laid down in the words that the treaty "will not impose any restriction on the power of the Indian Union to decide in future its relationship to other member States of the British Commonwealth." "The Indian Union," he said, "would be absolutely free to decide its future relations with other member States of the Commonwealth, one of which is Great Britain. It would be completely free either to remain within or go without the Commonwealth."

Explaining the use of the expression "cessation of hostilities," he pointed out that there was a difference between this and the "termination of the war." There might be a difference of one or two years between the cessation of hostilities and the end of the war. The idea was that the constitution-making body should be set up as early as practicable after the cessation of hostilities. "We do not impose anything on India, not even a time limit," he remarked.

EXPANSION OF EXECUTIVE

He declined to say anything specific about the last paragraph of the document dealing with the immediate arrangements envisaged in the Government of India executive, but said that "the intention of this paragraph is to indicate to the Governor-General, who is responsible for the formation of the Government of India, the broad lines upon which, in accordance with the scheme, that Government may be formed. All the details of the formation of that Government are for the Governor-General to decide and we have not attempted and should not attempt to take that responsibility out of his hands."

Nothing was obligatory on the Governor-General but he could Indianise the Executive Council. The general direction was laid down in the paragraph. The object was to give the fullest measure of government to the Indian people at the present time consistent with the possibilities of the present constitution which could not be changed till the end of the war. But there might be some small change to be made with regard to the composition of the Executive Council, particularly the condition that there should be three service members of 10 years' standing. "The intention of the document as far as possible, subject to the reservation of defence, is to put power in the hands of the Indian leaders."

Sir Stafford added: "So far as the Governor-General could, within the sections of the existing constitution, he would attempt to form his Executive Council with a body of Indian leaders who could give leadership to the country and could help to direct the counsels of the country in the Executive Council of the Commonwealth, in the War Cabinet and of the United Nations in the Pacific War Council."

Sir Stafford made it clear "the scheme goes through as a whole or is rejected as a whole." It would not be possible to retain only the part relating to the immediate arrangements at the Centre and discard the rest of the draft scheme.

"The defence of India will not be in Indian hands, even if all the parties want it," he declared in reply to a series of questions. It would be the worst thing for the defence of India; it would disorganise the whole defence arrangements, and such disorganisation would be fatal."

INDIANS AND DEFENCE

"Would you not agree to joint responsibility between England and India for defence?" asked a correspondent.

Sir Stafford said joint responsibility for defence had been conceded so far as the document laid it down that His Majesty's Government must inevitably bear the responsibility for and retain the control and direction of the defence of India as part of their world war effort, but the task of organising to the full the military, moral and material resources of India must be the responsibility of the Government of India with the co-operation of the peoples of India.

"Would you agree to give internal defence to an Indian?"—There was a fallacy in speaking of the internal defence of India, replied Sir Stafford. When there was a state of war it was impossible to dissociate internal from external defence. Taking a hypothetical case like the movement of troops from say Madras to Calcutta, he said, it might be said to be a purely internal matter but really it was a question which depended upon a multitude of other questions, such as whether the Japanese were likely to take Ceylon, the position in Burma, the playing of the fleet in the Pacific and whether there were other troops available to move from the Middle East, etc. It would be impossible to dissociate the internal movement of troops from the general strategy and tactics of the war.

So long, again, as a large portion of the effective navy, air force and army had to be brought from British, Dominion or other sources, it was essential that the control of the movement of all those forces should be under a centralised body. They were so today through the Commander-in-Chief under the control of the Chiefs of Staff, who got their directions from the War Cabinet.

It would be dishonest to say that

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BRITISH DESIRE TO SEE STATES JOIN INDIAN UNION

Sir S. Cripps's Avowal

NOW-OR-NEVER SETTLEMENT OF DEADLOCK

(Continued from page 1).

an Indian Defence Member would be responsible for the defence of India.

He referred to the decision to appoint an Indian member to the War Cabinet and said it was in that Cabinet that decisions as to strategy were made. He suggested that the full membership of the War Cabinet was the important thing and not the mere appointment of a Defence Member.

His attention was drawn to the position in Australia. "The position in Australia today," he said, "is that the whole thing is under American control." (Laughter).

