TENSIONS DURING THE WAR

I. IMPACT OF THE 'BLITZKRIEG'

During the summer of 1940, certain developments took place in Europe which significantly affected the political future of India, Europe and the world. The strategy adopted originally by Britain and France was to afford all facilities to Hitler to destroy the Soviet Union, the sworn enemy of capitalism and imperialist domination. They expected that in the event of a German invasion of Poland, the Soviet Union would go to the defence of Poland, which would eventually result in a war between Germany and the Soviet Union. But the German-Soviet no-war pact frustrated the design of Britain and France. It made possible for Hitler to turn to the west after conquering Poland. Although Britain and France declared war on Germany as allies of Poland, in the absence of an alliance with the Soviet Union, they were not in a position to take military actions against Germany.
Hitler did not turn towards the Western European countries, either. Thus a situation of a ‘farical war’ prevailed in Europe during the last months of 1939 and initial months of 1940.

By summer the situation changed. The Nazi forces entered Western Europe and conquered the West European countries including France, within about a month and half. This was known as the ‘Blitzkrieg’. This transition from the ‘farical war’ to the ‘Blitzkrieg’ was of great importance in world politics. France and Holland which had been trampling underfoot numerous countries in Asia and Africa collapsed under the Nazi attack. London and other cities of Great Britain, another colonial power, received heavy doses of bombardment. The British government and people feared that the Nazi forces might conquer the island under the cover of the air attack.

This ignominious defeat of Britain and France helped anti-imperialist sentiments in the colonial countries including India to soar. The revolutionaries in Indo-China, Philippines, Malaya and other countries made conscious and organized efforts to utilize the crisis of the ruling classes in the imperial countries to strengthen the independence struggle in their own countries. It was in this situation that the Workers Party of Vietnam, which had made its indelible mark in world history, and its leaders like Ho Chi Minh, Gen. Giap and Le Duan prepared themselves for their epic battle for liberation from the French colonial domination. In other South-East Asian countries in which Marxist-Leninist parties were not well organized, or lacked mass base, war-time revolutionary movements later became weak or even desintegrated.

In India, the Marxist-Leninist party was weak. Besides, the colonial government in India did not collapse as it happened in many South-East Asian countries. Above all, a bourgeois national leadership capable of effectively using—to control—the anti-imperialist feelings of the people had been existing in India. It was a leadership which stood in the forefront of the fighting masses and adept in utilizing the popular force for negotiating with the imperialist rulers. As
a continuation of this strategy, the Congress leadership utilized the discomfiture of the British rulers following the ‘Blitzkrieg’ to open another round of negotiation with the rulers. They maintained the hope that Britain, whose future was in danger like other allied countries in Europe would be prepared to show concessions if the Congress was ready to extend cooperation which they needed in order to face the danger to their own country. This led to serious differences of opinion within the Congress leadership. Before considering the details of these differences, it is necessary to refer in brief to the impact of the ‘Blitzkrieg’ on the internal politics of Britain.

As noted earlier, Neville Chamberlain, the author of the notorious policy of appeasement towards Hitler, was the Prime Minister of Britain when the war broke out. There was a strong feeling among the ruling classes of Britain that the German-Soviet pact was a result of the failure of this policy. This feeling got strengthened with the beginning of the ‘Blitzkrieg’ as a result of which the Chamberlain government was replaced by a government headed by Winston Churchill who was known to be a hard anti-Nazi. Although Churchill was known to have had no sympathy towards the Indian national movement, many ‘friends’ of India were in his cabinet.

Many among the Congress leaders thought that if India assured her assistance and cooperation to the British when they were facing a dangerous situation, they would be compelled to grant, in return, the demands which the Congress had been raising continually. Gandhi’s close disciples like Rajagopalachari and Sardar Patel were prominent among the spokesmen of this view. But Gandhi did not agree with this. Serious differences arose within the leadership now as ever before. A majority in the Working Committee was against Gandhi’s opinion. The Working Committee adopted a form of struggle which was opposed to what Gandhi was envisaging.
As we have seen earlier, a similar situation arose immediately after the war broke out, in which a majority in the Working Committee was against the opinion of Gandhi. Then Gandhi was holding the view that India should offer unconditional assistance to Britain when she was facing an extremely difficult situation. However, Nehru was of the opinion that since Britain had been taking a rigid attitude towards the national movement in India and other British colonies, India could not cooperate with her in her war efforts unless she relaxed this rigid attitude. A majority of the Working Committee agreed with Nehru, leading to the resignation of Rajendra Prasad from the Congress presidency in favour of Nehru. Almost a similar situation prevailed in the days following the 'Blitzkrieg'. Once again the majority opinion in the Working Committee was against Gandhi's views.

It must be specifically mentioned here that when Gandhi advocated unconditional assistance to the British in the days immediately after the outbreak of the war, he did it subject to a crucial condition. Gandhi was of the opinion that India should not offer the kind of assistance which would go against his creed of non-violence. He even advised the Briton "to fight Nazism without arms or, if... to retain the military terminnology, with non-violent arms". Obviously, Gandhi could not agree to the offer of assistance to the British, including military service, which would involve violence. He continued to hold the same view even after the beginning of the 'Blitzkrieg'.

Interestingly, the dispute now was not over the question whether assistance should be offered to Britain at all as it was the case earlier in the beginning of the war, but over the kind of assistance, assistance involving violence or non-violence. The majority in the Working Committee supported the views of Rajagopalachari and Sardar Patel, while a minority remained with Gandhi who adhered to the 'non-violent assistance'. Although Nehru disagreed with the majority, he refused to stand with Gandhi. On the resolution
adopted by the Working Committee with majority votes, Gandhi said:

Rajaji was the framer of the resolution. He was as certain of his position as I was of mine. His persistency and courage and utter humility brought him converts. Sardar Patel was his greatest prize.\(^2\)

Although there was a sharp difference of opinion on the attitude towards the British rulers and their war efforts, every one in the Congress leadership was in agreement on the objective of the Congress that the British rulers must immediately declare their readiness to constitute a constituent assembly for India with the representatives of the Indians as soon as the termination of the war and in the meantime to introduce the necessary administrative changes at the Centre to include Indian people's representatives in it immediately.

The resolution adopted by the Working Committee was later confirmed by the AICC making one more effort to bargain with the British authorities.

II. VINOBA, NEHRU, AND BOSE

Events did not develop as Rajagopalachari, Patel and the majority in the Working Committee expected. The assistance offered by the Congress to the British war efforts did not evoke the anticipated response in the rulers. They refused to concede the demands raised by the Congress in return for its offer of assistance. Although the Congress leaders and the spokesmen of the government continued to communicate with each other through public statements, the gulf that existed between them remained as wide as ever.

The Congress demand was that the necessary changes be made in the set-up of the Central government and in its functioning so that India too might enjoy in effect the Dominion Status like many other former colonies. The

\(^2\) D. G. Tendulkar, *Mahatma* vol. 5, p. 299
rulers, on the other hand, were not prepared to introduce any change in the existing set-up beyond including the representatives of the Congress and other organizations in the Central Executive Council. Nor were they prepared to offer any assurance as to the future constitution of India after the termination of the war. In other words, the new situation created by the 'Blitzkrieg' did not bring any change in the rulers.

The government, on the contrary, was taking more repressive actions against the Congress and other anti-imperialist organizations. Although most of the top Congress leaders, except Bose, were left free, leaders at the lower levels were arrested and put behind the bars. In the provinces, various charges were framed against many. Those who were in jails had to suffer a lot. In addition to prohibiting public meetings and curtailing the freedom of the press and other mass media under the existing law, an emergency law banning volunteer organizations was enacted. These repressive actions caused deep anguish among the Congressmen and the people.

In this background the Congress resolution offering assistance to the government's war efforts lost its relevance. The entire scheme to exert pressure on the rulers to get the demands conceded through negotiations collapsed. The majority of the Working Committee members including Rajagopalachari and Patel became convinced that a struggle was the only way out. They appealed to Gandhi to resume the leadership of the Congress.

Gandhi was prepared to resume the leadership of the Congress only on his own terms. He explicitly stated that he was not prepared to lead a struggle which deviated from the path of non-violence; the struggle which he would launch would be subject strictly to the conditions and restrictions he would place on it. The majority in the Working Committee, on the other hand, was prepared to accept any condition put forward by Gandhi. Thus within hardly two months of taking the decision to offer cooperation to the war efforts of Britain rejecting Gandhi's non-violent path, the AICC now came
forward to launch a non-violent *satyagraha* and to appoint Gandhi its commander-in-chief.

The AICC took this decision in the middle of September 1940. Even before this decision was taken, mass struggles of various forms were going on throughout the country. In many important cities and industrial centres workers struck work and organized processions in which tens of thousands of workers and other poor and middle class people participated. The Communist Party and other leftist organizations were in the forefront of giving these mass struggles an organized leadership and in organizing anti-war propaganda. A section of the ordinary Congressmen and Congress committees cooperated with them in these activities. It may be noted, for example, that the Kerala Provincial Congress Committee which was then under the leadership of the leftists gave a call to organize anti-war demonstrations. The Protest Day observation on 15th September led to a clash between the demonstrators and the police. Gandhi and other Congress leaders were disturbed over the growth of this tendency. The problem before them was how to curb such 'violent' activities when discussions were progressing on the launching of a struggle under Gandhi's leadership. The problem of how to start a 'strictly controlled struggle' was haunting them. After prolonged discussions it was made clear that a mass struggle of the type launched in 1930 and 1932 was not being visualized now. It would be individual *satyagraha* as in 1933. But as distinct from the 1933 *satyagraha*, only those whom Gandhi believed to have full faith in Gandhian philosophy and way of life would be chosen to offer *satyagraha*. Gandhi, as long as he remained outside the jail, himself will decide on the individuals to offer *satyagraha* one after the other. Strict instructions were given out that except those chosen by Gandhi, no one should violate the laws and rules framed by the government.

As in the case of the form of the struggle, Gandhi was also particular about the issues to be raised through the struggle. It was not a struggle for Full Independence; nor was Dominion Status the object of the struggle. The protest against
dragging the Indian people to a war without their consent also did not form the basis of the struggle. The purpose of the struggle was to express opposition to war in general and to protest against the denial of freedom to propagate this opposition.

In order to make this clear, it is necessary to understand Gandhi's theoretical attitude towards war. In an earlier chapter we have seen that Gandhi had given active support to Britain in her war efforts and that he was opposed to Tilak's opinion that the cooperation offered to the British should be subject to certain political conditions. We have also seen just above that at the beginning as well as at the later stages of the Second World War, Gandhi maintained the same attitude towards the war. Briefly, Gandhi had been maintaining the uncompromising policy of giving unconditional cooperation to the British in war. But when it became clear that the British rulers were not only rejecting the offer of conditional cooperation by the Congress but also gagging the press and the people and suppressing the Congress, he admitted that his policy of unconditional cooperation had ceased to be relevant. Consequently, he changed to unconditional opposition to war and unconditional right to campaign against war. Gandhi viewed the impending struggle under his leadership as opposition to war and to restrictions imposed during the war.

Gandhi was in search of a person to be appointed the first Satyagrahi in the individual satyagraha which he was going to launch. Finally he found Vinoba Bhave who had been devoted for long to the Gandhian constructive programme of spinning and propagation of Khadi and whom he considered to be the best qualified and able to carry out the kind of satyagraha he had in mind. Thus Vinoba who till then had been a relatively unknown person whose activities had been confined to an ashram in a village near Wardha all of a sudden gained all-India fame.

The form of the individual satyagraha started by Vinoba is also noteworthy. He would move from place to place in a
village and openly state that he was against war and exhort the people not do anything that would help the prosecution of the war. If he were arrested by the police, he would go to the jail; otherwise he would go to the next village and repeat the same thing there and so on. Vinoba was finally arrested only after offering satyagraha in this manner in some villages.

It must specifically be stated that this satyagraha was against all wars, no matter who conducted them. Gandhi and his disciples found absolutely no distinction between Hitler and his gang who conquered other countries and the people in those countries who resisted the Hitlerite aggression to defend own their country. This was evident from the letters Gandhi had addressed separately to Hitler and the Britons. Their approach towards the war was not the political approach of forging unity of the democratic forces in India and abroad against the fascist powers as envisaged in the official resolutions of the Congress, but the ethical and moral approach of the believers who opposed use of force of all forms.

Gandhi's opinion that Vinoba Bhava was best qualified to start the individual satyagraha with such an approach towards war need not surprise anyone. But what was indeed surprising was Gandhi's choice of the successor to Vinoba.

Gandhi's choice of the Second Satyagrahi did not fall on acclaimed Gandhian disciples like Rajendra Prasad and Shankarrao Deo, but on Jawaharlal Nehru! Although Nehru showed utmost personal loyalty to Gandhi and carried out in a disciplined way the decisions of the Congress on Gandhian lines, he was no firm believer of Gandhian ideologies. He had the tradition of rendering moral and material assistance to the peoples of Spain and China in their fight against the fascist and militarist forces. He was opposed to the British rulers not only because of their colonial domination of India, but also because of the role they played in the growth of the fascist powers in Europe. That was why he was also opposed to Gandhi's policy of offering unconditional assistance to Britain in the initial stages of the war as well as to
the proposal of Rajagopalachari and others to offer conditional assistance to the British in their war efforts.

