

## 1.2. 1935 ACT AND WORKING OF PROVINCIAL AUTONOMY: CONGRESS AND OTHER MINISTRIES

### Brief Summary...

The Government of India Act, 1935 and Provincial Autonomy • The Federal Structure was refused by the Congress, Muslim League and the Native Rulers • The Provincial Part was executed • Congress swept the poll • The result of the Muslim League was not satisfactory • Congress formed ministries in seven provinces out of eleven provinces • Coalition ministries were formed in two provinces • Bengal and Punjab had non-Congress ministries • The Congress decided conditional acceptance • The ministries tried to introduce Tenancy Legislation • But the Governors sometimes refused to give assent to the Bill • The Congress ministries tried to introduce for the workers holiday with pay-leave with pay during sickness-employment insurance-assurance of minimum wages-recognition of trade unions • The Marxist writers highlighted the constraints of the Congress leaders-war issue led to the resignation of the Congress ministries.

/// The Third Round Table Conference met at London in November, 1932, without any representative of the National Congress. The discussions ultimately led to the passing of the **Government of India Act, 1935**. This Act established a 'Federation of India' made of British Indian Provinces and Indian states and provided for autonomy with a government responsible to the elected legislature in every province. In provinces, the Ministers would control the Department and would remain responsible to the legislature. The Governors were given special executive powers which they could exercise before assenting to the Bills. The Governors were to be aided and advised by the Council of Ministers. The ministers were to be appointed and dismissed by them in their discretion. The members of the Provincial Legislative Assemblies were to be elected directly by the people. The franchise was based on property qualifications. Separate electorate and the system of weightage were retained.

The Federal structure of the government of India was to be composed with the Governor-General and a Council of Ministers. The Federal Legislature was to be a Bicameral Legislature—the Council of States and the House of Assembly. The ministers were to be chosen by the Governor-General and they were to hold office during His pleasure. In the Council of States, the representatives of the native states were to be appointed directly by the rulers. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Defence were reserved exclusively for the Governor-General. In this way, Diarchy was introduced at the Centre. This act was refused and rejected by the Princes, the Congress and the Muslim League for different reasons. The Muslim League, though criticized the act, was ready to give it a trial. Congress condemned the act but was ready to take part in the provincial portion, of course, under protest. Thus both Congress and the League participated in the election of 1937. Thus the Federal part was never introduced but the provincial part was put into operation very soon.

In the election under the Government of India Act, the mandate of the people came in favour of the Congress. The Congress swept the polls so far as general Hindu seats were concerned. Out of 38 seats reserved for the labour, Congress contested 20 seats and won 18 seats. 482 seats were reserved as Muslim seats. The Congress contested 58 seats and won only 26 seats and out of these 26 seats, 19 seats were in NWFP. The Congress did not get a single Muslim seat in Bombay, C.P., U.P., Sind and Bengal. For commerce and industry 56 seats were reserved. The Congress contested in 8 seats and could win only in 3 seats. For Landholders 37 seats were reserved. The Congress contested in 8 seats and won in 4 seats only. In five provinces, Congress had a clear majority. In Bengal, NWFP, Assam and Bombay the Congress emerged as the single largest party. On the other side, the performance of the Muslim League was not better. The Muslim League could not get a single seat in NWFP. In Punjab, the Muslim League got only 2 seats out of the 84 reserved seats. Thus the Congress formed ministries in 7 provinces out of 11 provinces. Coalition Ministry was also formed in 2 other provinces. Only Bengal and Punjab had non-Congress ministries.

Elections were held on different dates in different provinces and the results were very encouraging for Congress.

**Table**

Name of the Province	Total No. of Seats	Seats won by Congress
Assam	108	35
Bengal	250	60
Bihar	152	95
Bombay	175	87
C.P.	112	70
Madras	215	159
NWFP	50	19
Orissa	60	36
Punjab	175	18
Sind	60	08
U.P.	228	134

In Bengal, Assam, Bombay and NWFP Congress thus emerged as the single largest party. This was clear from the above table.

## THE CONGRESS MINISTRIES

The Congress decided 'Conditional Acceptance' of office. The condition was that the governors would not use their special powers to intervene in the functioning of the ministries in any way. The task before the Congress was a tremendous one because of the high expectations of the people. Congress had to function with limited powers and to work under the approval of the Governor-General. In spite of that Congress ministries introduced a number of popular reforms.

