

This non-violence will be expressed through civil disobedience, for the moment confined to the inmates of the Satyagraha Ashram, but ultimately designed to cover all those who choose to join the movement with its obvious limitations.

I know that in embarking on non-violence I shall be running what might fairly be termed a mad risk. But the victories of truth have never been won without risks, often of the gravest character. Conversion of a nation that has consciously or unconsciously preyed upon another, far more numerous, far more ancient and no less cultured than itself, is worth any amount of risk. . . .

The plan through civil disobedience will be to combat such evils as I have sampled out. If we want to sever the British connection it is because of such evils. When they are removed the path becomes easy. Then the way to friendly negotiation will be open. If the British commerce with India is purified of greed, you will have no difficulty in recognizing our independence. I respectfully invite you then to pave the way for immediate removal of those evils, and thus open a way for a real conference between equals, interested only in promoting the common good of mankind through voluntary fellowship and in arranging terms of mutual help and commerce equally suited to both. . . .

This letter is not in any way intended as a threat but is a simple and sacred duty peremptory on a civil resister. Therefore I am having it specially delivered by a young English friend who believes in the Indian cause and is a full believer in non-violence and whom Providence seems to have sent to me, as it were, for the very purpose.<sup>17</sup>

I remain, Your sincere friend, M. K. Gandhi

[CWMG 43:2-3, 4, 5-8.]

### *FROM THE GANDHI-IRWIN PACT TO QUIT INDIA*

Gandhi's negotiations with Lord Irwin led to the Gandhi-Irwin Pact and the suspension of the civil disobedience campaign set off by the Salt March. Many, but not all, political prisoners were released, and Gandhi agreed to attend the Second Round Table Conference in late 1931 in London. At his own insistence, Gandhi was the sole official Congress representative at these talks. Although his stay in London earned him considerable good will among segments of the British public and he made many personal contacts, the talks failed to produce agreement on steps of political advance for India.

Upon his return to India, Gandhi moved to resume the civil disobedience campaign, and he and hundreds of other congressmen were jailed. This period was marked by Gandhi's fast against the government's Communal Award, which granted separate electorates to the Untouchables. Gandhi's fast pressured Dr. Ambedkar to

agree to an alteration of the Communal Award called “The Poona Pact,” which gave the Untouchables more reserved seats but with joint electorates (see Ambedkar-Gandhi selections).

After passage of the Government of India Act of 1935, Gandhi agreed to the participation of the Congress in the elections of 1936–37. After the first of these, the Congress formed ministries in seven provinces. Gandhi was against the Congress entering into coalitions and so prevented any Congress-Muslim League alliance in Bengal. Once the Second World War began in 1939, the Congress resigned from all ministries, since it had not been consulted on India’s joining the war. Lord Linlithgow, on behalf of the British government, had brought India into the war against Germany.

Gandhi led the individual satyagraha campaign of 1940 and then inspired the August 1942 movement of non-violent resistance to the Raj, called the “Quit India Movement.” In between these campaigns Gandhi met the Cripps Mission, but the Congress and Gandhi declined its terms. The 1940 individual satyagraha efforts led to a modest number of arrests. But “Quit India” was a mass protest movement which, though it started non-violently, soon resulted in many acts of violence. This violence was led in some areas by members of the Congress Socialist Party (notably Jayaprakash Narayan, Rammanohar Lohia, and Aruna Asaf Ali) who had gone underground when threatened with arrest. They aimed to attack property, not people, in an effort to weaken the Raj. But the movement also involved mass and spontaneous demonstrations by students, peasants, and workers, especially in Bihar, eastern Uttar Pradesh, Midnapore district in Bengal, and quite a few other local areas across northern and central India. It was met with fierce repression by the Raj, and at least 90,000 people were jailed and probably more than a thousand killed. The rebellion was crushed by the end of 1942, but pockets of resistance held out into 1944.

Gandhi issued many statements following the failure of the Cripps Mission, and wrote in the “Harijan” of April 26, 1942, “Whatever the consequences, therefore, to India, her real safety and of Britain’s too lie in orderly and timely British withdrawal from India. All talk of treaties with the princes and obligations towards minorities are a British creation designed for the preservation of British rule and British interests. It must melt before the stern reality that faces all of us. . . . The fiction of majority and minority will vanish like the mist before the morning sun of liberty. Truth to tell, there will be neither majority nor minority in the absence of the paralyzing British arms. The millions of India would then be an undefined but one mass of humanity. I have no doubt that at that time the natural leaders will have wisdom enough to evolve an honourable solution to their difficulties.”<sup>18</sup>

The Congress moved ahead with its plans for civil disobedience on a wide scale with the resolution of August 7, 1942, calling for the British to withdraw immediately from India. Gandhi spoke supportively and at length on the resolution. On August 9 he conveyed his last instructions through his secretary, Pyarelal: “Let every non-vio-

lent soldier of freedom write out the slogan ‘Do or Die’ on a piece of paper or cloth, and stick it on his clothes, so that in case he died in the course of offering satyagraha, he might be distinguished by that sign from other elements who do not subscribe to non-violence.”<sup>19</sup> Gandhi also suggested that each participant in the cause was “free to interpret ahimsa in your own way.”<sup>20</sup> The same day Gandhi was arrested along with all of the top Congress leaders.

Gandhi was in jail during the war until he was released in 1944 to afford him the opportunity to negotiate with Mr. Jinnah and the Muslim League. These discussions led nowhere, and Gandhi agreed to Congress participation in the postwar elections. Lord Wavell arranged talks after the elections, and then the Cabinet Mission visited India in 1946, offering proposals for the transfer of power into Indian hands. (There is further discussion of these moves and their consequences in the introduction to chapter 7.)

## GANDHI'S RESPONSES TO INDIA'S CIVIL WAR IN HIS LAST YEAR

Although Gandhi gave primacy to his “constructive program” of social reforms to attain swaraj, history will remember him for his salt march of 1930, and then for his heroic fasts in Calcutta and Delhi to contain the communal violence of India’s civil war in 1947–48.

In terms of India’s escalating communal problems, even after Independence, Gandhi insisted that it was the clear and present obligation of the Hindu majority to protect India’s Muslim minority. Hindus justified oppression of Muslims by arguing that in their new-found democracy, a majority had the right to prevail, and this was what popular sovereignty meant. Gandhi countered with a liberal affirmation of minority rights, and then went further by contending that majority rights should be earned through fulfillment of civic responsibility. Excerpted below are two speeches, of June 29 and December 20, 1947, given in the great public squares of New Delhi, outside the chambers where India’s new federal constitution was being written, and finally one statement dictated during his last fast, in January 1948.

*June 29, 1947*

*Brothers and Sisters,*

Yesterday I talked to you about duty. However, I was not able to say all that I had intended to say. Whenever a person goes anywhere certain duties come to devolve on him. The man who neglects his duty and cares only to safeguard his rights does not know that rights that do not spring from duties done cannot be safeguarded. This applies also to the Hindu–Muslim rela-