Now the question is how did Gandhi’s choice of the Second Satyagrahi fall on Nehru who had always been dealing with the issue only politically by considering the general nature of the war and Britain’s role in it. In order to find an answer to this question, it is necessary to examine closely both the agreements and differences between the ideological approaches accepted by Gandhi and Nehru, and the reality of class politics underlying these approaches. As indicated above, Gandhi approached the war from moral and religious points of view. Nehru, on the other hand, looked upon the war not in general terms, but a specific war fought between fascism which had become a danger to the whole world on the one side and the chief imperialist powers of Britain and France on the other, in which the latter were deploying feely the men and materials of their colonies including India. But both Gandhi and Nehru who thus viewed the war from different angles had to safeguard the interest of the same (bourgeois) class. The political content of the approaches adopted by both was the intention to rally the Indian people behind that class and to utilize their organized force to bragain with the British rulers. Although the bargaining was prolonged for about a year, they failed to bring about a change in the attitude of the rulers. As a result, the Congress was moving towards an inevitable struggle. The entire Congress leadership wanted Nehru to join Gandhi and Vinoba Bhave in this struggle, for it would create the impression that the struggle was being conducted unitedly by the Congress overcoming the differences of opinion that had surfaced at the different stages after the outbreak of the war. In addition, it would strengthen the pressure tactics employed by Gandhi, Nehru, Rajagopalachari and Patel in different forms.

There was another important fact which needs particular mention. Soon after hearing that a satyagraha was going to be launched under Gandhi’s leadership, Subhas Bose wrote to
Gandhi offering his services in carrying out the struggle successfully. But Gandhi rejected the offer stating that his differences with Bose were fundamental in nature. But even before the war broke out, Gandhi was not prepared to trust Bose who had been the victim of punitive measures by the leadership for having raised a challenge against Gandhi and other right-wing Congress leaders. Between Gandhi and Bose there was only difference of opinion, whereas the bond of mutual trust between Gandhi and Nehru was stronger than the difference of opinion between them. Bose would not be able to participate in a struggle led by Gandhi and subject to the conditions set by him. On the contrary, like Vinoba Bhave, Nehru would be able to function within the Gandhian framework, no matter how broad were the basic differences that existed between Gandhi and Nehru. These were the considerations basic to the two decisions of Gandhi—the selection of Nehru as the Second Satyagrahi and the rejection of the offer of coopertion made by Bose.

III. DISRUPTION OF THE LEFT MOVEMENT

The difference that had begun to appear in the left movement before the outbreak of the war became acute in the months following the outbreak of the war. The leftists as a whole were opposed to the compromising attitude of the right-wing leaders of the Congress. However, there were differences among them on the question of how to draw the Congress leadership to the struggles against the war and imperialist domination. In this respect, the Communist and the Congress Socialists took an attitude which was distinct from that adopted by Subhas Bose. The Communist and the Congress Socialists regarded that since the Congress had a decisive role to play in rallying the people against imperialism and war, it was the duty of the leftists to preserve the organization and unity of the Congress. Bose and his colleagues, on the other hand, did not mind even if the fight
against the compromising policy of the right-wing leaders led to a split in the Congress.

There were differences of opinion between the Communists and Congress Socialists on the question how to carry out the activities to maintain unity in the Congress. The latter were working on the expectation that the entire right-wing leadership of the Congress could be drawn to the path of struggles. For them Congress discipline was supreme. Their policy was to struggle as strongly as possible inside the Congress to make the leadership accept the path of struggle and carry out the programme decided upon by the Congress leadership.

The Communists, on the other hand, while working within the Congress with a view to leading it along the path of struggle, led the people independently in their agitations and struggles. They played a significant role in mobilizing workers and organizing strikes against price rise during the first months of the war. Considering the class character of the Congress, they did not expect its leadership to go along the path of struggles. They believed that it was the task of the left to organize and rally the people against the compromising policy of the Congress leadership.

On account of the serious differences of opinion that existed between Bose and the Congress Socialists on the one hand and the Communists on the other, an intense ideological struggle took place among these three parties in the first months of the war. Bose and the Congress Socialists complained that the Communists were trying to grow at the expense of other left parties. In March 1940, the Congress Socialist Party announced the expulsion of Communists from that Party. Although the Communists had no formal connection with the Forward Bloc the polemics between the Communist and the Forward Bloc was as sharp as that between the Communists and the Congress Socialists.

One of the reasons for the rise of these differences of opinion and competition between these parties was the fact that they viewed the war differently. While two camps with
Britain aligned with one of the camps are engaged in a war with each other, how to utilize the situation and gain independence?—this was the common concern of the right-wing Congress leaders, Congress Socialists and the Forward Bloc. Utilizing the war-time situation, the right-wing Congress leaders as well as the “left” Nehru tried to bargain to derive maximum gain. That was why Nehru was chosen as the Second Satyagrahi to succeed Vinoba Bhave.

The Congress Socialist Party, and the Forward Bloc, on the other hand, looked upon the war-time situation as an opportunity to organize a revolution, instead of arriving at a compromise with the British rulers. But they disagreed with each other on the question of how to organize a revolution in India utilizing the war-time situation. We have already noticed the revolutionary perspective of the Congress Socialist Party vis-a-vis its special relationship with the Congress. Bose and the Forward Bloc led by him were trying to organize a revolution with the assistance of the foreign powers opposed to Britain, defying the decisions of the Congress, if necessary. In other words, the political approach adopted by the Forward Bloc was the continuation of the political outlook of the revolutionaries who tried to organize a revolution in India with the aid of of certain imperialist countries during the First World War on the basis of the logic of “enemy’s enemy, the friend.”

When the Congress decided to launch the individual satyagraha in October 1940, the differences in outlook that existed among the left parties came to the surface. The Congress Socialist Party never lagged behind the Communists in formally opposing the method of Gandhian satyagraha. But instead of rallying the masses against this rightist policy of the Congress, they tried to successfully carry on at least the satyagraha led by Gandhi.

As we have noted in the previous section, Bose had offered his services to Gandhi for the successful conduct of the satyagraha. When this offer was rejected by Gandhi, he secretly left for Germany where he established contact with the
Nazi rulers with a view to organizing a revolution in India with their aid. For the same purpose, he later went to Japan and organized the Indian National Army and established the Azad Hind Government abroad. The Congress Socialist Party did not approve of these exploits of Bose initially, but when the right-wing Congress leadership started eulogizing Bose as an epic hero after the 1942 struggle, the Socialists also followed suit.

The attitude of the Communist Party was quite different from all this. The Party agreed that the war had brought about a situation which was favourable for a revolution. But they did not look upon the war in an abstract way as did all others. They examined the character of the war and Britain’s role in it by making an objective evaluation of the international background in which the war broke out, the resultant class forces and their interrelationships, the complex political problems arising out of this situation and so on. On the basis of this examination, the Communist Party came to the political conclusion that the war being fought by Britain and France against Nazi Germany was not a real anti-fascist war, but it was an imperialist war. The Soviet Union tried its best to ensure that the Second World War as it broke out would be a real anti-fascist War. The Soviet leaders suggested that the military strength of the capitalist countries like Britain and France and that of the Soviet Union should be consolidated and combined together to administer a deadly blow at the forces of Hitler and Mussolini. The Communists pointed out that the rulers of Britain who were prominent among those who rejected the Soviet proposal and prepared the ground for Hitler’s aggressive war were donning the garb of anti-fascism in order to consolidate their domination over India and that it was the task of the revolutionaries to tear away this anti-fascist garb and expose the real character of British imperialism. On this basis, the Communist Party examined critically the policies and approaches of the right-wing Congress leadership, the Congress Socialist Party and the Forward Bloc. The Party fundamentally disagreed with
the standpoint of the Congress leadership that India was sympathetic to the anti-fascist war being fought by Britain and France and that since the British rulers were not prepared to effect any change in their attitude towards India, India was unable to cooperate with the British. It pointed out that Britain had been following an imperialist policy not only towards India but also towards the anti-fascist world politics. This was another reason for the Party's fundamental opposition to the compromising policy of the Congress.

Neither the Congress Socialist Party nor the Forward Bloc subscribed to this view. The leadership of the Congress Socialist Party was in the hands of those who had been following the line of the world social democratic movement for which anti-communism and anti-sovietism formed the core ideology. Although the path of socialist-Communist cooperation was opened up in 1935-36 under the leadership of Jayaprakash Narayan, the Congress Socialist leadership transformed itself, like all social democratic parties, into a group expressing anti-communism and anti-Sovietism. They refused to perceive the role being played by the Soviet union in world politics and denied the fact that the Second World War was caused by the anti-Soviet politics of the Chamberlain & Co. They visualized an anti-war movement based on India-British relation alone without exposing the pro-fascist role played by British imperialism in the war and world politics. In other words, having conceded the British claim that they were fighting an anti-fascist war, they simply opted for a revolutionary struggle in place of bargaining with the British.

Bose and the Forward Bloc went a step further. For them the slogan of anti-fascist war was irrelevant. They thought it possible to gain independence with the assistance of Germany and Japan which were fighting a war against India's national enemy, the British imperialism. This idea reached its full and practical form in 1942-43 when the Soviet Union and Germany were engaged in a crucial war against each other and Japan had reached the door-steps of India after conquering all the South-East Asian countries.
In fact, it had already started appearing in its primary form during 1940-41 when a general feeling had begun to spread that Nazi Germany was the force that was going to be helpful in destroying the British domination. The people desired a powerful struggle to develop even if it was under Gandhi’s leadership. It was in these circumstances that Bose offered his co-operation to Gandhi in launching the individual satyagraha campaign. When this offer was turned down by Gandhi, Bose left for Germany secretly in January 1941.

Thus, four main political parties and views appeared actively on the scene: the Congress leadership striving to bargain with Britain while making anti-fascist declaration, the Congress Socialist leadership which, while pretending to oppose the Congress, was in effect approving its policies, the Communist Party which was striving to expose the real character of the British rulers by tearing away its anti-fascist veil, and the Forward Bloc which was striving to organize a revolution in India with the assistance of the fascist powers.

A word about the Royist group which was a component of the anti-imperialist front during 1935-39. It had changed itself into a political party right from the outbreak of the war offering full assistance to the British in their war efforts losing the left character it had been maintaining.

IV. IMPACT OF THE SOVIET-GERMAN WAR

The Nazi military attack on the Soviet Union which began on 22nd June 1941 brought about a fundamental change in the relationship among the left parties and between them and the Congress. It also affected the basic character of war and the world politics. In this new development, each party was compelled to re-examine its own political stand.

It need not be repeated here that the Communist Party, as distinct from other parties, views war in the international context in which it occurs. Communists in India, as elsewhere in the world, evaluated the war in the background of the
sharpening contradiction between the decaying world capitalism and the growing socialism—the principal phenomenon in world politics that emerged with the October Revolution in Russia. The Party's approach towards the government and towards the political parties was consistent with this evaluation.

This might sometimes create difficult problems for the Communist Parties of some countries. The foreign policy requirements for the existence and growth of the Soviet Union, the only socialist country in the world, might often be incompatible with the internal policy requirements of the Communist Parties in other countries in meeting its obligations towards the class struggle or national struggle in their respective countries. However, this problem somewhat lost its seriousness as more than a dozen countries came under the socialist system after the Second World War. Capitalism became less capable of annihilating the developing Socialist World. But this was not the situation during the first half of the 1940s when the world capitalism had been trying to destroy the lone Socialist country in different ways. The Nazi military attack on the Soviet Union was the culmination of this attempt. The Soviet Union, while mainly relying on its own strength, needed the help of the imperialists of Britain, France and the U.S.A., to give a fitting counter-blow to the Nazi aggressors.

This placed not only the Communists but also those Congressmen and Congress Socialists who had adopted an anti-fascist approach in India in a quandary. All of them desired a Soviet victory in its anti-fascist war and all of them were prepared to do what they could in this regard. They protested against the obstacles put in their way by the British government. All of them agreed in the opinion that the British government should change its policy in such a way that they were able to help the Soviet Union. It was in fact the refusal of the government to change its policy that led Congress and the Congress Socialist Party to the Quit India struggle. It was the same that led Subhas Bose to form the Indian
National Army (INA) and the Azad Hind Government and to cooperate with Japan. Before entering into the details of these, it is, however, necessary to dwell on the confusion that existed within the Communist Party on this issue.

During the first stage of the Second World War, the international and national policies of the Communist Party of India were fully compatible with each other. It was not at all difficult for the Party then to expose the fact that the British imperialists were the main obstacle on the path of creating the condition for waging a real anti-fascist war and that the war they were fighting was not an anti-fascist war but an imperialist war. Nor was it difficult for the Party to state the need of starting an anti-British mass struggle on the ground that the same British rulers who had been pursuing a pro-fascist policy were taking measures to continue their domination over India. It was also easy to expose the Congress leadership which was adopting a compromising policy in this regard and to rally the people against it.

On this the Congress Socialist and the Forward Bloc had no disagreement with the Communists. But as regards the international outlook, the former parties were at loggerheads with the Communists. They did not agree with the assessment of the Communists that the Second World War was the result of the fundamental contradiction between the Socialist society represented by the Soviet Union and the capitalist world represented by the rulers of other countries and that since Britain and France were the representatives of the anti-Soviet attitude, the war they were fighting was definitely an imperialist war. They argued that the meaning of the Communist stand was that they would give up their anti-British stand once Britain changed her attitude towards the Soviet Union while maintaining the attitude towards India unchanged. For this and other reasons the relations of these parties with the Communist Party continued to deteriorate.

The situation changed with the entry of the Nazi forces into the Soviet Union and the subsequent British-Soviet pact. The incompatibility between the international interest
with regard to the victory of the Soviet Union’s anti-fascist war and the national interest of India’s fight against the British imperialist domination came to the surface. Differences arose within the leadership of the Communist Party on the question of how to resolve these difficult problems that resulted from the incompatibility of interests.

The leadership of the Party which remained outside the jail considered that although the entry of the Soviet Union had brought about a fundamental change in the international character of the war, the Indian people could not extend cooperation to Britain’s war efforts, since the policy of the British rulers towards India had not undergone any change. The comrades in jails argued, on the other hand, that 22nd June 1941 marked the beginning of a new phase in world politics and that it was wrong not to perceive its importance. After a protracted exchange of views between the comrades inside and outside the jail for about six months, the party leadership outside the jail (the Polit Bureau) adopted a resolution on 15th December 1941 generally accepting the views of the comrades inside the jail.