### Activities of the Congress Ministries

1. The Congress was committed to release all political prisoners. Through the intervention of Gandhiji, 1100 detenues of Bengal were released.
2. In U.P. many prisoners including the **Kakori prisoners** were released.<sup>1</sup>
3. The Congress leaders also worked for removing the restrictions on the political exiles like Rash Behari Bose, Prithvi Singh, Maulavi Abdullah Khan, Abani Mukerjee and others. But they could not do much in this respect. The prisoners who were imprisoned by Central Government could not be released from Andaman jails.
4. Suspension order on the political parties and similar organizations were revoked.
5. The press was granted the right of free criticism.
6. The Congress Ministry in Madras remitted the pending loans taken by the peasants from the government. In Bombay and U.P. the interest on agricultural loans was reduced.
7. The Bombay ministry passed in 1938 the Industrial Dispute Act and wages of mill hands were increased.
8. Licence for selling intoxicating drugs was restricted.
9. The peasant problem was a burning issue. The formation of Congress ministries had generated a new hope amongst the peasantry. So the Tenancy Legislation was taken up in all Congress-ruled provinces.
10. Everywhere efforts were made to protect the peasants from the clutches of the money lenders and irrigational facilities were increased. Actually this was a period of tremendous awakening among the peasants and they stood behind Congress.

### Laws passed for the Workers

The Congress had always promised a better working condition for the workers. Naturally, the Congress in October, 1937, appointed a Labour Committee which gave a programme and the All India Congress Committee accepted it.

This included:

1. Holiday with Pay,
2. Leave with Pay during sickness,
3. Employment Insurance,
4. To fix minimum wages and
5. Recognition of Trade Unions.

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1. The Revolutionaries of Northern India founded the Hindusthan Republican Association at Kanpur with the object of organizing armed revolution against the colonial rule. To finance the organization, the HRA decided to organize dacoities against the government property. Thus on 9 August, 1925, ten revolutionaries stopped a train at Kakori, a village station near Lucknow, and looted the official railway cash. But ultimately they were all arrested and tried in the Kakori Conspiracy case.

The Bombay ministry took up the cause of the labour and introduced Industrial Dispute Bill to prevent strike and lockouts as far as possible. But this gave a wrong signal to the workers who went on strike. Ultimately this movement was suppressed with the help of the police authority. Another important event was a massive workers' strike in Kanpur where 24000 workers went on strike demanding higher wages and better living conditions. Ultimately, the dispute was settled by the ministry. In Bengal, Congress supported the Jute Mill strike. In TISCO workers' strike at Jamshedpur, Jawaharlal Nehru and Rajendra Prasad acted as arbitrators between the Tata Authority and the workers. During this period, another important feature was the increased leftist influence on the working class.

In all the Congress-ruled provinces, a vigorous campaign was launched in favour of prohibition, khadi and hand spinning. At the initiative of Congress, an All India National Education Conference was organized at Wardha in October, 1937. The Conference prescribed free and compulsory education throughout the country for seven years, mother tongue as the medium of instruction and vocational training. In a number of provinces, attempts were taken to put this scheme into action.

The major achievements of the Congress ministries were:

1. Reduction of the salaries of the ministers.
2. Welfare scheme for the Tribals.
3. Jail Reforms and
4. Declaration of Fundamental Rights.

### **A Summary of Main Developments under Non-Congress Ministries**

According to the Government of India Act, 1935, two new provinces were created, namely, Sind and Orissa. Though Congress formed ministries in a number of states, in some states non-congress ministries were also formed. In Bengal, Fazlul Huq invited the Congress to co-operate in forming a coalition government. As the Congress refused, Fazlul Huq joined hands with the Muslim League. In Sind, Congress supported the ministry of Gulam Hussain Hidayatullah and in Assam Gopinath Bardoloi. In Punjab, the Congress was not in a position to play a dominant role. The Non-Congress ministries of Bengal and Punjab also passed several measures for improving the material conditions of the people. In Bengal, the Fazlul Huq ministry took an important step and formed the Land Revenue Commission. Moreover, a number of arbitration committees were formed to settle the dues of the ryots with the landlords. The Bengal Tenancy Act was also amended to relieve the ryots.