PROVINCES AND UNION

Earlier at the conference, Sir Stafford indicated that it would be obligatory on all provinces to take part in the election to the constitution-making body. As soon as the constitution was settled everything would be transferred to India. If some provinces decided not to accede, then so far as they were concerned they would not be parties to the constitution. It would be open to them to form a separate union. He envisaged the possibility that only provinces which were contiguous could form a separate union.

Replying to questions about the procedure to determine whether a province did or did not desire to accede, Sir Stafford said in any case where the result was not absolutely clear the suggestion had been made that it should be done by a plebiscite of the adult population of the whole province. Where the provincial Legislative Assembly had decided by a majority of 80 per cent. to accede it would not be necessary to have a plebiscite. If 80 per cent. of the legislature did not vote in favour of accession then the minority should have the right to challenge a plebiscite.

The plebiscite itself would be decided by a bare majority.

"If for a year a constitution-making body the Indian communities meet together in order to forge a united constitution for India they will probably succeed," said Sir Stafford. "If they do not we can do nothing more to help them to succeed. If after having done that they want to separate, nobody in the world can stop them."

METHOD FOR UNITY

The object, he added, was to offer a method by which there could be a united India governed by Indians and the British would not take up an attitude which would lay them open to the charge that it was the British Government which was preventing a united India because they were relying upon differences between Indians. "Unfortunately, our experience in the past ten years has been that the Indians have not yet solved the problem or put forward a joint scheme for the giving of self-government to India."

He made it clear that in case there were non-acceding provinces which were not financially self-supporting, the British Government would not undertake financing them. They would have to consider the financial problem before deciding not to accede.

Did the scheme mean that Pakistan had been conceded? asked a correspondent. "Certainly not," replied Sir Stafford.

There would be no condition in the treaty to be signed between the British Government and the constitution-making body as regards guarding the vested rights of the British in India.

Would the Indian Union have the right to take expropriatory measures?—The Indian Union would be free to take all measures open to a sovereign State to take.

The decisions of the constituent assembly would have to be passed by a majority of the provinces, and the

provinces which supported the majority would be theoretically the minimum which could form the union.

As a Socialist are you satisfied with the scheme? was another question put to him.

His answer was that with all the views he held he was satisfied that this was the best possible solution of the Indian problem in order to give the maximum chances of creating a united India.

It was the British Government's desire that all or as many of the Indian States as possible should join the Indian Union. Where in the Indian States elected legislatures existed, these would send representatives to the constitution-making body, but in the others the existing machinery would be used for the purpose.

It would not be possible to compel Indian States to join the Union but many suggestions would be made and methods of persuasion would be used. He thought that the smaller States would have to be grouped together for the purpose of being represented on the constitution-making body.

Would not the Indian States representatives be really representatives of the rulers? queried a pressman. The rulers, he replied, were the only people who at present existed in those States and could appoint men for that body.

The Indian States would be invited to appoint representatives in the same proportion to their total population as in the case of representatives of British India as a whole and with the same powers as British Indian members. The scheme did not contemplate any forced change in the constitution of any Indian State. It contemplated that each Indian State would use the best method it had for appointing peoples' representatives. If there was no other way, it would be nomination by the ruler.

INDIA AND ATLANTIC CHARTER

In view of this scheme was there any difficulty in India's participating in the Atlantic Charter?—There is no difficulty at all.

Sir Stafford indicated that the draft had undergone some drafting changes as a result of the discussions hitherto held by him in India. "Is this now the final document?" he was asked. He replied: "This is the final document at this stage." (Laughter).

As at previous Press conferences, Sir Stafford dominated this evening's conference, which was attended by nearly 200 people, including British, American and Swiss, besides Indian correspondents. Halfway through he took off his coat, both physically and figuratively and at one stage dealt sharply and severely with a questioner, who was heard to make disparaging remarks about British intentions and pledges. Sparks flew as he turned on him and rapped out: "I have a long-bearing temper, but there is a limit to it and if you propose to make adverse comments against the British people or the Government, I shall terminate the conference. I have got certain courtesies due to me as well as to the Press."