The Communist International in general and the Communist Party of Great Britain in particular had helped the party leadership in taking this decision. They pointed out to the Indian Communists that adopting an approach towards the war purely on the basis of the British attitude towards India would be a bourgeois nationalist approach and not of proletarian internationalism that Communists were expected to uphold. Although the Polit Bureau could not accept their arguments in the beginning, it prepared a note entitled “Our New line on War: British Comrades Correct Us” and included it in the Party Letter, a secret publication of the party.

It must be noted in particular that one of the documents on the basis of which the Party stated that the “British Comrades Correct Us” was a letter which the General Secretary of the British Communist Party, Harry Pollitt, had sent to the members of that Party in December 1941. During
the first phase of the war, finding the incompatibility between the class struggle in his own country and the international stand on the war, Pollitt requested permission from the Party leadership to resign the general secretaryship. When the permission was granted, he relinquished the post. Pollitt then could not subscribe to the view characterizing the war which was causing danger to the national interest of Britain as an imperialist war. In the second phase of the war, when Britain joined hands with the Soviet Union to fight the anti-fascist war, the working class and the Communist Party in India had to face a situation similar to that the British working class and the Communist Party had to face during the first phase of the war. Although Harry Pollitt had resigned the party general secretaryship, he fully participated in carrying out the party decision. Furthermore, he played an important role in the second phase of the war to make the Communist Party of India adopt a policy which was fully acceptable to him.

These incidents are recounted here to get a clear picture of the role played by Indian Communists in the period immediately following the Quit India struggle. Those who accuse the Communists of characterizing the "imperialist war" as "Peoples' war" 'overnight' for the sole reason that the Soviet Union had entered the war must remember these facts.

The characterization of the war by Communists as 'imperialist' in its first phase and as 'peoples' war' in the second phase was based on one and the same principle. It is certainly a crucial issue what attitude the ruling classes of Britain take towards the Soviet Union which is destined to decide the future of the human society. The Communist Party had never hidden its stand on this issue. Everyone who is interested in man's onward march to socialism would take the same stand. It is noteworthy that the same Congress leadership which later gave the call for the Quit India struggle had adopted a resolution after the outbreak of the German-Soviet war expressing sympathy to the Soviet people and praising the Socialist system they were building. As we are going to
show in the next chapter, by adopting this stand, the Congress leadership was striving to negotiate with the British in a new form for a compromise. The Communist Party which had been opposing the Congress policy of bargain continued its opposition to that policy. The Communist Party was of the opinion that in the atmosphere of the decisive war being fought between the Nazi army and the Soviet Red army, the way to India's freedom was opposition to fascism relying on its own forces. As stated in the resolution of the Polit Bureau published on 15th December:

Our policy in the present phase differs from the policy of the national bourgeois leadership in the same way as our policy in the imperialist phase of the war differed from their corresponding policy in that phase. Then they did not frankly and openly declare it to be an imperialist war which required an unconditional opposition. They dodged and prevaricated, put up constitutional opposition, made gestures of mass opposition to war, and ultimately settled down with individual satyagraha to wait for compromise at the next favourable opportunity. One thing they did not want was to rely upon people, to put up real resistance against war. Today they again refuse to rouse the people to the consciousness that they have to win it in common with other peoples of the world in order to ensure their own freedom. They refuse to rely upon the people, to rouse them to such activity and initiative that will smash the obstacles which prevent India from playing her part in the struggle for world liberation and thus paving the way for her own liberation.3

THE 1942 STRUGGLE

1. THE CRIPPS MISSION

The fact that the Soviet Union and Britain were fighting together on one side in the war did not bring out any change in the British attitude towards India. As ever before, the British rulers were adament in their stand of not conceding India’s demand.

In this context, Prime Minister Churchill’s speech in the British parliament in September 1941 needs special mention here. Earlier, the United States and Britain had jointly published a document, called the Atlantic Charter. It envisaged freedom for all peoples of the world to choose their own mode of governance and for those who had lost sovereignty to restore it. But Churchill stated that the Atlantic Charter would not apply to India. What emboldened him to take such a stand was his belief that there were serious differences of opinion among the different groups within the Congress
as well as between the Congress and other political organizations in India. And this belief was not altogether baseless. For instance, it was well known that there were differences between the Congress and the colleagues of Subhas Bose and between these two on the one hand and the Communist and Socialist parties on the other. Further, there were differences within the Communist Party on the change that the nature of the war had undergone and within the Congress on the evaluation of the development that took place following the individual satyagraha movement. Added to these were the differences that existed between the Congress and the Muslim League and between them on the one hand and the liberal leaders on the other. The British government decided to cleverly utilize these differences.

The differences of opinion that existed among the Congress leaders need special mention. As we have seen earlier, twice after the outbreak of the war the Congress had taken certain steps which were at variance with those taken by Gandhi. What created this gulf between Gandhi and the Congress leaders was the differences in the outlook of Gandhi who was holding fast the "means of unadulterated non-violence" and those of the "practical politicians" like Nehru, Rajagopalachari, Patel and others in the Congress.

The Congress decided to launch individual satyagraha and to assign its leadership to Gandhi only because Britain refused to concede the demands raised by it even after a majority of the leaders adopted an attitude of willingness to cooperate with the British in their war efforts despite Gandhi’s opposition.

The first year of individual satyagraha was coming to a close. Rajagopalachari and some other leaders demand a review of the year’s experience. Although about 2,000 satyagrahis were arrested, the movement did not yield any significant result. Moreover, opportunities were coming forth for fresh negotiations with the British rulers in the new situation created by the entry of the Soviet Union in the war. Accordingly, on the initiative of Rajagopalachari, the
Congress' Working Committee adopted a resolution during the Christmas of 1941 expressing readiness to cooperate with the British in its war efforts.

Certain helpful moves came from the British also. Thus many top-ranking Congress leaders including Nehru were released from prison. The situation of war once again changed basically with the Japanese attack on the United States' Pearl Harbour in December 1941.

Although the United States had taken an attitude openly in favour of Britain and France, it was not a participant in the war till December 1941. With the American entry in the war, the war now became one with the governments of the U.S., Britain and the Soviet Union along with the liberation movements of the German occupied countries in Europe on the one side fighting against the German and Italian fascism and the Japanese militarism.

The surrender of France to Hitler, Japan's occupation of Indo-China as a gift from France and the occupation of other Asian countries following the declaration of war in December 1941 would have made it easy for Japan to enter India. It was the interest of the United States also to create a political situation that would prevent such an eventuality. It occurred to the American rulers that the Churchill government's attitude towards India might turn out to be dangerous to the Allies, including America. They made this known to the rulers of Britain. They impressed upon the British that it was in the interest of the Allies to liberate those Asian countries which had fallen to Japan and also to prevent India from falling to it. By this, they were, in fact, trying to replace the crumbling Dutch-French-English imperialism by their own imperialist domination in a new form.

But whatever their intention, the U.S. move helped the bourgeois Congress leadership. America's generous political support, the publicity received through the American newspapers, the powerful anti-imperialist stand taken by the Soviet Union, and the sympathies of the neighbouring countries like
China were all considered as valuable assets by the Congress leaders.

It was in this situation that the Chinese President Chiang Kai-shek and Madame Chiang visited India. China was then fighting Japan. Because of their political weakness, they could not exert much pressure either on Britain or on the Indian government. But their visit with an open expression of sympathy to India’s national demand gave a boost to the Congress policy of bargain.

This could not but leave an impact on the British rulers. They were disturbed and anxious over the fate of India following the Japanese occupation of Singapore. This also reinforced the pressure being exerted by President Roosevelt on the British Prime Minister Churchill. All in all, Britain was forced to take some action to change the Indian public opinion. It was in this background that the British government sent to India Sir Stafford Cripps, a member of the wartime Cabinet and a sympathizer to the Indian national movement. The announcement in this regard created the impression that the British authorities were trying to renounce their hardline attitude towards India and to satisfy the Congress and other political parties in India. Such was the publicity the Cripps mission received in the Indian and foreign press.

Even before Cripps set off to India, a draft declaration had been prepared by the British government on India’s future constitutional set-up and on the changes that were to be introduced in the existing system during the war time. This draft document was kept a secret until Cripps reached India and held talks with the leaders of the different political parties. On behalf of the British government, Cripps claimed that he was trying to bring a settlement between the government and the representatives of the Indian people.

The declaration had been prepared in such a way as to make it appear progressive as compared to all the earlier declarations made by the government. It had been stated that the government would take steps to create “a new Indian Union which will have the full status of a Dominion.”
The objective was stated to be to enable India to achieve the "earliest possible realisation of self-government". The declaration specifically stated that in order to realize the objective, a constitution-making body would be set up "immediately upon the cessation of hostilities".

Considering the policy declarations that the Congress had hitherto been making, this draft declaration should have been acceptable to it. But there were two important conditions included in the draft declaration. One of the conditions was that if one or more provinces were not prepared to join the Indian Union, such province or provinces would be free to frame a separate constitution and would have the same status as the Indian Union. The rulers of the princely states also would have the same right. The second condition was concerned with the minorities. The new constitution of the Indian Union and other provinces and states staying out of it would guarantee the assurances given earlier by the government to the Muslims, Christians, Parsis, Europeans, Anglo-Indian and other communities.

All these were relating to the constitution. Equally important were the problem of what was going to be done immediately. The British government desired and urged the effective participation of the different sections (parties and organizations) representing the interests of the Indian people in the functions of the governments of their own country, the British Commonwealth and the United Nations. Cripps claimed that what was being visualized was an Indian national government with Dominion Status at least nominally.

The Cripps mission was a big gain to the Muslim League, for most of the demands raised by the leaders of the League with regard to Pakistan had been accepted. Not only that all the guarantees given to the religious minorities had been honoured, the Muslim majority provinces were now given the freedom to stay away from the Indian Union and to form a separate nation by themselves. Furthermore, if the League would have a share in the Central government which was going to be formed in accordance with the Cripps
proposals, it could strengthen itself utilizing the new position in the government.

As for the Congress, the proposals seemed attractive in the beginning, but as discussions progressed it realized the underlying dangers. The provision contained in the proposal giving the right to the provinces and the princely states to stay away form the Indian Union disturbed them. But Rajagopalachari, Nehru, Patel and certain others were ready to accept the Cripps proposal even ignoring Gandhi’s opposition to it. (This was exactly what happened after the termination of the war.) What was really unacceptable to them was the proposal relating to the change to be introduced immediately in the Central government. Had the authorities been prepared to constitute immediately a national government at the Centre with the status of Dominion along with the provision giving the right to the provinces to stay away form the Indian Union, the Cripps proposal would have been accepted in toto by all the Congress leaders except Gandhi.

The talks that took place at the different levels—between the Congress leaders and Cripps, among Cripps, the viceroy and the Commander-in-Chief, among President Roosevelt’s personal representative and the Indian and British leaders—revealed what exactly were the differences between the British government and the Congress. The latter insisted on its demand that the Viceroy’s Executive Council should right now start functioning as the national government with the status of a Dominion. But the Viceroy and the Commander-in-Chief would not budge an inch insofar as sharing their authority with others. Although Cripps and the U. S. representative tried their best to make them accept the position, the Viceroy and the Commander-in-Chief, who had the support of Churchill, were adamant.

Thus failed the efforts to enlist the support of the Indian people in the war against the fascist forces with the cooperation of India’s popular leaders. Cripps returned to England empty-handed.
II. ‘QUIT INDIA’

Even while Cripps' talks with Indian leaders were on, the situation in India's eastern borders was causing alarm to the Allied Powers and to the people. The Japanese forces were steadily advancing along the India-Burma road, conquering on their way the British possessions of Singapore, Burma, Malaya and the Andaman islands. There were Japanese naval attacks in the Bay of Bengal. The eastern port cities of Vishakhapatnam and Kakinada came under Japanese bombardment. The government themselves had ordered destruction of certain establishments in Madras fearing Japanese invasion. In brief, there was an increasing probability of India coming under the attack of Japan, like other Asian countries.

The Congress maintained that in order to be able to meet this threat a mere declaration about India's future was not enough and demanded transfer of power, in whatever form, including that of the defence department to the representatives of the Indian people. The British rulers, on the other hand, held adamantly that they would not part with the control of such crucial departments as defence and home. Consequently, the Delhi talks broke off which, in turn, caused great resentment and anger among the people. There was practically no one in India who was not infuriated by the stand taken by the British rulers, who were leading an army which were fleeing on the face of the Japanese attacks, that they would not hand over the country to her own people, no matter even if they had to surrender it to Japan.

It may be recalled that it was also the time when one of the topmost national leaders, Subhas Bose, who had left India, had been raising the Indian National Army (INA) with Indians in the territories held by Japan to liberate India with the assistance of Japan. The contempt towards the British army which were facing defeat after defeat together with the impression created in India that the INA led by Subhas
Bose were planning to launch an offensive against the British rule in India aroused national sentiments among the people. It seemed to them that the opportunity was at hand to liberate themselves from the British rule.

This sentiments were, in fact, contrary to the policies the Congress and other anti-imperialist organizations had been pursuing. They had been ceaselessly speaking to the Indian people for about a decade against the fascist forces of Italy and Germany and Japanese militarism. They had been maintaining all along that an advance of the fascist and the militarist forces would not set free the dependent countries; it would lead only independent countries to lose their freedom. They never entertained the illusion that India could be liberated with the assistance of Japan. On the contrary, they knew that a victory of Japan meant changing from one master to another. That was why they demanded that the British should transfer power to the Indian people and resist Japan with their support.