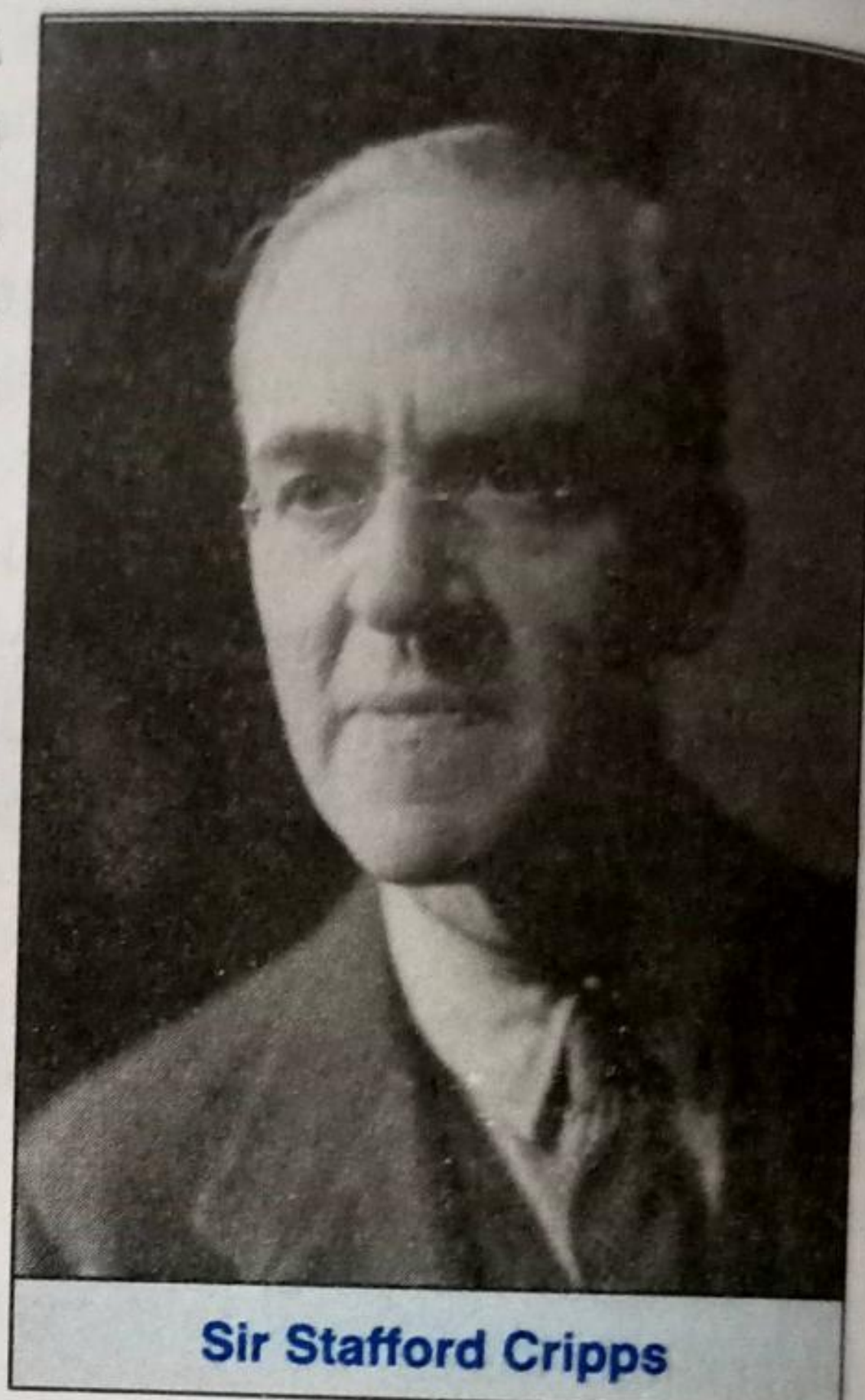
### **ASSESSMENT OF THE ACTIVITIES**

Though the Congress formed ministries in different provinces, they actually failed to introduce land reforms. The Marxist writers wanted to highlight that the zamindars and the landed

class had influence on the Congress Party particularly in the interior regions. Naturally, the Congress Ministries did not want to alienate this class of people. On the other hand, in U.P. most of the talukdars were Muslims and land reform might affect their interests and this class might side with the Muslim League. Congress required the co-operation of all sections including the landed aristocracy. Though the people had great expectations, the Congress Ministries were not destined to rule for long. The Congress Ministries resigned in November, 1939, on the war issue. Congress alleged that the Viceroy had involved India in the Second World War without consulting the Central Legislature and the Provincial governments.

