

**Ramgarh Congress, August Offer**

There was a general sentiment of launching immediate mass struggle among some leaders, after resignation of the Congress ministries. However, different stakeholders responded as follows:

**Gandhi and his supporters did not favour an immediate mass struggle. Gandhi was in favour of continued cooperation at the provincial level. He said that he would offer the British moral support during the war but on a non-violent basis.** Gandhians believed that the cause of Allied forces (of which the British were a part) was just, Congress organization was not fit to lead another mass struggle immediately, there was a possibility that a mass struggle could degenerate into communal conflict and the masses were not ready to participate effectively in another conflict.

**The leftists** like Subhash Chandra Bose, Communist Party of India, Congress Socialist Party, the Royists – characterized the war as an imperial struggle and supported an all-out effort to dislodge British government from India.

- Bose continued with his strong militant stand of direct action against the colonial government forcing it to agree to the grant of freedom. Once again, he pointed out that Britain's difficulty was to be seized as India's opportunity.
- He even mooted the idea of forming another Congress party to lead a mass struggle but the CPI and CSP did not support him.

**Nehru** was against both imperial and Fascist powers but tilted against the fascist powers and therefore went along with Congress and Gandhi. He reiterated that complete independence for India must be a precondition for Congress support to the British war effort.

- **Ramgarh Congress (March 1940)**

- President: Abul Kalam Azad
- The Congress reaffirmed its demand for complete independence.
  - Indian freedom could not be in the form of dominion or any other status within the imperial structure. Sovereignty, said the Congress resolution, must rest with the people, whether in the States (the princely states) or the provinces.
- "Congress would resort to civil disobedience as soon as the Congress organization is considered fit enough or if circumstances precipitate a crisis."



Jawaharlal Nehru, industrialist Jamnalal Bajaj, Sarojini Naidu, Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, and Maulana Azad at the 1940 Ramgarh Session

- It said that India never intended to establish a new nation on the ruin of British crown and accepted that Indian **Congress had no intention to support the extreme Nazi regime** as against the British paramount. The Congress further stated that it would support the British government to fight the war as it is meaningless to resort to non-violence when enemy is at the doorsteps. Thus, it appreciated the grave crisis with which the British were confronted with at that time, **agreed to cooperate** with the rulers on the conditions:
  - **Provisional National Government immediately**
  - Announcement of the goal of **Independence in India after the war.**

### **August Offer by Linlithgow (August 1940)**

- In response, the British authorities made it clear that power could not be transferred to a body which was not accepted by the Muslims and other minorities. But they came up with the August Offer as a reply to the offer of cooperation made by the Congress towards the government.
- **Timing:** For many months the British government did not pay any attendance to demands of Indian leaders but when **Battle of Britain** commenced in July 1940, Britain came under Immense pressure. British government was at a worse situation, as almost all the nations of Europe fell before the German army. The deteriorating war situation in Europe forced them to seek all help from India, and thus appease India by conciliating them.



- **Proposals:**

- **Long-term (post-war)**

- India would be granted self-government or **Dominion Status**
- Setting up of a **representative constitution-making body:** a Constituent Assembly after the war where mainly Indians would decide the Constitution according to their social, economic and political conceptions, subject to fulfilment of the obligation of the Government regarding defence, minority rights, treaties with states, all India services.
- No future Constitution to be adopted without the consent of minorities.



- **Interim**

- Full Indian support was expected during war period.
- **Increase** in the number of **Indians in the Governor-General's Council**
- **A war advisory council** comprising Indian members would be established.

- **Congress Reaction**

- It failed to satisfy the aspirations of Indian Nationalists It was rejected by congress immediately.
  - The Congress had been demanding **complete Independence** since 1930 but it promised **dominion status** after the end of the war.