But the experience of the leaders who expressed readiness to lead the Indian people to fight Japan even at the cost of the creed of Gandhian non-violence posed the question before all the political parties, excepting Bose and his colleagues: What is to be done next? Different Congress leaders answered this question differently.

Gandhi had, left Delhi right in midst of the discussion with Cripps. The proposals put forward by Cripps did not at all seem to him attractive. Referring to Britain’s defeat in Malaya and Burma and their indifference in enlisting the support of the people which was an essential condition for avoiding the repetition of the defeat in India, Gandhi described the Cripps proposal as a “postdated cheque on a crashing bank”. He regarded it an urgent task to take a strong action against the British rulers who were adamantly refusing to hand over India to her people. Accordingly, Gandhi drafted a resolution and sent it to the Working Committee which was to be met towards the end of April. He expressed the opinion that though the victory of the
Axis Powers in the war appeared certain, Japan would leave India alone. In case an invasion took place, he expected "the people to offer complete non-violent non-cooperation to the invading forces and not to render any assistance to them."

Many members of the Working Committee, including Nehru and Azad, were not in agreement with Gandhi's ideas. They considered the idea of ejecting the British with the assistance of Japan absurd and thought it possible to get the adament attitude of the British relaxed with the assistance of the world leaders like President Roosevelt, since an anti-fascist front including China, the Soviet Union and the United States which were sympathetic to India had now been formed. Later, a resolution to this effect was adopted by the AICC replacing the draft resolution submitted by Gandhi.

However, this hope was soon shattered. It became clear that neither Roosevelt nor other world leaders could intervene in the Indian affairs. Nor did they come forward to exert pressure on the British, since they were convinced that a transfer of the defence department to the Indians in the midst of the war would adversely affect the efficient conduct of the war. Hence, most leaders including Nehru and Azad had to fall in line with Gandhi. How agonizing this change was had been stated by Azad:

I reached Wardha on 5 July and Gandhiji spoke to me for the first time about the 'Quit India' Movement. I could not easily adjust my mind to this new idea ... I felt that we must refrain from any word or action which could offer encouragement to the Japanese. It seemed to me that the only thing we could do was to wait upon the course of events and watch how the war situation developed. Gandhiji did not agree. He insisted...that the British must leave India. If the British agreed, we could then tell the Japanese that they should not advance any further. If in spite of this they advanced, it would be an attack on India and not on the British. If such a situation developed we must oppose Japan with all over might.
I have already said that I had been in favour of organized opposition to the British at the outbreak of the war. Gandhi had not then agreed with me. Now that he had changed, I found myself in a peculiar position. I could not believe that with enemy on the Indian frontier, the British would tolerate an organized movement of resistance. Gandhi seemed to have a strange belief that they would. He held that the British would allow him to develop his movement in his own way. When I pressed him to tell us what exactly would be the programme of resistance, he had no clear idea. The only thing he mentioned during our discussions was that unlike previous occasions, this time the people would not court imprisonment voluntarily. They should resist arrest and submit to the government only if physically forced to do so.

Gandhi held that the British would regard his move for an organized mass movement as a warning and not take any precipitate action. He would therefore have time to work out the details of the movement and develop its tempo according to his plans. I was convinced that this would not be the case.

Gandhi's idea seemed to be that since the war was on the Indian frontier, the British would come to terms with the Congress as soon as the movement was launched. Even if this did not take place, he believed that the British would hesitate to take any drastic steps with the Japanese knocking at India's doors. He thought that this would give the Congress the time and opportunity to organize an effective movement. My own reading was 'completely different....

Our discussions started on 5 July and continued for several days... We began to discuss in greater detail the various elements of the proposed movement. Gandhi made it clear that like other movements, this would also be on the basis of non-violence. All methods 'short of' violence would however be permissible. During the discussions, Jawaharal said that 'what Gandhi had in view' was in
fast an open rebellion, even of the rebellion was non-violent, Gandhi ji liked the phrase and spoke of an open non-violent revolution several times. This rather long passage is quoted here to show the depth of the crisis off thinking the Congress was caught in before the "Quit India" resolution was adopted. The strategy of Nehru and Azad of bringing pressure on Britain with the assistance of the US, and China had failed. If, in place of it, Gandhi’s strategy was to be adopted, it would create an atmosphere for the successful advance of the hated fascist Axis forces. On one side, the adamant attitude of the British and, on the other, the popular urge to force the British to quit India even with the assistance of the fascist Axis forces, Bose and his colleagues in-between the two trying to enter India along with the Japanese army—how to face all these simultaneously? Finally, Nehru and Azad surrendered to Gandhi.

There was another prominent Congress leader, Rajagopalachari, who, as indicated earlier, had deviated the Gandhian path more than once and trodden his own. Once again he came out with his own views and proposed that the Congress should be courageous enough to concede the Muslim League’s demand (for Pakistan) and revive the Congress ministries in the provinces. Rajagopalachari got two resolutions incorporating his proposals adopted by the Congress Legislature Party of Madras Presidency. He also presented one of these resolutions before the AICC which was, however, rejected with a large majority of votes. Not only that; the AICC adopted another resolution declaring that “any proposal to disintegrate India by giving liberty to any component state or territorial unit to secede from Indian Union or Federation, will be highly detrimental to the best interests of the people of the different States and Provinces and the country as a whole, and the Congress, therefore, cannot agree to any such proposal.”

As soon as the result of the voting on the resolution was made known, Rajagopalachari announced that he would campaign for his views in his province (Madras). He resigned from the primary membership of the Congress as well as his membership in the Madras Legislative Assembly, following the directive of the Parliamentray Party. (He had already resigned from the Working Committee earlier.)

Rajagopalachari’s actions failed to create any impact either in his province or in the Congress. Although he was occupying a high position in the Congress, he was swimming against the current of popular sentiments. The masses were angry over the series of defeats being inflicted on Britain and other Allied Powers in Europe and over Britain’s obstinacy in holding on to power in India even in the humiliating conditions created by these defeats. Bose and Gandhi were giving shape to this popular anger in two distinct forms. Although Nehru and Azad did not agree with their policies, they had to take account of the popular sentiments and adopt the ‘Quit India’ resolution. They were constrained to launch a mass struggle which might, perhaps, lead to the victory of Japan and other fascist forces in the war—a step hard to digest for them from the very beginning.

The passage quoted from Azad makes it obvious that however forcefully and determinedly Gandhi was talking about the ‘Quit India’ struggle, he was, in fact, groping in the darkness. For instance, he did not know where to stop the struggle which he was going to launch. Although he was talking enthusiastically about a mass struggle, he had made no arrangement to carry it out in an organized way. He was operating with a child-like confidence that enough time and facilities would be available and that the rulers would not go in heavily to suppress the struggle. It is doubtful if the world has ever witnessed a mass revolution which has been led so unplanned a way. This is the basic character of the ‘Quit India’ struggle which has been subsequently eulogized so highly. A mass struggle of such a magnitude that has never taken place in Gandhi’s entire political life in a political back-
ground devoid of a programme of struggle and of an organization to carry it out—this was ‘Quit India’.

This may sound strange. But there is nothing strange in it, for the present struggle, like all the earlier ones, to be launched by Gandhi was not designed to overthrow the British rule relying on the revolutionary potentials of the people, but to create a political atmosphere necessary for reaching a compromise with the rulers. Gandhi had made it clear to Nehru and Azad that he was contemplating to launch ‘Quit India’ struggle on the calculation that the rulers would be compelled to seek a compromise not long after the launching of the struggle.

III. THE ‘AUGUST REVOLUTION’

On 14th July 1949 the Congress Working Committee met at Wardha and adopted a resolution which subsequently became well known as the ‘Quit India Resolution’. The Working Committee also decided to convene a meeting of the AICC at Bombay on 7th and 8th August to take a final decision on the resolution.

Nehru and Azad had abandoned their stand and come round to Gandhi’s way of thinking even before the Working Committee met. This, however, does not mean that their doubts about the desirability and consequences of the struggle had been removed. Rather, they came round because there was no alternative left before them on the face of the adament attitude of the British rulers and also the helplessness of the world leaders. So, they simply cast aside all the doubts and joined hands with Gandhi.

Interestingly, it was Nehru himself who presented the Quit India resolution at the AICC meeting. Again, it was he who answered the Communists who introduced amendments to the resolution. Gandhi was thus able to rally all sections in the AICC behind himself and get the resolution passed almost unanimously (excepting opposition from Communists).
The AICC adopted the Quit India resolution on 8th August and before dawn of the next day, all Congress leaders who were present in Bombay were arrested and put behind bars. Simultaneously, Congressmen at the different levels were arrested similarly all over the country. It became evident that the government had a well-designed plan to suppress the Quit India struggle launched by the Congress without a plan.

There were indications to show which way the government was moving. Immediately after the Working Committee meeting, Gandhi made an attempt to open negotiation which was 'part and parcel of his method of struggle'. He sent one of his close disciples, Miss Slade alias Mira Ben to the Viceroy to explain to him the resolution of the Working Committee and the form of struggle envisaged therein. But the Viceroy refused her permission to meet him making clear that 'the government would not tolerate any rebellion during the war, whether it was violent or non-violent' and that it was not prepared 'to meet or discuss with any representative of an organization which spoke in such terms'.

Besides, on 17th July (three days after the meeting of the Working Committee), Gandhi had obtained a copy of the circular sent by the Secretary of the Publicity Department of the Government of India to the provincial governments, to which Gandhi had referred in his speech at the Bombay AICC meeting. Thus, the Congress had received the warning that the government was getting ready to face the struggle it was going to launch. Since the Publicity Department had issued such a circular, it could well be imagined that other departments also must have made similar arrangements to face the situation. But as against it, there was absolutely no preparedness on the part of the Congress. Gandhi never bothered, either to save at least a section of the leadership from mass arrests or to create an underground organization functioning continuously in the background of such mass arrests as any party in the world would do while organizing mass revolts against the government. What is more, he even made it clear in his speech before the Bombay AICC that
he was opposed to any such venture and maintained that since the struggle he was visualizing was an "open mass revolt", there was no room for underground activities and so on, and those who indulged in secret activities would land themselves in danger and so forth.

It may be argued that there was nothing strange in it since Gandhi was always opposed to secret activities. He had always maintained that secret activities were negations of the satyagraha programme he had formulated. But as distinct from the struggles conducted under his leadership earlier, he now left the participants free without placing any restriction on them. He was not bothered about "violent tendencies" of which he was afraid in each struggle he undertook to lead since 1921. Now his central slogan was "do or die". Gandhi gave the direction that in case he and other Congress leaders were arrested, Congressmen at the different levels and the people should take their own initiative to carry on the struggle in whichever way they considered right.

This idea was, in fact, contained in the AICC resolution which stated: "A time may come when it may not be possible to issue instructions or for instructions to reach our people and when no Congress committee can function. When this happens, every man and woman who is participating in this movement must function for himself or herself within the four corners of the general instructions issued. Every Indian who desires freedom and strives for it must be his own guide urging him on along the hard road where there is no resting place and which leads ultimately to the independence and deliverance of India."

Gandhi had laid down the condition earlier that everyone who participated in the struggle should engage oneself in the implementation of his constructive programme of spinning and weaving Khadi. He also used to avoid struggle whenever there was a semblance of "violent tendency" and call off the struggle when there was a minor incident of

violence. None of these principles had been adhered to now. He gave unconditional and unlimited freedom to everyone to engage onself in anti-government activities in whichever way one considered appropriate. That was why Nehru told that what had come form Gandhi now was a call for an “open rebellion”, a statement which Gandhi himself approved.

Nevertheless, the Quit India struggle contained most of the features of the Gandhian method of struggle. As in the case of the earlier struggles, in the present one also the large-scale mobilization of the people was designed to solve the problem through negotiations (bargaining) with the authorities. That was why immediately after the meeting of the Working Committee which adopted the ‘Quit India’ resolution, Gandhi sent Mira Ben to get in touch with the Viceroy. What is more, both the resolution of the Working Committee adopted on 14th July and the ‘Quit India’ resolution in August had left the door open for negotiations.

As we have seen, on many an occasion after the outbreak of the war, Gandhi had differed from the majority of the Working Committee on the question of whether the Congress should participate in Britain’s war efforts—actions which are quite at variance with the Gandhian principle of non-violence. On this issue also Gandhi had gone back from his earlier position. For example, the Working Committee resolution made it clear that the Congress was “agreeable to the stationing of the armed forces of the Allies in India, should they so desire, in order to ward off and resist Japanese or other aggression, and to protect and help China” and that the interim national government would have no objection in participating in such activities, because the Congress was as much interested as Britain and the Allied Powers in driving out the Japanese aggressors and rescuing China. It must be specifically noted that reference to this was made by way of explaining the background of launching the Quit India struggle in the resolution drafted with the approval of Gandhi.

The Quit India resolution was an appeal to the radical sections in Britain as also to the Allied Powers of the U. S.,
Soviet Union and China. The line of argument was that the Congress was launching upon the struggle reluctantly since the British was not prepared to give up its adamant attitude towards granting India its rights which would prepare the ground for the Congress to mobilize the whole people of India in the war in which these foreign friends were interested. Clearly, this was an approach designed to prepare the ground for negotiations.

The Congress approach was such that it was likely to appear justifiable to any impartial observer in relation to the relationship between the British rulers and their allies and also between the Congress and other political parties and organizations. Gandhi and Azad emphatically stated that the Congress was not demanding the British to leave for the sake of the Congress but for the whole country and that if the British were making use of the claims made by the Muslim League as a trump, they would not mind even if power was transferred to it. The resolution stated that what was aimed at was "a provisional government formed by the cooperation of the principal parties and groups in the country" and the preparation of "a constitution for the governance of India acceptable to all sections of the people". Thus, the present struggle was also looked upon as a means to win the demands through bargain.