**Arrival of Cripps Mission (1942) :** In the meantime, the war situation became very critical. After occupying Poland, Belgium, Holland, Norway and France, Germany attacked Russia on 22

June, 1941. Having joined the Axis Powers, Japan made a sudden attack on the American fleet at Pearl Harbour. Japan soon captured Philippines, Indo-China, Indonesia, Malaya, Burma and marched towards Assam. Thus they brought the war to India's doorstep. The British army was facing defeat after defeat in the South-East Asia. There were pressures on Britain from Russia, America and China to reconsider their Indian policy so that Indians could cooperate with the British against Japan's attack. The British government was now in a desperate condition for seeking the cooperation of the Indians in the war effort. The government decided to send **Sir Stafford Cripps**, a Member of the War Cabinet, to India after the fall of Rangoon to the Japanese. Cripps came to India on 22 March, 1942 and started discussions with the representatives of Congress, Muslim League, Hindu Mahasabha, the Harijanas, the Native rulers and the Liberals. He announced his proposals in the form of a Draft Declaration on 30 March, 1942.



**Sir Stafford Cripps**

#### **The proposals of Cripps were:**

- (1) Dominion Status would be granted to India immediately after the end of the war with the right to secede from the British Commonwealth.
- (2) Immediately after the war, a Constitution-making body would be set up. It would consist of members from British India as well as the Native States.
- (3) The Constitution so framed after the war would be adopted by the British Government on condition that any Indian Province, if desired, could remain outside Indian Union and negotiate directly with the British Government.
- (4) The actual control of Defence and Military operations during the war period would be retained by the British Government.

#### **Reactions of the Congress and other political parties**

The Congress rejected the proposals. Congress demanded full independence, but Cripps now offered Dominion Status which Congress had already rejected in 1930.

**Secondly**, the proposal wanted to create a cleavage by providing that any province could opt out of Indian federal constitution. It was an indirect indication towards the formation of Pakistan.