- Indian leaders were **demanding transfer of response to Indian hands immediately**, but the August Offer contained no such provision, congress was not against the idea of drafting constitution, but it wanted that the constant making process should commence immediately not after the end of the war.
  - The Government had taken the **adamant position that no constitutional advance could be made till the Congress came to an agreement with the Muslim leaders**. It was just a ploy, and they were very well of British intentions of dividing Indians so that British Rule could continue.
- The Indian politicians rejected this August offer' forthwith.
  - Nehru said boldly that the whole idea of 'Dominion Status' "was as dead as a doornail."
  - Gandhi declared that August Offer widened the gulf between the British and Indian nationalists.
- **Muslim League Reaction**
  - The League rejected the Offer and announced that it would not accept anything less than partition of India.
    - In March 1940, the League had demanded the creation of separate state for Muslims by adopting a **resolution at Lahore**. So, it wanted separate state for Muslims, but August Offer did not make any such promise.
    - The August Offer just promised to safeguard the interest of minorities, but the nature of safety was not elaborated.
    - AIML wanted the League to get equal representation in the reconstituted executive council of G.G but the government did not make any such promise.

#### **Individual Satyagraha (Oct 1940 – Dec 1941)**

- Meanwhile, the government issued **ordinance after ordinance** taking away the freedom of speech and that of the press and the right to organize associations. Thus, the Congress decided to resort to civil disobedience. Towards the end of 1940, the Congress once again asked Gandhi to take command.
- Gandhi insisted that it would be an individual or limited rather than mass movement of resistance. It would be a limited Satyagraha on an individual basis by a few selected individuals in every locality.
- **Objectives:**
  - He wanted to ensure that the British were not embarrassed at their hour of crisis.
  - To show that nationalist patience was not due to weakness.
  - To express people's feeling that they were not interested in the war and that they made no distinction between Nazism and the double autocracy that ruled India.
  - To give another opportunity to the Government to accept Congress' demands peacefully.
  - To prepare the people for the coming struggle the Congress organization was being put back in shape; opportunist elements were being discovered and pushed

out of the organization; and above all the people were being politically aroused, educated and mobilized.

- **Nature of Individual Satyagraha:**

- The Satyagrahi would **beforehand inform the district magistrate** of the time and place where he or she was going to make the anti-war speech.
- Public anti-war declaration by Satyagrahi: *'It is wrong to help the British war-effort with men or money. The only worthy effort is to resist all war with non-violent resistance.'*
- And if the Government did not arrest a Satyagrahi, he or she would not only repeat the performance but move into the villages and start a trek towards Delhi, thus participating in a movement that came to be known as the **'Chalo Delhi' (onwards to Delhi) movement.**



- Satyagraha
  - The carefully chosen Satyagrahis - **Vinoba Bhave** was to be the first Satyagrahi on 17 October 1940 and **Nehru** the second - were surrounded by huge crowds when they appeared on the platform, and the authorities could often arrest them only after they had made their speeches.
  - By May 1941, 25,000 people had been convicted for individual civil disobedience.
- The Forward Bloc leader Subhas Chandra insisted that it was high time to launch a civil disobedience movement and strike at the enemy. Subhas Chandra launched a civil disobedience movement on his own which found a favourable response in Bengal.

## Aftermath

- Withdrawal of the individual satyagraha movement in **December 1941.**
- The Congress leaders, released from jails, were anxious to defend Indian Territory and go to the aid of the allies.
- The CWC overrode Gandhi's and Nehru's objections and passed a resolution offering to cooperate with the Government in the defense of India, if:
  - Full independence was given after the war,
  - The substance of power was transferred immediately.
- It was at this time that Gandhi designated Nehru as his chosen successor.

## The Cripps Mission (Mar-Apr 1942)

**Background reasons** for the British to break the deadlock after the rejection of the 'August offer' in 1940 by the Indian leadership. Deteriorating war situation, particularly on the eastern frontier of India, forced both parties to engage in serious dialogue.