But as distinct from the earlier struggles, what was contemplated now was a massive struggle by releasing the people to do what they liked. "Leave India in God's hands", Gandhi told the British authorities, "in modern parlance, to anarchy..." The Congress leaders realized that nothing short of a massive, unrestrained struggle which Gandhi did not hesitate to call a "open rebellion", would create conditions for effectively bargaining with the British.

The Congress leaders were aware of the fact that it was dangerous to launch a struggle at a time when the war had reached a critical juncture. And this was specifically mentioned in the AICC resolution. But they gave the call for a struggle facing any possible eventuality that might
arise in the circumstances in which Britain had been facing onefeat after another in the war. According to their calculation, the popular support they might gain through such a struggle would help them to bargean with the authorities at least in the future. They felt that if they surrendered before the adamantine attitude of the rulers, they would lose whatever popular support they had been able to gain through the struggles for several decades.

The British rulers, too, had realized their own weakness. They knew that they would not be able to remain in India for long even if they succeeded in suppressing the Congress for the time being. A notion made by the then king of England, George VI, in his diary in July 1942 throws light on this. Quoting, Churchill's statement that his colleagues and all parties in the British Parliament were ready to hand over India to the Indians after the war, he wrote that things appeared as if Cripps, the newspapers and the American public opinion together had impressed upon these parties that the continuance of their rule in India was wrong. Thus, neither the British rulers nor the Congress leaders had any doubt that the British would have to leave India handing over power to the Indians not long after the war. The former maintained that their rule should continue without any significant change during the war, in order to prosecute the war effectively, while the Congress held that in order to realize the same objective, Indians themselves should wield power in India. This was the difference between the two sides. Each side began to operate on its own stand-point.

The AMERICAN session terminated at night on 8th August 1942 after adopting the Quit India resolution. The slogans like "Freedom or Death" and "Do or Die" reverberated throughout the country. On the same night the government struck hard at the Congress which crumbled as never before. This was what the Congressmen and Socialists praised as the "August resolution". Was it really a revolution? Better understood.
There were protest demonstrations following the mass arrests that took place throughout the country and there were police lathi-charges and firings at the demonstrators. In many places where such actions took place, the people went into counter-actions against the police and the military. These were what was known as the "August revolution". Congressmen and Socialists are in the habit of proclaiming proudly that they were the organizers and participants of that "revolution". They used to denounce the Communists for having refused to participate in it and for opposing it.

But what actually took place during August and September 1942 was not a revolution as they are claiming; it was only a demonstration of protest against the repression let loose by the government. Neither Gandhi nor other Congress leaders had ever tried to give an organized form to the anti-imperialist feelings spontaneously displayed by the people. On the other hand, the government had a pre-determined plan to suppress the struggle within a matter of days.

Thus, the government was able to sweep at one stroke and throw into prison the leaders who were repeating the words "revolution" and "open rebellion" without doing anything necessary to organize that "revolution". The advocates of "August revolution" are, in fact, characterizing this attack of the rulers on the Congress and the national movement as revolutionary attack of the Indian people against the British rulers!

IV. STAGES AND ORGANIZERS OF 'QUIT INDIA'

The movement variously called the 'Quit India struggle' and the 'August revolution' began with the mass arrests that took place before the dawn of 9th August. As we have seen in the preceding section, neither Gandhi nor other Congress leaders had any idea as to how to organize and lead the struggle. In the words of Nehru: "Neither in public
nor in private at the meetings of the Congress Working Committee did he (Gandhi) hint at the nature of action he had in mind, except a one-day general strike. 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."

But as distinct from earlier struggles in which severe restrictions were imposed on the participants, the general instruction given in the AICC resolution and repeated by Gandhi in his speeches and statements was that "every Indian who desires freedom and strives for it must be his own guide" in the fight against the British rule. People were given a free hand in deciding the mode of the struggle and in forming the fighting organizations. Gandhi and other leaders never knew and nor did they want to know how the people would act and against whom they would turn in carrying out the task set before them; they merely declared that what they intended was an "open rebellion" that might follow the release of the fighting spirit of the people.

It was in the background in which this idea had run deep into the people that the mass arrests took place before the dawn of 9th August in a manner that enraged the people. And they expressed their protest against this action by holding huge demonstrations.

It must be noted that the demonstrations held on 9th and 10th August were relatively peaceful. But when these peaceful protest actions by the people were brutally attacked by the government, the people came out to sabotage the railway lines and the post and telegraph services in order to prevent the movement of the police and military forces which were being used to attack the people.

Viewed from the tradition of the Gandhian struggle, this had created the situation which was sufficient for the withdrawal of the struggle. However, neither Gandhi nor the

other leaders of the Congress deprecated these acts of violence. On the contrary, they attributed the violence on the part of the people to the use of force committed by the authorities on peaceful and non-violent demonstrators. From the prison Gandhi had sent a letter to the Viceroy to this effect.

The government charged that the forms of struggle adopted at the second stage, as distinct from those of the days immediately following the mass arrests, were the result of a planned programme, for which they put the blame on Gandhi and other leaders. In support of this, the rulers pointed out that the nature of the sabotage that took place several places simultaneously was the same. They also pointed out that these acts of sabotage were such that they could be executed only by those who had the necessary expertise in using specialized equipments.

But there was no evidence whatever to suggest that Gandhi or any other member of the Congress Working Committee had ever given any instruction for carrying out sabotage. On the contrary, there was enough evidence to show that they gave the call for this “mass rebellion” without giving any clear instruction on the conduct of the struggle and without creating an organization for that purpose. This, however, does not mean that the Congress leaders were free from the responsibilities for the forms of the struggle employed following the incidents that took place on 9th August, including the acts of sabotage. For they had openly given the general direction to the people to express their discontent and anguish towards the British rule by adopting any means which each one of them considered appropriate. What happened throughout the country after the mass arrests was that they carried out this direction in its literal sense. The people considered it their duty to paralyze the oppressive rule which unleashed cruel repression on the peaceful protest demonstrations in the initial stage of the struggle.

Among the people who were thus agitated, there were also experts in technical matters. They dedicated their expertise to the ‘Quit India struggle’ and trained others in
such acts as removing railway tracks, damaging bridges, destroying government office buildings, post and telegraph services, and so on. Thus, acts of sabotage of different kinds and forms took place extensively as part of the expression of their protest without any specific direction from above.

A certain development took place in the meantime which gave these unorganized activities an organized character. There were some leaders at the provincial level and below who had escaped arrest on 9th August. They and certain others like Jayaprakash Narayan who had escaped from prison formed a secret organization of the Congress and started sending circulars to the Provincial Congress Committees as “AICC directives”. Similar secret organizations came into being in many provinces. Illegal printing presses and publications, short time radio broadcasting stations, etc., also began to function. Collecting fire arms, teaching and learning bomb-making, conducting sabotage making use of explosives and such other activities started in an organized manner. With all this, the “Quit India struggle” acquired an organized character with an underground leadership centralized at least at the provincial and local levels.

As a result of these activities, the government machinery became completely paralyzed at least in some areas and secret mass movements which can rightly be called “parallel governments” emerged. Such parallel governments were formed and started functioning in Ballia in U. P., Bhagalpur and other places in Bihar, Midnapore in Bengal and in Satara in Maharashtra. Although these movements were Shattered before long in the face of attacks by the authorities, they constituted an important development that took place as part of the “Quit India” struggle in the different parts of the country.

Both the British rulers and the liberal politicians blamed the top leadership of the Congress and Gandhi for this situation. That this charge was unfounded is clear from the unplanned character of the struggle visualized by the Congress. For, the Congress leadership had never sent out
any directive with regard to the struggle. Besides, it would be clear to anyone that if the Congress had really intended to carry out such programmes as sabotage and setting up parallel governments, they could have organized them in much more wider a scale than what had happened in the weeks following 9th August. The fact that these were confined to a few places and lasted for a short duration makes it evident that the organizers of these activities enjoyed much less organized popular support than the central Congress leadership.

However, it is significant to note that neither Gandhi nor other Congress leaders came forward to deplore the sabotage, parallel governments and other activities organized in the name of the ‘Quit India’ struggle. On the contrary, they characterized the organizers of the struggle who adopted the means which were contrary to the Gandhian non-violence as patriots who carried out the call given by them. Furthermore, they sought to justify the Quit India struggle which, in effect was violent, and to own it entirely to themselves on the pretext that it was the British rulers who forced the struggles to adopt the means unacceptable to them.

It still remains a riddle as to what Gandhi and other Congress leaders would have done, had they not been arrested en masse before the down of 9th August. Suppose that the Congress leaders and the people in a certain place adopted means of struggles deviating from the Gandhian creed of non-violence which was reiterated in the Quit India resolution. Would Gandhi have disowned such means of struggle? If the answer is in the positive, would it not be a repudiation of the Quit India resolution and the statements he had made earlier? If the answer is in the negative, would it not give room for the interpretation that he led a mass struggle throwing overboard his own method of non-violence for the first time in his long life?

Fortunately for Gandhi and other Congress leaders, there was no occasion for these questions to be raised. They became free from the responsibility of deciding the form of
the struggle which they themselves called for. They could easily maintain that the incidents of violence developed because they were behind the bars. At the same time, since there were leaders outside the jail who had the capacity as well as the willingness to carry out the struggle in an organized way, the programme of struggle which caused extreme difficulties to the government were carried out under their leadership. This provided opportunity to Gandhi and other Congress leaders both to shrug off the responsibility for the consequences of the actions organized by this group of leaders and to own to themselves the gain of the "August revolution" at the same time. As we shall see in the later chapters, they did utilize this opportunity effectively during the years 1945-46.

Prominent among those who organized the underground activities and gave the Quit India struggle an organized character after the first stage of the struggle were Jayaprakash Narayan, Dr. Rammanohar Lohia and Mrs. Aruna Asaf Ali. Although they functioned on behalf of the Congress, they were socialists. They declared that they stood for a people's armed revolt, rather than adhering to the principle of non-violence contained in the Quit India resolution. They sharply criticized the Congress leaders for giving a call for a country-wide popular revolt without chalking out a programme of struggle or creating an organization for that purpose. These leaders who created the impression that they were effectively carrying out the struggle through underground organizations, were in a sense organizing the rank and file of the Congress against the leadership.

This enhanced the popularity of the socialists. People felt that although Gandhi and the Congress leaders had called for the struggle, it was the socialists who were carrying out the struggle in practice. Jayaprakash, Lohia and Mrs. Asaf Ali came to be revered by the people.

However, this impression did not last long. The people knew that although it was the socialists who created the necessary organization for the struggle and gave leadership
to the struggle, the actual call for the struggle came from Gandhi and other leaders of the Congress and that the former only helped to carry out the call given by the latter. Their level of consciousness was such that they thought that it was perhaps a minor error on the part of the Congress leadership, which, of course, could be corrected and that the leaders of the struggle, at any rate, were the top Congress leaders including Gandhi. In other words, the feeling they had towards Jayapra-kash, Lohia, Aruna and other leaders were secondary to their reverence to Gandhi and other Congress leaders.
THE CONGRESS AND ITS OPPONENTS

I. THE INDIAN NATIONAL ARMY

By the time Jayaprakash Narayan and other Socialist leaders started functioning as an underground centre of the AICC the struggle had already become stunted. The centre in a statement issued in November 1949 said that "our ranks have been repleted; our resources, in the form of local assistance in rural areas, and active enthusiastic support from village youngmen have been reduced by repression". In spite of this, the leaders of the underground organization firmly believed that the Indian masses were solidly with them. So they chartered a programme of action to make the struggle more wide-spread and more democratic. The programme included the following items:

1. The peasantry should refuse to pay the land tax and obstruct the revenue and police officers to collect the
tax. Even a military invasion should be rendered ineffective by flight into the jungles.

4. Emphasising upon the people the danger of food and cloth famine.
5. Organization of Swaraj Panchayat and boycotting of revenue or police officers.
6. Roads, and telegraphs and railways to be destroyed to defeat the British military."

But the programme remained only on the paper. This was not because the people were loyal to the British or they were opposed to the Quit India struggle, but because the government had succeeded in suppressing with arms all demonstrations of protest during the one and a half months following 9th August. A general feeling spread among the people that it was futile to fight the British.

However, while the struggle within India was being suppressed, certain developments were taking place outside the country, which culminated in the formation of the Indian National Army, its attempts to enter India under the leadership of Subhas Bose and its final defeat.

When Subhas Bose left India secretly in January 1941, Japan was not a party in the Second World War. Germany was making preparation to attack the Soviet Union under the cover of the no-war pact it had signed with it. Hitler was waiting for an opportunity to attack Britain and the countries under its possession after defeating the Allied forces in Europe. Therefore Bose first went to Germany where he established relation with the German Foreign Minister Ribbontrop and the fascist rulers of Italy, and started making regularly anti-British propaganda on the German radio. This evoked two different reactions among the politically conscious people in India. Among those who had adopted an anti-fascist outlook, thanks to the systematic propaganda

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carried out by anti-fascist organizations in India including the Congress, Bose’s activities evoked opposition. They were disturbed by his friendship with the fascist forces. At the same time, another section expressed sympathy with his activities. Their hatred towards the British rulers was stronger than that towards the fascist forces.

The entire course of the war changed before long. During the initial months when the German forces made rapid advances, a general impression was created that the Soviet Union would be defeated in the war. On the Asian front, Japan began to make advances. This too helped to create two reactions. It created sympathy towards the Soviet Union and China and hatred towards Germany and Japan. The second reaction was the feeling that Germany and Japan together were crushing the British and India could utilize this opportunity to win freedom. Both these reactions were found reflected on the people at large and particularly among the ranks and leadership of the Congress.