**Thirdly**, the Indian native states were also given the right to secede from Indian union.

**Fourthly**, the Congress proposal for forming a War Council with the Indian leaders was denied.

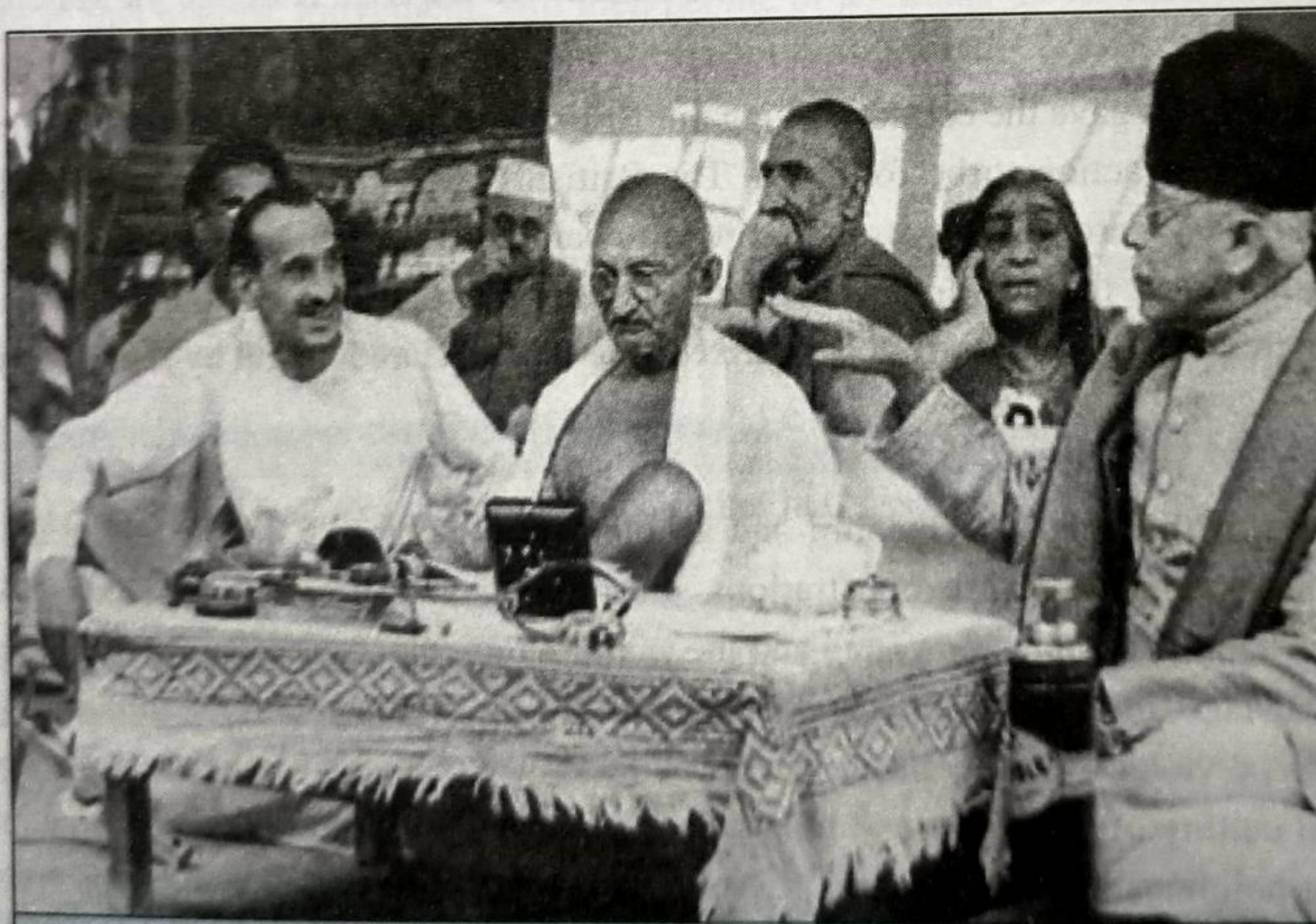
**Fifthly**, all proposals were to be implemented in future, so Congress did not rely on future promises. Gandhiji condemned the proposals as a *"Post-dated cheque on a crashing bank."*

Muslim League rejected the proposal because this did not ensure Pakistan and 50: 50 seats for the Muslim League with the Congress in the Interim Government. Moreover, the Declaration had not recognized separate electorate in the constitution-making body.

The Sikhs, the Depressed classes, the Indian Christians and the Anglo-Indians demanded more safeguards for their communities. Hence, the Cripps Mission failed to pacify the Indians. But in spite of that, the British Government through Cripps Mission for the first time agreed that the Indians should frame their own constitution.

## QUIT INDIA RESOLUTION

After the failure of the Cripps Mission, it became clear that the British Government was not willing to transfer power to the Indian people. The failure of the Cripps Mission further sharpened Congress hostility towards the British. The arrival of Japan to India's Eastern Frontiers aroused among the Congress mixed feeling of fear and hope. There was apprehension that India might meet the fate of Malaya and Burma and Japan would be the new imperialist. Nehru's anti-British attitude did not condone Japan's aggression. Underneath the fear was the hope that Japan might



**Gandhiji drafting the Quit India Resolution**

liberate India from the British. This was partly born of hostility towards the British and partly of the assurance given by General Tojo, the Prime Minister of Japan, and the Indian leader, Subhas Chandra Bose. Tojo had proclaimed 'India for Indians'. Subhas Chandra Bose had already escaped from India to Berlin in January, 1941 and then to Tokyo and Singapore. He assured the Indians from the Azad Hind Radio, Germany, 1942 that Japan had no designs on India.



Wrapped in this mood of frustration, hostility, fear and hope, Congress looked towards Gandhiji for guidance. Gandhiji had lost all faith on the British Government and now wanted an all out attempt to compel the British authority to withdraw from India. His view point was that "the presence of the British in India is an invitation to Japan to invade India. Their removal removes the bait." Except **Raja Gopalachari**, all the Congress leaders accepted Gandhiji's view point. Only Raja Gopalachari wanted to accept Cripps proposals and the principle of Pakistan. He did not agree with Gandhiji and tendered his resignation from Congress.