- In 1941, two major changes in world politics took place.
  - On June 22, 1941, **Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union**. Repeated success of the Germans in the War kept the British on their toes. Quite a few people in India were happy to discover their enemy number one in distress, but the Congress High Command refrained from doing anything which might multiply the difficulties for the British. The
  - On 7th Dec 1941, **Japan entered the WW** with a massive attack on American base located at Pearl Harbor, in which more than 2000 American soldiers got killed and the complete scenario of war got changed. Within a span of few weeks Japanese forces captured almost whole of southeast Asia, it was quite clear that **India would be next Japanese Target**.
- Even a diehard imperialist like **Premier Churchill** looked for support of the Indian people and their leadership to meet the challenge of the Japanese menace.
- **Indian leadership** also appeared inclined to open negotiation, as they were doubly concerned about the defence of India.
  - The Congress leadership had refused to go along with Gandhiji on his proposal to a non-violent resistance to war, so much so that he was relieved of his leadership after the withdrawal of the individual satyagraha movement in December 1941.
  - Thus, Congress leadership had no moral compunction in extending its support to the British war efforts if its demand for freedom was conceded by the British.
- During early 1942, **Chiang Kai-Shek**, visited India and extended moral support to the cause of the Indian independence.
- Interest was also shown by **President Roosevelt** in Indian affairs. Roosevelt even contradicted Churchill's statement that the Atlantic Charter was not applicable to the Indian situation.
- Not only that, **a section of the British Cabinet led by the Laborites** also favoured some fresh initiative on the part of the British to break off the Indian deadlock.



All this influenced the British Government to set up the Cripps Mission in March 1942.

Sir Stafford Cripps reached India on 22 March 1942 and stayed till 11 April 1942, engaging himself in serious discussions with the Indian leadership.

## The Cripps Proposal

The preamble of the draft proposal clearly mentioned that the basic objective of the British Government was to usher India to a state of self-governance. To that end, the government contemplated the creation of a new Indian Union, having **dominion status**.

- **As a long-term measure (post-War)**

- An **elected constitution-making body** would be set up to frame a new constitution for India.
  - **Electoral college**
    - Elected members of the provincial assemblies
    - Nominated representatives from the Indian states
  - The total number of the constitution-making body would be one-tenth of the number of the electoral college. The election would be held based on **proportional representation**.
  - This Constituent Assembly would frame the **new constitution** for India.
- British Government committed itself to accept the new constitution **subject to two conditions**:
  - **A province** at any stage would be free to reject the new constitution and opt-out of the Union and could retain its existing constitutional position.
    - However, it would be also open to future accession to the Union on its own discretion.
    - Such non-acceding provinces could frame their own constitution, which, in the eye of His Majesty's Government, would have the same status as the Indian Union.
  - **Indian states** were given freedom to join or not to join the proposed union.
    - A new treaty arrangement would have to be re-negotiated in the light of the new situation. This would apply to both acceding and non-acceding states.

- **Interim phase**

- Until the new constitution comes into being, His Majesty's government must bear the responsibility for and retain the control and direction of the Defence of India as a part of their World War effort.
- The government of India would bear the responsibility for mobilising the military, moral and material resources of India with the **cooperation of the people of India**.
  - Thus, **Indians** would immediately become **members of the Viceroy's Executive Council**, primarily with a view to prop up war efforts.
  - The leaders of the principal sections of the Indian people were invited for immediate and effective **participation in commonwealth as well as in the United Nations**.
- Thus, they were exhorted to give their active and constructive help in the discharge of a task, which was vital and essential for the future freedom of India.



## Indian Reaction

It was clear that whereas **the long-term goal was clearer and more specific; the short-term arrangements were left deliberately vague and inconclusive.**

Several political groups like the Hindu Mahasabha, the leaders of the depressed classes, the Akalis, Anglo-Indians, and the Indian Christians rejected the proposal for their own reasons. For example,

- **Dr. Ambedkar** rejected Cripps plan because there were no provisions to safeguard their interest.
- **Sikhs of Punjab** also rejected Cripps plan because they were apprehensive that if province of Punjab rejected new constitution they will be left at mercy of Muslims.
- **Hindu Mahasabha** rejected Cripps plan on the ground that the freedom given to provinces to accept or reject a new constant was a threat on unity and integrity of India. It wanted that the members of C.A should elected without any safeguard for any community.

The only political party to welcome the scheme was the **Radical Democratic Party led by M.N. Roy**. But the two dominant political organisations which really mattered, viz., the Indian National Congress and the Indian Muslim league, entered a sustained negotiation with Cripps.

## Negotiations with the Congress

The Congress Party was unhappy with the Cripps proposal.



- **Mahatma Gandhi**, after he came to know of the details of the proposal, asked Cripps to go back to his country by the first available plane. He even nodded his agreement when someone commented that the proposal was like 'a post-dated-cheque drawn on a crashing bank'.
- **Jawaharlal Nehru** was profoundly depressed by the contents, nature and implications of the proposal.