The Congress leadership participated in the talks with Cripps as a compromise between these two outlooks. At this stage, the sympathy towards the Soviet Union and China bore more weight with the leadership. But as the talks broke down, the joy over the advances being made by Germany and Japan as well as the feeling that India would be able to take advantage of the situation and gain freedom became stronger. Even in the midst of their talks with Cripps, the Congress leadership had maintained that in spite of their sympathy to the Allied powers, they would not be able to participate in the war efforts of the British as long as they continued to hang on to power in India. Even in the Quit India resolution, the Congress reiterated its sympathy to the Allies.

While this was the situation within the country, among the Indian living abroad there was a widespread feeling of admiration for Germany and Japan in their victory in the war and the optimism that India would be able to utilize the new world situation and gain independence. Even those
living in countries occupied by Germany and Japan, who had anti-fascist feelings, did not express them. Thus, Berlin and Tokyo became the centres of the Indians who were eager to wage an anti-British struggle. Berlin was the main centre of such activities until Japan declared war on the United States and Britain. With Japan’s entry in the war and its triumphant march over many Asian countries, the centre was stifled to Tokyo.

Rash Behari Bose, an Indian revolutionary who had left India during the First World War was living in Japan as a Japanese citizen. On his initiative, a conference of Indians was held in Tokyo from 28th to 30th March 1942, which formed the Indian Independence League of the overseas Indians. Following, a larger conference was held in Bangkok from 15th to 23rd June in which 100 delegates representing Indians living in East and South-East Asia participated. Rash Behari Bose was elected president of the Indian Independence League. The conference hoisted the Indian tri-colour flag and declared the immediate attainment of complete freedom for India its objective.

The Conference through a resolution invited Subhas Chandra Bose, who was then living in Germany, to Asia. Accepting the invitation, Subhas Bose reached Tokyo in June 1943 and took over the presidentship of the Indian Independence League from Rash Behari Bose.

Meanwhile, in December 1941 Japan invaded Malaya and defeated the British forces there. A number of soldiers were taken prisoners of war. A small party of Indian soldiers led by Capt. Sohan Singh who escaped from the advancing Japanese forces surrendered finally after wandering in the forest for a few days. The Japanese officers held talks with Sohan Singh and suggested to him to form an “Indian national army” out of a selected number of Indian prisoners of war and march to India in cooperation with the Japanese forces to end the British rule there. Sohan Singh accepted the suggestion. This was how the Indian National Army
(INA) was formed with Indian prisoners of war. In accordance with the decision of the Bangkok conference, a Council of Action was set up with Rash Behari Bose as the president and Sohan Singh as the minister of defence and the commander-in-chief of the Army. However, the activities of the Council were hampered for several reasons and it was only after Bose arrived and took up the leadership that they could be carried out smoothly.

As Subhas Bose took over the leadership of both the Council and the Indian National Army, a new wave of enthusiasm swept over the Indians in the Japanese occupied countries and even over a section of nationalists in India. It may be noted that after his taking over the leadership, the name of the Council was changed to "Provisional Government" on 21st October 1943. The feeling became wide-spread among the nationalists in India and abroad that the INA and Provisional Government were safe under the leadership which was capable both of liberating India from the British rule with the assistance of Japan and of preventing Japan from establishing its domination on the country thus liberated. It was also widely believed that the anti-British underground movement led by Jayaprakash and other socialist leaders was going to achieve final victory with the offensive actions of the INA forces led by Bose.

The initial activities of the INA were such as to create this impression. Bose was determined to maintain independence of the INA and the Provisional Government from the Japanese government and its military bosses. A number of biographical notes and reminiscences contained instances of Bose having taken strong position against the actions of the Japanese government which were not in correspondence with his ideas.

The consciousness spread among the INA men that far from being the mercenaries of Japanese masters, they were rising as the national army of India. In addition to the former prisoners of war, a section of the civilians trained by them also became an integral part of the INA. This enlarged
INA with Bose as its supreme commander fought and marched ahead. More than 4,000 among them were killed in actions and finally they were able to set foot on the Indian soil in March 1944. The Japanese ruler Tojo declared that Japan was resolved to extend all means in order to help to expel and eliminate from India "the Anglo-Saxon influence" and enable India to achieve "full independence in the true sense of the term".

But by the time they were able to reach about 150 miles inside the eastern borders of India, the course of the war began to change. The INA's first target was Imphal. However, they could not achieve the objective because the Japanese failed to reach the necessary supplies and materials. Meanwhile, the monsoon set in preventing their further advance. The British, on the other hand, used the opportunity to regroup their forces and made a successful counter-attack on the Japanese and INA forces as the monsoon withdrew. This marked the beginning of the end of the Japanese army and the INA.

Thus, both the Quit India movement inside India and the INA offensive outside India aborted. The British were able to suppress the Quit India struggle using its police and military forces. They were also able to defeat Japan and recover Burma, Malaya and Singapore with the support of the anti-fascist forces all over the world and with the military aid and cooperation from the Allies including the Soviet Union and the United States.

But the Quit India struggle and the activities of the INA had shaken the foundation of the British rule in India. The former remained in a subdued state ready to erupt at the first opportunity. The experience with the INA provided the warning that even the Indian soldiers who had been regarded as mercenaries of the British might turn the direction of their guns at an appropriate movement. When the INA trial began in the court, the ire of the people including that of the Indian servicemen rose high. The country-wide protest against the trial clearly showed that if the British were to hang on to
power arrogantly with the claim that they were successful in suppressing both the movements, not only the people of India in general but even the armed forces under the British control would rise against them. This was confirmed by the mutiny organized subsequently by the naval ratings in Bombay.

It was under these circumstances that the British decided to re-start negotiations. Details of these negotiations will be given in the later chapters. However, it is necessary here to find an answer to the questions why did the 'August revolution' fail and why did the INA crumble after registering partial success in the initial stage.

1. The Quit India struggle was not built upon the organized strength of the masses, no matter how wide a support it had received. It was the same leadership which had been arguing that any mass struggle was contrary to the principle of non-violence that now called upon the people to adopt any method each of them considered appropriate in the Quit India struggle. Even this call was subject to the principle of non-violence! Therefore, as Jayaprakash and others pointed out later, the absence of an organization strong enough to wage the struggle disarmed the people.

2. The Quit India struggle failed to create even a ripple among the armed forces maintained by the British. Like their English counterparts, the Indian soldiers continued to act in accordance with the orders given by their superiors. There was not one minor incidence of insubordination anywhere in India during the 1942 struggle as was witnessed in Peshawar during the 1930 salt satyagraha. Munity in the organized armed force is an important element in the success of any revolution. As Lenin stated, without immobilizing the armed forces no major revolution had succeeded and will not succeed.

3. The INA was the first indication to the fact that the British Indian armed forces would not act as loyally as before. What made the INA a strong willed military force was the fact that a section of the Indian army turned against
the British and thousands of civilians turned themselves into trained soldiers under such a popular leader like Subhas Bose.

4. Even at that stage, the Indian soldiers who were deployed against the INA were acting loyally to the British rulers. Neither the organizers of the Quit India movement nor the INA was able to "immobilize" it. Added to this was the fact that in Europe in the west and in Asia in the east, the fascist powers were facing one defeat after another. All this led to the final defeat of the INA.

II. AUGUST STRUGGLE AND THE COMMUNIST PARTY

In the midst of the people who were excited by the politics of the Quit India struggle and the formation of INA, the Communist Party was growing as a new political force in the country. From 1933-34 when a perpetually functioning central leadership of the Party emerged, the Communist Party had been striving to unite the left forces within and outside the Congress and to draw the Congress along the path of an uncompromising struggle against the British. Thus, the party was functioning as part of a leftist united front in which the top Congress leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Bose had played important roles.

As the war broke out, the left front broke up and the constituents of the front—the Communist Party, the Congress Socialist Party and the Forward Bloc—began to proceed along their respective ways. The Congress came under the leadership of Gandhi, though deviating at times from his path. The Communist Party which was fighting against the compromising policy being pursued by Gandhi and the Congress, could earn the appreciation of the anti-imperialist circles in the country.

The situation changed once again in the second stage of the war when Germany attacked the Soviet Union and Japan
overran the Asian countries and reached the eastern frontier of India. People's indignation rose high against the British rulers who were utilizing the economic and manpower resources of India to protect their own imperialist interests without conceding to India its right to independence. The anti-fascist attitude the Congress had hitherto been maintaining got weakened. Not only Bose who, camping at Berlin, Bangkok and other places, was cooperating with the fascist forces, but also the Congress leaders in India began to take an attitude which was in effect favourable to Japan on the belief that "Japan would not attack India". Statements and speeches contrary to the anti-fascist policy and approach that the Congress had been pursuing for a decade came in abundance from leaders like Gandhi. Other Congress leaders like Nehru and Azad who were disturbed by this new trend, however, succumbed to the pressure of popular sentiments and helplessly supported the Quit India resolution.

As we have seen earlier, the only section in the Congress which had uncompromisingly opposed this was the Communists. The Communist Party did not give in even after the adoption of the Qint India resolution by the AICC. The Party continued to hold that it was suicidal to launch the Quit India struggle in a manner that would obstruct the war efforts of the Allied Powers including the Soviet Union in the prevailing world situation in which the very future of the Soviet Union was hanging in the balance and a large part of Asia including the eastern border countries of India came under Japanese occupation. It could not agree with the views of Bose of liberating India with the assistance of Japan. So the Communist Party kept itself aloof from the Quit India struggle as well as from the activities of the INA. Not only that. The Party did not hesitate to organize campaigns among the People that the activities on these lines were suicidal.

For the Party it was a period of great trial. It was placed itself in a situation in which it had not only to challenge the bourgeois leadership of the Congress but had to move against the current of anti-imperialist feelings which
had become strong among all classes and sections of the people. Furthermore, immediately before launching their attack against the Congress, the authorities released many well-known communist leaders from the prison and withdrew arrest warrents issued against many others who had escaped arrest. This had helped to create an impression among a large section of the people who had participated in the Quit India struggle or who were otherwise sympathetic towards the struggle that “the communists had struck a deal with the British”.

This was the circumstance under which the communists came to be alienated from the people including those who had regarded them highly for the part they had played earlier in the anti-imperialist struggles. Later, this was also utilized by Nehru and other top Congress leaders in making fierce propaganda against the communists who, according to them, “joined the other side during the independence struggle”.

However, judging the activities of the communists before 1942 and after 1945, no one would think that they would do anything that would help the British rulers in suppressing the freedom movement. Hence, it is necessary to examine objectively what the communists did in the period 1942-45.

It was true that the Communist did not take part in the Quit India struggle called for by the Congress. It was also true that at the end of the first stage of the struggle when subversive activities were organized by the Congress functioning underground under the leadership of Jayaprakash Narayan and others, the Party mobilized all its resources to campaign extensively among the people that the policy they were pursuing was suicidal. Further, the opposition put up by the Party against the approach of Bose of liberating India with the assistance of Japan helped to spread bitterness towards the Party amongst other anti-imperialist forces in the country. But the truth was that the Party adopted this attitude on the basis of the anti-fascist policies which had
been consistently followed by all anti-imperialist forces in the country and officially adopted by the Congress itself.

The 1942 Quit India resolution and all other official documents and declarations of the Congress had expressed the determination of the Congress not to do anything that would impede the anti-fascist war efforts of the Allied Powers which included Britain. We have also noted that Nehru and Azad amongst the top Congress leaders who had subscribed to this view more strongly could not really agree to Gandhi’s policy with regard to the Quit India struggle. Their dissent was in essence the policy which was adopted by the Communist Party towards the struggle. On account of the “affectionate pressure” from Gandhi and motivated by the rising anti-imperialist feelings of the people, they renounced their own stand and gave approval to the Quit India resolution. The Communist Party, on the other hand, adhered to its own stand till the end—this was the only difference.

The entire Congress leadership, including Gandhi, Nehru and Azad utilized as ever before the situation arising out of the present war as an opportunity to protect their own (bourgeois) class interests by bargaining with the British rulers. They subordinated the hatred towards fascism, sympathy towards the Soviet Union and China and all other sentiments to the policy of bargain with the rulers. They were ready to cooperate in the war efforts if the government was prepared to accept their conditions; otherwise, they would launch a struggle that would obstruct the efforts of the government—this was the attitude of the Congress leadership.

The Communist Party totally disagreed with this. The Party pointed out that in the anti-fascist war which was going to decide the future of mankind, mobilizing masses against fascism was not the concern of the British alone, but also of the whole Indian people. The demands raised by the Congress were just. The Party had no doubt about it. The Party regarded that the British fighting the war without acceding to these demands and with such policies as would only result in creating discontent among the people was in effect defeating
their own efforts. It mobilized all its resources to place these views before the people. Since the Party’s propaganda campaigns had this anti-British component, the government’s repressive weapons were also used against it. Yet, the Party maintained that launching the Quit India struggle in protest against the adament attitude of the British in a manner helpful to the Japanese invasion was like burning the castle to kill the rat.

It may be recalled that the call for the Quit India struggle was given by the Congress when the historic battle of Stalingrad was going on in Europe, while in the east the Japanese forces had reached the eastern borders of India. In that situation the Communist Party proposed that it was not enough to conduct country-wide campaigns against the adament attitude of the British rulers and to build pressure in order to compel them to concede the demands, but it was also necessary to take all steps, including guerilla war, against the Japanese aggressers to stop the advance of fasism, should Japanese forces crossed the Indian borders. The Party was of the opinion that the Congress and other anti-imperialist organizations must also conduct activities on a number of war-time problems such as providing medical aid to the victims of bombardment and organizing people against hoarders and blackmarketeers, including profiteering by exploiting the war-time situation.