### Adoption of the Quit-India Resolution

After a long discussion, on 14 July, the Congress Working Committee adopted the Quit India Resolution which was to be ratified at the Bombay A.I.C.C. meeting in August and on 8 August, 1942, the A.C.C.I. passed the Quit India Resolution. Gandhiji then gave his clarion call to all sections of the people to participate in this movement. His message to the country was, "Every one is free to go to the fullest-length under Ahimsa to complete dead lock by strikes and other non-violent means. Satyagrahis must go out to die, not to live. They must seek and face death. It is only when individuals go out to die that the nation will survive. Karengye ya Marengye (do or die)."

Congress leaders gave the call for driving out British but did not give any specific or concrete direction or line of action to be followed. The British Government viewed any such idea as rebellion and the Viceroy took a strong attitude towards this Quit India Resolution. Before the Congress could start the movement, early in the morning of 9 August, Gandhiji and all the leading Congress leaders were arrested. Congress was also declared illegal by the authority.

### SPREAD OF THE MOVEMENT

The news of the arrest of Gandhiji and all other leaders spread like wild fire all over the country. There were hartals, demonstrations and processions all over the country. As all the leaders were behind the bars, the young and the students took the charge as leaders at local levels. At the initial stage, the movement was non-violent. But the repression of the authority provoked the people to be violent. The people now devised their own methods for the struggle. There were wide spread cutting of telephone and telegraph wires, damaging of railway trucks, attacking on government buildings and police stations. Apart from these, all other violent forms were used to stop the movements of the police and military vehicles.

Apart from Congress, the Congress Socialists group also played an important part under the leadership of Jaya Prakash Narayan, Rammanohar Lohia and Aruna Asaf Ali. **Muslim League** denounced the Quit India Resolution and naturally League refused to participate in the movement. **The Communist Party of India** also condemned the movement as it would weaken the British Government in its struggle against Fascism. **The Hindu Mahasabha** also condemned the movement and did not take part in this national struggle.

## VIOLENT PUBLIC REACTION

The movement gradually became violent. In many places, the administration ceased to exist. In Satara of Maharashtra a parallel government was established which functioned for a long time. A national government was set up at Tamluk (Midnapore) in Bengal and worked for a long time. In Talcher (Orissa), and in parts of Eastern U.P. and Bihar (Balua, Azamgarh, Ghazipur, Monghyr etc), the government authority practically became non-existent. Everywhere the revolutionaries ran the government. The Quit India movement got a massive response from the people of Bombay, Bihar, Gujarat, Orissa, Assam, Bengal and Karnataka but the response was less in Punjab, Sind and NWFP. The working class went on strikes in many industrial towns. On the other side, underground revolutionary activities started under **Jaya Prakash Narayan and Ramananda Misra** who managed to escape from jail. The most daring act was the establishment of Congress Radio by underground rebels with Usha Mehta as its announcer.

## IMPORTANT STORM CENTRES OF THE MOVEMENT

Though the Muslim League, the Communist Party and some other organizations did not participate in this historic movement, still then people of all walks of life took active part in the movement. We can see that there were **five important storm centres of the movement embracing the whole of India.**

These were:

1. The districts of Bhagalpur, Hazaribagh and Saran in Bihar.
2. Benaras, Ghazipur, Balua and Azamgarh districts in U.P.
3. Tamluk in Midnapore district of South Bengal,
4. The districts of Balasore, Koraput and Talcher in Orissa and
5. Nasik and Satara in Maharashtra.

Though the Muslim League did not participate in the movement, the caste Hindu and Harijanas took active part. Moreover, the women folk took active part in different parts of India. The well known amongst them were **Aruna Asaf Ali, Sarojini Naidu, Sucheta Kripalani** and others.

## MOVEMENT IN THREE PHASES

Sumit Sarkar has identified three phases of the Quit India Movement. **In the first phase**, the movement started in urban areas followed by hartals, processions, demonstrations, strikes in schools, colleges and offices. Working class in a number of industrial towns went on strike. Some of these industrial centres were Bombay, Kanpur, Jamshedpur and Ahmedabad. But in most of these centres the strike did not last long except in Ahmedabad where it continued for about three months.

**In the second phase**, the lead was given by the rural people. The people of Tamluk in Midnapur district of Bengal, North and East Bihar, Eastern U.P. especially Benaras district, part of Maharashtra, Balasore and Talcher of Orissa took the lead in this movement. The people attacked the government buildings like post offices, police stations, cut the telegraph and telephone lines. They tried to set them on fire. Temporary governments were established in Tamluk in Bengal, Balia in U.P and Talcher in Orissa.