**The Congress had serious objections** to the long-term part of the proposal primarily on three counts:

- Instead of **Purna Swaraj** only dominion status had been conceded.
- Both the British provinces and the Indian states had been granted **the right to opt out** of the union, which would result in the dismemberment of the country.
  - Conceding the right of the British Provinces and the Indian states to opt out of the Union was nothing but **opening a Pandora's box for the balkanisation of India**.
  - The Cripps Mission gave a big **boost to the Muslim League** as it found in the proposal, a virtual **endorsement of its idea of Pakistan**.
- **Indian princes** had been given the right to nominate/appoint their representatives to the Constituent Assembly instead of the people being given the right to elect them directly.

However, the threat to the Japanese menace was too near to be ignored and the Congress leadership was interested in the optimal mobilisation of the people in defence of India. Hence, despite their reservation on the proposals, they willingly negotiated with Cripps on the nature and extent of immediate transfer of power to the people of India.

Thus, the Congress entered serious **negotiations with Cripps on the interim arrangement to be made, even though it rejected its long-term arrangements.**

**Maulana Azad**, the Congress President and **Jawaharlal Nehru** were the main negotiators on behalf of the Congress.

- The Congress leaders, at that time were looking for **certain concrete political gains** and they were not satisfied with mere promises for the future. They insisted that the **interim Government** must be a cabinet government with full powers including the defence portfolio. The Indian nationalists felt that the complete transfer of power to Indian hands was necessary to organise the war effort.
- The British refused to accept the Congress demand for the immediate transfer of effective power to Indians. The exigencies of the war were being used as a pretext to **deny substantial political concessions** to the Indian people, while it tried to extract maximum concessions from the Indian leadership.

The take it or leave it attitude of Stafford Cripps left Indians with no choice. **The negotiations between Cripps and the Indian leaders thus broke down.**

**The Muslim League rejected the Cripps proposal** as there was no assurance of a separate Muslim nation. The League did not like the idea of constituent assembly as such a body, they felt, would be dominated by the Hindus. The Muslim leaders claimed that partition was "the only solution" of India's constitutional problem.

### Critical Analysis:

The Cripps Mission failed due to various reasons.

- **Cripps could not cope with the various demands floated by various Indian voices.**
  - To pacify the pluralist Indian political leadership, he too, spoke in many voices. He sought to please everybody, but in the end could not satisfy anybody. ‘
  - His only ambition was to become the Prime Minister of Britain by making his mission to India a success.
- Cripps alone was not responsible for the breakdown of the negotiation. The **Indian Viceroy, the bureaucracy, Lord Wavell and Churchill, the British Prime Minister** also contributed to the collapse of the scheme.
  - Winston Churchill could not hide his intentions when he flatly said, "I did not become the King's First Minister to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire".



- It seemed more of a **window dressing** on the part of the British to meet the **pressure of the world public opinion**, rather than a genuine attempt to transfer substantial power to the people of India.

However, on several counts, the **Cripps Mission marked an important milestone** on the road to a negotiated constitutional settlement between the British Government and the people of India.

- For the first time, the British Government clearly **accepted the principle of self-determination** for the people of India. It conceded their **right to frame their own constitution**, which was a long-standing demand of the Indian national movement.
- **The British people** of all political hues got **committed to the idea of freedom for India**, which none of them could retrace subsequently.
- It was **the first major attempt of the Congress leadership to enter a detailed negotiation** with the British on their own: on all other earlier occasions, it was Mahatma Gandhi who had negotiated with the British.



But the immediate impact of the failure of the Cripps Mission was that it left the Indian people more determined to persevere on the path of struggle.

The failure of Cripps mission in satisfying Indian aspirations greatly disheartened Indian Nationalists. It also brought about a **distinct change in Gandhi's mood**. Earlier, he had been against launching any mass agitation against the colonial rulers during the war. He now asked for complete British withdrawal from India and was willing to go for a mass movement, despite the war. He realized that if British were so rigid in accepting Indian demands at a time when empire was fighting for its existence, their attitude won't be better after the end of the war.

It, therefore, provided a **historical backdrop to the Quit India Movement**.