Nehru had at one stage agreed to these proposals. He expressed the opinion in favour of organizing guerilla squads in areas falling to the Japanese forces. But after holding talks with Gandhi, he gave up the idea. Yet, the Party did not swerve. Furthermore, during the Quit India struggle, the Communist Party acted in accordance with the programme which was even accepted at least partly by Nehru at one stage. It did not hesitate to establish contact with the government and accept the assistance necessary for carrying out this programme.

Even while engaged in these activites, however, the Communist Party continued to organize campaigns against the government’s policy of refusing to arrive at an understanding
with the Congress on India's national demands and against arresting them en masse.

This was a policy which was adopted not only by Indian Communists but also by Communists all over the world during the anti-fascist war. The French Communist Party, the most glorious of them, devoted everything for the anti-fascist guerilla war. The Communist parties of the present day Asian socialist countries of Vietnam, Laos, Kampuchia, Korea and China and the parties in other occupied countries of Malaya, Burma, and Indonesia had accepted different kinds of assistance including military training and military hardware form the imperialist countries including Britain and USA during the anti-Japanese war. It was with these materials that the Communist parties and other anti-fascist organizations in those countries prepared the people for the fight against the colonial domination immediately after the termination of the Second World War.

Such a situation did not develop in India. The Japanese forces had to retreat even before entering India. The Communist Party, however, did make some efforts, in a small way though, to meet any Japanese attack. The authorities had come forward to give training in guerilla warfare to the Communists for that purpose. The Party did not hesitate to obtain assistance from the departments concerned for organizing defence against air raids, etc.

At the same time, the Communist Party organized massive campaigns exposing the anti-people politics of the government and stressing the fact that the anti-fascist war could not be fought keeping the Congress leaders behind the bars. Simultaneously, the Party also made efforts to foster trade unions, peasants organizations socio-cultural associations and organizations of students, youth and women and to bring the masses in the struggles against hoarding and black-marketing and against price rise and famine. The Party also organized struggles against hoarders and black-marketeers by systematically organizing relief work in the 1943 famine in Bengal and other provinces. As a result of all these
activities, there was tremendous increase in the membership of the Party, the circulation of Party journals and people's contributions to party fund.

It is often stated that the reason for the success of the Party was that they were able to freely carry on their activities while the Congress leaders were behind the bars and the socialists were working underground. That this was hardly the truth can be seen from the fate of M N Roy and other Royists who were fully cooperating with government during the same period. They enjoyed more freedom than the Communist Party. It may be stated that although many of the Party leaders were released from prison, a number of them had still remained inside. Similarly, though the arrest warrents against many had been withdrawn, many others were forced to remain underground. Cases against many leaders were still pending in courts. It may be noted that the Royists were free from all these problems. In spite of this, they met with their doom because they were functioning as an appendage of the government giving up the independent stand of the working class. The Communist Party, on the other hand, was opposing the Quit India struggle by organizing countrywide campaigns against the general policies of the government.

This, however, does not mean that the Communist Party did not commit any error in translating its general approach towards the Quit India struggle into practical activities. Failing to properly appreciating the popular feelings behind the struggle, the Party had often displayed a tendency to denounce those participating in the struggle as fascist agents. It had also made certain errors in organizing mass struggles during this period. All such errors were subjected later to severe self-criticism, particularly in the Second Party Congress held in Calcutta in 1948.

Despite the omissions and commissions, the Party adopted a policy which was by and large correct during the Quit India struggle. The Party combined anti-imperialism with anti-fascism. It adopted an independent working class
revolutionary attitude facing both the provocations and threats from the rulers and the rising popular sentiments under the leadership of the bourgeoisie. The Communists came out as a party independently organizing the people while striving to criticize the British rulers who were fighting the war while suppressing the people and their leaders, Bose and his followers who were rejoicing at the victory of the fascist forces and operating on the expectation that they would be able to liberate India with their assistance, and the Congress leadership which was looking upon the anti-fascist war as an opportunity to bargain with the British rulers. The Communist Party engaged itself in the task of organizing the working class, the peasantry and other working masses on the basis of this political approach of anti-imperialism combined with anti-fascism.

It was for the first time that the Communist Party was rising to such a level. With this it became clear that an independent working class revolutionary party, small though, had come into being standing on its own legs and challenging the bourgeois leadership. This constituted the meaning of the growth of the Party at this stage.

III. NEGOTIATION ATTEMPT THAT FAILED

Although the Communist Party made great strides during the Quit India struggle as compared to the earlier period, it could not bring about any substantial change in the political situation in the country. The Congress leadership continued to be the symbol of people's aspiration for freedom. Although the struggle failed, the freedom loving people put it on a still higher pedestal. Politically, the Muslim League and other caste and communal parties continued to be the forces capable of effectively challenging the Congress. As a consequence, the post-war Indian politics was again centred around negotiations among the Congress, the British rulers, and the caste-communal parties including the Muslim League.
Even when the Quit India resolution was adopted, Gandhi and other Congress leaders had thought that things might move in that direction. This explains the attempts made by them to establish contact with the League leaders in the days immediately preceding the adoption of the resolution. It may be recalled that the Congress President Azad and Gandhi himself had made it clear that the Congress would not be troubled even if the Muslim League formed a government at the Centre, provided it contained the essence of freedom. It was, in fact, leaving the door open for negotiations on this basis that the Quit India resolution was adopted by the Congress. Furthermore, Gandhi had announced in his speech before the AICC that he would try to keep in touch with the Viceroy as authorized by the resolution before launching the struggle.

But the government arrested the Congress leaders en masse without providing them opportunities for starting such negotiations. It was followed by a communiqué issued by the government justifying these actions. The communiqué was designed to create hatred towards the Congress among all those, particularly the foreigners, who wanted to see that the fascist forces were defeated and those who felt disturbed at any action which was likely to become an obstruction before the war efforts. It sought to create the impression that what was envisaged in the name of Quit India struggle was destructive activities and if the Congress was allowed to carry on these activities, it would doom the anti-fascist war efforts of the Allied Powers.

The charges levelled against the Congress and the repressive actions resorted to by the government provided Gandhi another opportunity to attempt to open negotiations. Thus, on 22nd September, hardly a month and a half after the mass arrests, Gandhi wrote a letter to the Viceroy in which he repudiated the charges levelled against the Congress. He sought to establish that neither he nor the Congress could be held responsible for the destructions that had taken place in the country. Gandhi expressly stated that the
Congress did not approve of the destructive activities which could have been avoided if the Congress leaders were left free to lead the struggle. The people turned violent, according to Gandhi, because the government, in addition to rejecting the national demand raised by the Congress, arrested the leaders en masse and brutally attacked the people who were agitated over the arrests of their leaders.

Gandhi's letter was not released for publication by the government until the middle of February 1943. A few months later, the Congress charged the Viceroy and other officials with deliberately withholding the contents of the letter from the press. Basic to this allegation was the thinking that if it had been released to the press soon after it was received, those who were cooperating with the programme of destructive activities thinking that it was in accordance with the instructions of the Congress, would have withdrawn their cooperation which would render the reason for their continued imprisonment invalid. Interestingly, this charge was raised only after Gandhi undertook a fast from 10th February. The fast was undertaken on the ground that the reply he had received to his letter of 22nd September and to the subsequent letters was not satisfactory. Only two days after launching the fast did the government reveal it to public. The correspondence exchanged between Gandhi and the Viceroy was released to the press by way of explaining the position of the government.

The letter exchanged between Gandhi and the Viceroy revealed that the Congress represented by Gandhi had no sympathy at all either to the socialists who were venturing to give a revolutionary character to the Quit India struggle, nor to Bose who had been striving to liberate India with the military assistance of Japan. The call for the struggle was given as part of the usual pressure tactics to bring the authorities once again to negotiations which were broken off as a result of the failure of the Cripps mission.

The government took a rigid attitude to this struggle as they did in the case of the 1932 civil disobedience movement.
They were determined to use all forces against the Congress. The entire government machinery was brought in, including the police and the military, in such a way as had never been witnessed since the 1857 revolt. So Gandhi had to find a way out of the crisis and the letter of 22nd September was a first step taken in that direction. Further, this was another example to show that bourgeois politics could be handled cleverly under the veil of spirituality. On the sole issue of the repression let loose by the government all over the country, Gandhi launched upon a twenty-one-days fast on the ground that the only weapon in the hands of a satyagrahi facing violence was “self-affliction”. And in the explanation given to this action lay hidden an extremely clever bourgeois political strategy.

Gandhi’s statement that he and his colleagues could not be held responsible for the destructive activities could be interpreted to mean a denunciation of the destructive activities themselves and based on this interpretation, the government could release the Congress leaders from prison and start negotiations with them as envisaged by Gandhi. But this was possible only if the government was willing for that. Alternatively, Gandhi’s statement could be interpreted in another manner which did not require denunciation of the destructive activities. That is, the people who were agitated and provoked by the brutal repression let loose by the government simply gave expression to their natural feeling in a way which was different from the Congress method of agitation. In other words, negotiate with the authorities if opportunities are open for it; otherwise, go along the way of popular sentiments as far as possible and keep the people under their sway without denouncing the violence on their part—this was the strategy.

However, the rulers too played bourgeois politics. As indicated earlier, even Winston Churchill who was known to be a hard-core defender of imperialism had come to the conclusion that Britain would have to leave India after the war. But, since they were not willing to do so in the midst of the war,
they were determined to preserve their authority and rule through organized repression, while the Congress was striving to demonstrate and enhance its popularity among the people through the 'Quit India struggle'. That was why the Congress leaders were arrested en masse soon after the AICC meeting. And for the same reason, the rulers made it clear from the beginning of the exchange of letters between Gandhi and the Viceroy that they were not prepared to let up the repressive actions. In a letter wrote to Gandhi before the commencement of fast, the Viceroy stated:

....but you many rest assured that the charges against the Congress will have to be met sooner or later and it will then be for you and your colleagues to clear yourselves before the world, if you can. And if in the meanwhile you yourself, by any action such as you now appear to be contemplating, attempt to find an easy way out, the judgement will go against you by default.²

The meaning of this passage is evident. The Viceroy was making an open declaration in unambiguous terms that the government would not do anything to avert a possible danger to the life of Gandhi as a result of the prolonged fasting. It also constituted a warning to the effect that the military had been kept ready to face the repercussions of Gandhi's possible death in detention.

Luckily, nothing untoward, as the Viceroy expected, happened. The fast, though precarious at times, passed off its stipulated period. It ended with both parties holding their respective positions firm: the authorities in their policy of repression and Gandhi protesting against the repression.

Meanwhile the Congress President Azad, who came to know of the fast from the newspaper, wrote a long letter to the Viceroy in which he repeated what Gandhi had explained in his own letters to the Viceroy. It became clear that the line of argument with regard to the destructive activities was not of Gandhi alone, but it was the line of the Congress

leadership as a whole. Thus, everyone understood that, like Gandhi, the entire leadership of the Congress was searching for a way out of the situation created by the incidents that took place following the events of 9th August.

Utilizing the situation, Rajagopalachari who had left the Congress a few months before the Quit India struggle, and the liberal leaders like Sapru began attempts to bring the Congress and the government together for negotiations. These attempts received support from a wide spectrum of political opinions in different countries including England and the United States. Suggestions began to come up that since the Congress had authoritatively stated to be not in favour of destructive activities, there was no justification for the continued imprisonment of the leaders and that the stage should be set for the formation of governments at the Centre and in the provinces with the participation of the Congress and the Muslim League and for preparing a constitution acceptable to all political opinions in the country. An atmosphere conducive to negotiations began to appear.

There was, however, one pre-condition for the success of these efforts: the release of the Congress leaders from prison. The British were not prepared to do that. Having known for sure that they would have to leave India after the war, the British rulers decided to keep Gandhi and other Congress leaders in prison until the war was over. They did not even permit the leaders to exchange letters between them and the leaders like Jinnah who were outside the prison. The Congress leadership had no alternative other than remaining in prison until the war was over.

IV. AN ALTERNATIVE BOURGEOIS LEADERSHIP

The principal reason for the failure of the attempts made by the Congress to start negotiations was the fact that the British rulers were able to utilize the bourgeois leadership
which had emerged in the meantime as an alternative to the Congress, against the Congress and other organizations of the movement for national independence. This bourgeois alternative was the Muslim League which had started functioning as an organized political force raising the central slogan of ‘Pakistan’. It rendered valuable assistance to the British authorities in facing the Quit India struggle. In place of the Congress slogan of ‘Quit India’, Jinnah raised the slogan of ‘Divide India, and Quit’.

Apparently, this slogan was against both the Congress and the British rulers. The League was equally interested in the British leaving the country, but not in the manner as demanded by the Congress. The League did not want to see the Congress rising to the position of leading a united India. Consequently, just as the Congress slogan ‘Quit India’ inspired the Indian people in general, so the League slogan ‘Divide India, and Quit’ inspired the Muslim masses.

We have already explained the general background in which the Indian politics had reached this state. Ever since the national demand for Swaraj came to be raised and the agitational programmes including boycott launched to back up this demand, the British rulers were able to set the Muslim community against the Congress-led national movement. However, in those days the Muslim leaders had not been successful in bringing the entire community under one organization. Many of them were with the Congress. A change in the situation came only in 1937 when the Congress ministries came to power in some of the provinces. The Muslim League under the leadership of Jinnah gained considerable strength through agitations against the Congress ministries. It was as a continuation of this struggle that the League adopted the Pakistan resolution in 1940.

Even at this stage, the League could not claim to be the sole party representing the Muslim community. The League had little influence on the ministries in those provinces where the Congress was a minority in the legislature. As we have seen earlier, for example, the Fazlul Haq
government in Bengal and the Sikandar Hyat Khan government in Punjab were independent of the Muslim League. In the Muslim majority border provinces of Sind and Assam, ministries of the Congress or under the influence of the Congress were in power. Besides, when the Congress ministries in the provinces resigned in 1939, the Muslim ministers in some of these provinces functioned in ways which were opposed to the policies of the League. The Sind Chief Minister Allah Baksh issued at the initial stage of the Quit India struggle a statement holding the British authorities responsible for the crisis, as a consequence of which he was removed from office.