**The Third phase** started roughly from September, 1942. In this phase, the movement was controlled by the revolutionary leaders. Underground revolutionary activities started. **Jaya Prakash Narayan** and **Ramananda Misra** escaped from Hazaribagh jail and organized an underground movement. In Bombay, Aruna Asaf Ali of the Socialist Group carried on underground activities. Speaking over Berlin Radio on 31 August, 1942, Subhas Chandra Bose described the movement as "**Non-violent guerilla warfare.**"

**In the last phase**, the movement continued upto May, 1944 at a very slow pace when Gandhiji was released from jail. The revolutionaries celebrated the Tilak Day and the Independence Day. Gradually this historical movement of the Indian people came to an end.

### CAUSES OF THE FAILURE OF THE MOVEMENT

The historic Quit India Movement failed due to some reasons.

(1) When Gandhiji and all other leaders were arrested, the movement came under the control of the local leaders who were not always followers of true Gandhian ideas. They organized the movement locally and there was no centralized leadership to coordinate and guide the movement. Naturally, the movement gradually became scattered and lost its force.

(2) **According to Dr. Rajendra Prasad**, extensive preparation was needed for success of this movement. The leaders of the movement should have decided their plan of action before the government had arrested them. But they made no such preparations because Gandhiji was of opinion that the government would not arrest him.

(3) The Quit India Movement also failed as the rulers of the Native states, army, police and high government officials remained faithful towards the British government. Thus the activities of the government continued unhampered. The movement did not evoke much response from the merchant community because the capitalists and the merchants groups had profited heavily during the war period.

(4) **The Muslim League** remained aloof from the movement and the **Hindu Mahasabha** condemned the movement. **The Communist Party of India** due to its 'Peoples' War' line did not support the movement. There were some Congress leaders like **Raja Gopalachari** who did not participate but supported the war efforts. So from the very beginning, the movement was ill-conceived and weak for all these reasons.

(5) Another important reason for the failure of the movement was the ruthless repression of the authority. The government had adopted all methods of repression like arrest, detention, firing,

burning of houses, flogging and others. The government also used aeroplanes to gun down the people in different places. The Allied army which was then stationed at Calcutta was promptly used to crush the August revolutionaries. **R.C. Majumdar** has rightly remarked that the general picture that emerges from these accounts may be described as a widespread revolutionary upsurge of the people, almost throughout India, that manifested itself mainly in destructive activities.<sup>1</sup>

Finally, the British government also took advantage of the War time Press Censorship to suppress the movement ruthlessly. The government did not care to listen to any internal criticism of their barbarous activities done towards the Indians. The Allied Powers were busy in fighting against the Axis powers and naturally they had no mind to think what the British were doing in India. Hence, the Quit India Movement failed but its significance and contribution to the freedom movement of the Indians cannot be denied.

### SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MOVEMENT

Though the Quit India Movement collapsed, it clearly revealed the strong determination of the Indian people to do away with the British rule. The British government had never faced such an opposition before. Thus the decision of the British government in 1945 to try for a negotiated settlement of the transfer of power was the outcome of the Quit India Movement. In a letter to Churchill, dated 24 October, 1944, Viceroy Wavell pointed out that **“It would be impossible to hold India by force after the war.....it would in fact be wise to start negotiation before the end of the war.”**

The Quit India Movement clearly demonstrated the fighting spirit of the people and their desperate longing for freedom. It revealed that the fear of the mighty British power had disappeared from the people's mind. The '42 movement' was the apex of India's struggle for freedom. It also became clear that British would have to leave India sooner or later. The only question was how and when.

Finally, the movement created a strong public opinion in foreign countries in favour of India. America and China were specifically influenced by the tide of this revolution. The American President Roosevelt wrote to the Chinese Prime Minister that the best policy for the English would be to grant independence to the people of India as soon as possible.

Answer the following:

1. What were the main features of the Government of India Act, 1935?
2. Critically estimate the working of the Congress Ministries in the years 1937-39 in the provinces.
3. Discuss the three phases of the Quit India Movement.
4. State the causes of the failure of the movement with special reference to its significance.