

THE SAPRU PROPOSALS

HARD words break no bones, and the Sapru Committee, being made up of seasoned politicians, will know better than to attach undue significance to Mr. Jinnah's splenetic outburst. So far as the outside world is concerned, the League leader's denunciation of a sincere attempt to find a way out of the deadlock, coupled with the fact that since he assumed the role of dictator of the League he has not put forward a single suggestion that was calculated to attain this object, cannot but produce a most unfavourable impression. The Sapru proposals may not be regarded by everybody as satisfactory in every respect; indeed no set of proposals made for tackling so thorny a problem can hope to commend itself to everybody. But it will be observed that Mr. Jinnah has not cared to consider the proposals on the merits. He denounces them outright from *a priori* considerations which in the context are altogether irrelevant. He says, "Two alternatives are offered. If either of them is accepted the Muslim aspirations and their national demand of Pakistan would be torpedoed by this subtle and flanking movement." From the resolution cabled by the Sapru Committee to Lord Wavell it will be seen that 'the two alternatives' to which Mr. Jinnah refers represent but one part of the Committee's proposals—that which is concerned with the formation of an *interim* Government at the Centre. The Committee has proposed in addition that all political prisoners and detenus should be released immediately, that a Royal Proclamation should be issued declaring India as an independent State ranking as a full equal in the British Commonwealth, and that popular Ministries should be re-established in the Provinces. Since Mr. Jinnah does not specifically refer to these suggestions we presume he does not object to them. And indeed it would be strange if he objected to India being proclaimed an independent State, on the ground that it would prejudice the Muslim claim to Pakistan. For, the Proclamation would be a formal avowal by Britain of her resolve to relinquish her control over India; the question whether free India would remain one or would divide itself into two or more States would remain to be answered by the people of India themselves in the course of their deliberations over the future Constitution. Mr. Jinnah declares, "The question of Pakistan is the foremost issue to be decided preliminary to any consideration of the framing of any future constitution." Whether the Pakistan issue is to be settled as one of the issues arising for solution by the constitution-framing body or whether it should be settled first and then only should the machinery for constitution-making be set up or begin to function—this is a question that must be determined by the free Indian people among themselves by agreement. While Britain may offer her good offices to promote a settlement, it is unnecessary, and indeed it would be improper, for her to retain her control over India on the plea that she must settle this question first; in fact that would conflict with the very principle of self-determination on which Mr. Jinnah bases the claim to Pakistan. On the other hand, if Britain establishes her disinterestedness, as the Sapru Committee suggests, by formally declaring her intention to relinquish control, a friendly offer coming from her then to promote an agreed settlement would be much more acceptable to all parties vitally interested in the country's future.

If, as we hope we have shown, Mr. Jinnah cannot with any grace oppose the Sapru demand for the issue of a Royal Proclamation, his violent attack against the Sapru proposals for an *interim* Government at the Centre rests on a basic misconception. Neither of the alternatives proposed by the Committee can be interpreted by any stretch of imagination as calculated "to change the present Constitution in any way which would, directly or indirectly, be on the basis of a United India." The first alternative suggests that the Federation part of the Government of

India Act should be put into operation forthwith, with the only modification that the requirement that a certain proportion of the Indian States should first express their willingness to accede need not be insisted upon. Far from this proposal aiming at changing the present Constitution it would in reality implement it. The British Government under the existing Act has the constitutional right to introduce Federation on its own volition. Since the States will not be compelled to accede against their will, they cannot in reason object if the British Government should decide no longer to be bound by the self-imposed condition that Federation shall be introduced only if a sufficient number of States accede. And it is not open to Mr. Jinnah or anybody else to object either on the ground that the Constitution is being changed, because the Constitution is not being changed at all. As to the second alternative proposed by the Sapru Committee, it would no doubt involve some changes in the existing Constitution. But these changes cannot be reasonably regarded as prejudicing Pakistan. The principal Sapru proposals in regard to the *interim* Centre are that the entire Executive Council of the Viceroy should, except for the Commander-in-Chief, be composed of Indians 'commanding the confidence of the parties in the Central Legislature'; that the Reserved subjects should be abolished; and that the decision as to when general elections should be held 'should be left to the National Government at the Centre. None of these stipulations can be held to prejudice the League's claim to press for Pakistan when a constitution for free India comes to be discussed. They all aim, no doubt, at increasing the power and influence which a popular Government at the Centre, having the support of the Legislature, would exercise; but as that Government would have the League as well as other Parties represented on it we cannot see how Mr. Jinnah can consistently object to this. As the *de jure* position of this *interim* Government would still be that of the Viceroy's Executive Council, there would be no question of changing the Constitution. Mr. Jinnah himself was not averse in 1940, some months after the Lahore Resolution on Pakistan was passed, to the League's being represented on the Viceroy's Executive Council when it was proposed to expand it to include 'representative Indians'. And, far from being opposed to the Council's being invested with ampler powers than it then possessed, he insisted that the League could co-operate with the Government only on the basis of 'equal share in the authority of the Government.' It was because of the unwillingness of the Viceroy to concede this and other demands of the League which aimed at securing for it primacy in the Government that the League ultimately refused the Viceroy's offer. If Mr. Jinnah now repudiates by implication the position he then took up, by refusing so much as to consider the setting up of a *de facto* National Government which would be possible only on the basis of co-operation of all popular Parties including the Muslim League, it only shows how much more unreasonable is his stand to-day. Only an uncomfortable realisation on his part that it would be impossible to justify that attitude on grounds that would be acceptable to impartial opinion could have induced him to dodge argument by raising the slogan, 'Pakistan in danger.'