The situation changed as the people began to line up behind the respective slogans of the Congress and the Muslim League. The influence of the League on the elected Muslim members in the legislatures increased and the ministries of Bengal, Assam and the NWF Province passed into the hands of the League. In Punjab the influence of the League increased after the death by the end of 1942 of Sikandar Hyat Khan who was firmly opposed to the League demand for Pakistan. In spite of this, an official Muslim League did not come up in Punjab.

The political changes that occurred in the months immediately following the launching of the Quit India struggle were skilfully utilized both by the British government and Jinnah. They proceeded by creating the impression that the entire Muslim community was solidly behind the League. They also created the impression that there were other minority communities and the depressed sections among the Hindus which, although did not entirely agree with the League’s demand for Pakistan, were generally in support of the League’s anti-Congress stance. The elites among these communities were opposed to the slogan of ‘Quit India’ and to the struggle called for by the Congress. It was, in fact, relying on the sympathy and support of the masses behind these elites that the British rulers resorted to repressive actions to suppress the Quit India struggle. It was the same
that emboldened the British authorities to ridicule the efforts made by Gandhi and Azad in prison to start negotiations.

Gandhi and other Congress leaders had known well that this had created a serious situation. They were also were conscious of the fact that it was impossible to reach a settlement with the British ignoring the Muslim League and its slogan of Pakistan. That was why they had tried to establish contact with the League leadership before adopting the Quit India resolution. It was for the same reason that Gandhi wrote a letter to Jinnah from the prison, which the authorities refused to deliver to him. They had on doubt that the unity between the Congress and the League was a precondi
tion for the success of any negotiation that they would have to start with the British rulers in the post-war days.

Thus, by 1942-43 the question of the British leaving India had ceased to be a controversial one. Instead, the question now was whether they would leave an undivided India handing over its administration to a government with the participation of the Congress, the League and other organizations, or they would create two independent nations—a Hindu India and a Muslim India—and transfer power to their respective leaders.

Besides, the question also emerged as to whether the princely states numbering about 600 would be an integral part of an undivided India, or to which country would each of them align itself, or would they remain independent sovereign countries.

We shall deal in later chapters with the details of the intense arguments, uncompromising proposals, private and open discussions among the leaders of the people, and the like that took place before and after the end of the war. Here we shall deal only with certain general things relating to the understanding which formed the basis of these arguments and discussions.

As we had referred to earlier, from the time when the idea occurred that India must become independent, two parallel views began to gain ground on the meaning of
'independence', One section thought that independence meant revival of the ancient (Hindu) kingdoms and empires and of the sociocultural life that prevailed in those periods which were regarded as the 'golden period' of Indian civilization. Another section thought, on the other hand, that independence meant a re-establishment of the reign of the Badshahs of Delhi which was the capital of India in the medieval period. The former may be called Hindu revivalists and the latter Islamic revivalists.

From Jinnah's 'two-nations theory' it can be understood that the League was the organization of the latter. Jinnah argued for the creation of two independent sovereign countries on the plea that India was not one nation but two nations, the Hindus and the Muslims. The Muslim League slogan of 'Divide India, and Quit' was a transformation of this argument. They accused the Congress which opposed this slogan that they stood for 'Hindu domination'.

It may be argued that there is an element of truth in it. From the early sanyasi revolt of Bengal to Tilak's Ganesh Puja and Gandhi's ashram life, one could see the influence of Hinduism in the history of Indian national struggle. Yet the slogans they raised were those of modern (bourgeois) nationalism. Not only freedom and democracy but also reformation of communal and ritual practices and cultural modernization were part of the freedom movement represented by the Congress. And similar movements of reformation and modernization had spread among the leaders of the Muslim community. Each of the Muslim social and political movements right from the Aligarh movement led by Sayyed Ahamed Khan to the Muslims League led by Jinnah gave expression to the aspirations of the bourgeoisie emerging from among the Muslims. Until 1937-38 Jinnah himself had appeared as a nationalist raising the slogan of modernization and nationalism against Islamic revivalism.

Basically, the Congress and the Muslim League thus represented the same (bourgeois) class. The leaders of both the parties wanted this class to develop; they wanted to create
conditions (political power) for a reorganization of the society on capitalist lines. Yet, there were contradictions and rivalries characteristic of capitalist society between them. The dispute between them was over the sharing of political power which was to be acquired and the sharing of the gains resulting from the reorganization of the society on capitalist lines making use of this political power. It was this dispute that manifested itself in the form of the slogans of “Quit India” on the one hand, and “Divide India, and Quit” on the other.

From the beginning the British rulers were trying to take advantage of this rivalry to protect their own imperialist interests. When ‘Quit India’ and the ‘two-nations theory’ came to the fore, the ‘divide and rule’ tactics of the rulers revealed its real character. They utilized the ‘two-nations theory’ and the demand for Pakistan against the slogan of ‘Quit India’. It was a political necessity of the British to expose the claim made by the Congress that it was the sole representative of the Indian people. But they, at the same time, claimed that they wished India to remain undivided. Both Lord Linlithgow who was the Viceroy at the time when the demand for Pakistan was raised and Lord Wavell who succeeded him expressed the desire that “India should remain one entity for geographical and political reasons”. And Lord Mountbatten who at last performed the division tried to impress upon the people that he did it reluctantly.

Having understood the tactics of the rulers, the Congress leaders tried to devise certain counter-tactics. But the political situation that prevailed was such that any such attempt was bound to end in failure. One of the reasons for this was the fact that the views held by most Congress leaders including Gandhi contained elements of Hinduism. But what was more important was that the British rulers were able to utilize the Islamic views which had exerted considerable influence on the Muslim communal leaders against India’s national demands. A modern secular political leadership had not yet emerged capable of countering the Hindu and Islamic
varieties of the revivalist movements and their possible repercussions on the Indian political life. And the frightening consequences of this situation manifested themselves in 1944 and thereafter.

V. THE CRISIS

Gandhi’s fast and the attitude of the authorities towards it put the Congress in a serious crisis. When the Quit India struggle was launched the Congress leaders expected a mass upsurge to take place compelling the authorities to seek negotiations. That did not happen. On the contrary, the authorities were determined not to enter into negotiations with the Congress, even if Gandhi was to die fasting in prison. The Congress leaders reached a dead end finding no way out of the dilemma created by this situation.

The British rulers too were in a dilemma. Although they had boasted that they had succeeded in suppressing the Quit India struggle and were able to carry with them the different organizations like the Muslim League, the mass support to the Congress was increasing. A new generation was emerging in India drawing inspiration from the underground organizations which had been created following the suppression of the Quit India struggle and from the activities of the INA. Although keeping aloof from the Quit India struggle, the Communist Party which had been organizing popular agitations for the release of the Congress leaders and for other demands of the people was also growing. The different streams of anti-imperialism were steadily gaining strength.

In the political field, certain developments took place in the early months of 1943 which were likely to produce long-term results. During and after Gandhi’s fast, the liberal leaders and certain former Congress leaders like Rajagopalachari came out with the suggestion to start talks between the Congress and the Muslim League in order to find a solution to the political problems. Presiding over a conference held
in 1943, the League President Jinnah wondered why Gandhi who had been continually writing letters to the Viceroy was not writing to him. In response to this Gandhi wrote a letter to Jinnah which the government refused to deliver to him causing a storm of protest inside and outside the country. Different sections of the people in England openly accused the government of thwarting all attempts to find a solution to the political problems.

To cap it all, a famine broke out in India, particularly in Bengal, in 1943. Several thousands of people starved to death under a government which was claiming itself to be “functioning efficiently”. The rulers and their agents tried to make it out that the famine was caused by drought, which was accentuated by uncontrolled increase in the population. But any knowledgeable person knew that famine, rather than being the result of nature’s failure, was man made.

Democratic-minded people pointed out that the famine and the general price rise were due to hoarding and blackmarketeering being practised extensively by big landlords, money-lenders and wholesale merchants utilizing the war-time situation. Public opinion rose high against the authorities who instead of taking actions against these anti-people elements, were giving all protection to them. The demand came from the people that the government should immediately release the national leaders from prison and seek their cooperation in the controlled distribution of food grains and other essential articles.

The role played by the Communist Party in this regard deserves particular mention. The Party’s attitude towards the food problem as also towards the war and the problems that arose out of the war was different from that of the British rulers, on the one hand, and that of the organizers of the Quit India struggle, on the other. It was linked with the solution to the day-to-day life problems of workers, peasants and other sections of the common people.

As distinct from the organizers of the Quit India struggle, the Party had extended cooperation to the government
in matters relating to the control of the price and distribution of food grains and other essential commodities. The Party had campaigned against sabotage causing obstruction to these activities. The Party had participated actively in the work of the procurement and distribution of essential commodities by cooperating with the authorities and by setting up separate organizations for the purpose. The Party had organized workers and peasants to get them engaged themselves fully in the work of increasing industrial and agricultural production.

At the same time the Party emphatically stated that it was impossible to control scarcity and price increase without preventing profiteering by big landlords, wholesalers and other vested interests. It put forward practical suggestions to take over the stocks from big landlords and others and to distribute them among the people. It not only demanded actions to prevent food grains being transported from the famine stricken areas but also formed volunteer organizations to undertake this work where the authorities were not prepared to do it.

The activities of peasant organizations engaged in these jobs and the trade unions agitating against the capitalists who were standing in the way of increased production in factories became more wide-spread. Besides, the Party's political campaigns went on emphasizing that the government would not be able to solve these problems as long as they kept the popular national leaders in prison.

The propaganda campaigns and the relief work organized by the Party at the all-India level with regard to the Bengal famine created a small ripple in Indian politics. It was true that a considerable section of the people in the country did not show favour towards these activities on the ground that they were being organized by a party which was opposed to the Quit India struggle. They even opposed these activities. However, it created considerable impact on those non-communist democrats who did not share the Quit India politics. The approach of the Party during the campaign in connection with Bengal famine was to serve the people under
any circumstance and under any condition and expose the anti-people forces, and to state openly that the greatest obstruction on the path of putting the anti-people forces in their proper place was the policies of the British rulers. Although keeping itself aloof from the Socialist Party and other groups engaged in giving an organized character to the Quit India struggle after its suppression and from the Congress leadership which called for the struggle, the Communist Party had been building a movement against the exploitation by the landlords, wholesalers and other vested interests and against the anti-people character of the British rulers who were abetting these exploitors.

Although famine, price rise and starvation death were acute in Bengal, they were common throughout India. In each province they showed up in accordance with its own characteristics, but the crisis of the socio-economic system manifested itself everywhere. Both the social life that continued to exist for centuries and the administrative system that had been there for decades were crumbling. The famine and price rise were the outward manifestations of the deep crisis that had affected all aspects of human life. The progressive, anti-imperialist minded people had no doubt that the solution to this problem was to change India's existing socio-economic system after ending the British rule. There was no difference of opinion on the point that this task had to be accomplished as soon as possible. The differences were on how to accomplish this task. In the opinion of the Communist Party the immediate task was to turn the people against the vested interests and the rulers by rendering all assistance to the victims of famine, price rise and starvation taking help from the government for this purpose. In the views of other nationalists, there was no question of seeking the help of the Government for the famine relief activities until the foreign rulers left the country. There were sharp conflicts between these to view-points all over the country.

This situation created its impacts outside India also. The famine-stricken Bengal and other provinces demonstrated the fact that the rulers were "efficient" only in keeping
the Congress leaders in prison and not in the procurement and distribution of the essential articles to the people. It became also clear that the government lacked the willingness to seek the cooperation of the people and their leaders and also capability to solve the problem without their cooperation and that the continuance of this situation was dangerous to the war efforts of the Allied Powers. In these circumstances, an important change took place in the government. Viceroy Linlithgow relinquished his post and his position was taken over by Lord Wavell who was the Commander-in-Chief of the British armed forces in India.

Apparently, this was only a change of the individual. Lord Wavell was a party to all the decisions taken by Lord Linlithgow as the Viceroy. In fact, it was only because of the obstinate attitude of Lord Wavell that the suggestion (which was acceptable to the Congress) to form a government at the Centre handing over the power of all the departments including the defence to Indians was finally rejected during the talks with the Cripps mission. So, the change in the person who occupied the viceregal position was of no consequence.

However, the circumstance under which Linlithgow had to relinquish the position is noteworthy. Durga Das had stated in his memoirs that the American Presidential Representative in India, W. Phillips, had told him that President Roosevelt had suggested to British authorities that only a person more imaginative than Linlithgow would be able to solve the Indian problem. In an interview allowed to Durga Das before quitting office, Lintithgow was reported to have stated that India need not wish for independence for another fifty years and that since the parliamentary system would not grow in India, the British officers would have to remain in India permanently.

It had become clear to the authorities in England and to their foreign friends that it was unwise to try to solve the Indian problem by keeping such a person at the top of the administration in India. In the existing political conditions
it was inevitable to create the impression that a change in the situation was needed.

It was true that the situation did not change fundamentally even after Lord Wavell became the Viceroy. That was why when effective talks had to be started with regard to the transfer of power in 1946-47, the Labour government which was then in power sent Lord Mountbatten as the Viceroy. But Wavell's appointment helped to create the impression of a change at least for the time being. Certain steps he had taken immediately after assuming office were in accord with this impression. For instance, he visited the famine stricken areas in Bengal. Beside, he ordered for the release of Gandhi on 6th May, who had been ill in the prison since April 1944. Other political leaders who were detained along with Gandhi in the Aga Khan Palace were also released.