Towards the end of 1926 I happened to be in Berlin, and I learnt there of a forthcoming Congress of Oppressed Nationalities, which was to be held at Brussels. The idea appealed to me, and I wrote home, suggesting that the Indian National Congress might take official part in the Brussels Congress. My suggestion was approved, and I was appointed the Indian Congress representative for this purpose.

The Brussels Congress was held early in February 1927. I do not know who originated the idea. Berlin was at the time a centre which attracted political exiles and radical elements from abroad; it was gradually catching up Paris in that respect. The Communist element was also strong there. Ideas of some common action between oppressed nations inter se, as well as between them and the Labour left wing, were very much in the air. It was felt more and more that the struggle for freedom was a common one against the thing that was imperialism, and joint deliberation and, where possible, joint action were desirable. The colonial Powers—England, France, Italy, etc., were naturally hostile to any such attempts being made, but Germany was, since the War, no longer a colonial Power, and the German Government viewed with a benevolent neutrality the growth of agitation in the colonies and dependencies of other Powers. This was one of the reasons which made Berlin a centre for advanced and disaffected elements from abroad. Among these the most prominent and active were the Chinese belonging to the left wing of the Kuo-Min-Tang, which was then sweeping across China, and the old feudal elements seemed to be rolling down before its irresistible advance. Even the Imperialist powers lost their aggressive habits and minatory tone before this new phenomenon. It appeared that the solution of the problem of China’s unity and freedom could not long be delayed. The Kuo-Min-Tang was flushed with success, but it knew the difficulties that lay ahead, and it wanted to strengthen itself by international propaganda. Probably it was the left wing of the party, cooperating with Communists and near-Communists abroad, that laid stress on this propaganda, both to strengthen China’s national position abroad and its own position in the Party ranks at home. The Party had not split up at the time into two or
more rival and bitterly hostile groups, and presented, to all outward seeming, a united front.

The European representatives of the Kuo-Min-Tang, therefore, welcomed the idea of the Congress of Oppressed Nationalities; perhaps they even originated the idea jointly with some other people. Some Communists and near-Communists were also at the back of the proposal right from the beginning, but, as a whole, the Communist element kept in the background. Active support and help also came from Latin America, which was chafing at the time at the economic imperialism of the United States. Mexico, with a radical President and policy, was eager to take the lead in a Latin American bloc against the United States; and Mexico, therefore, took great interest in the Brussels Congress. Officially the Government could not take part, but it sent one of its leading diplomats to be present as a benevolent observer.

There were also present at Brussels representatives from the national organisations of Java, Indo-China, Palestine, Syria, Egypt, Arabs from North Africa, and African Negroes. Then there were many left-wing Labour organisations represented, and several well-known men, who had played a leading part in European Labour struggles for a generation, were present. Communists were there also, and they took an important part in the proceedings; they came not as Communists, but as representatives of trade union or similar organisations.

George Lansbury was elected president, and he delivered an eloquent address. That in itself was proof that the Congress was not so rabid after all, nor was it merely hitched on to the star of Communism. But there is no doubt that the gathering was friendly towards the Communists, and, even though agreement might be lacking on some matters, there appeared to be several common grounds for action.

Mr. Lansbury agreed to be president also of the permanent organisation that was formed—the League Against Imperialism. But he repented of his rash behaviour soon, or perhaps his colleagues of the British Labour Party did not approve of it. The Labour Party was 'His Majesty's Opposition' then, soon to blossom out as 'His Majesty's Government', and future Cabinet Ministers cannot dabble in risky and revolutionary politics. Mr. Lansbury resigned from the presidency on the ground of being too busy for it; he even resigned from the membership of the League. I was hurt by this sudden change in a person whose speech I had admired only two or three months earlier.

The League Against Imperialism had, however, quite a num-
ber of distinguished persons as its patrons. Einstein was one of them, and Madame Sun Yat Sen and, I think, Romain Rolland. Many months later Einstein resigned, as he disagreed with the pro-Arab policy of the League in the Arab-Jewish quarrels in Palestine.

The Brussels Congress, as well as the subsequent Committee meetings of the League, which were held in various places from time to time, helped me to understand some of the problems of colonial and dependent countries. They gave me also an insight into the inner conflicts of the Western Labour world. I knew something about them already; I had read about them, but there was no reality behind my knowledge, as there had been no personal contacts. I had some such contacts now, and sometimes had to face problems which reflected these inner conflicts. As between the Labour worlds of the Second International and the Third International, my sympathies were with the latter. The whole record of the Second International from the War onwards filled me with distaste, and we in India had had sufficient personal experience of the methods of one of its strongest supports—the British Labour Party. So I turned inevitably with goodwill towards Communism, for, whatever its faults, it was at least not hypocritical and not imperialistic. It was not a doctrinal adherence, as I did not know much about the fine points of Communism, my acquaintance being limited at the time to its broad features. These attracted me, as also the tremendous changes taking place in Russia. But Communists often irritated me by their dictatorial ways, their aggressive and rather vulgar methods, their habit of denouncing everybody who did not agree with them. This reaction was no doubt due, as they would say, to my own bourgeois education and upbringing.

It was curious how, in our League Against Imperialism Committee meetings, I would usually be on the side of the Anglo-American members on petty matters of argument. There was a certain similarity in our outlook in regard to method at least. We would both object to declamatory and long-winded resolutions, which resembled manifestos. We preferred something simpler and shorter, but the Continental tradition was against this. There was often difference of opinion between the Communist elements and the non-Communists. Usually we agreed on a compromise. Later on, some of us returned to our homes and could not attend any further Committee meetings.

The Brussels Congress was viewed with some consternation by the Foreign and Colonial Offices of the Imperialist powers. 'Angur', the well-known writer of the British Foreign Office,
has given a somewhat sensational, and occasionally ludicrous, account of it in one of his books. The Congress itself was probably full of international spies, many of the delegates even representing various secret services. We had an amusing instance of this. An American friend of mine, who was in Paris, had a visit from a Frenchman who belonged to the French secret service. It was quite a friendly visit to enquire about certain matters. When he had finished his enquiries he asked the American if he did not recognise him, for they had met previously. The American looked hard, but he had to admit that he could not place him at all. The secret service agent then told him that he had met him at the Brussels Congress as a Negro delegate, with his face, hands, etc., all blacked over!

One of the meetings of the Committee of the League Against Imperialism took place at Cologne, and I attended it. After the meeting was over we were asked to go to Dusseldorf, near by, to attend a Saccho-Vanzetti meeting. As we were returning from that meeting, we were asked to show our passports to the police. Most of the people had their passports with them, but I had left mine at the hotel in Cologne, as we had only come for a few hours to Dusseldorf. I was thereupon marched to a police-station. Fortunately for me I had companions in distress—an Englishman and his wife, who also had left their passport in Cologne. After about an hour's wait, during which probably telephonic enquiries were made, the police chief was graciously pleased to allow us to depart.

The League Against Imperialism veered more towards Communism in later years, though at no time, so far as I know, did it lose its individual character. I could only remain in distant touch with it by means of correspondence. In 1931, because of my part in the Delhi truce between the Congress and the Government of India, it grew exceedingly angry with me, and excommunicated me with bell, book, and candle—or to be more accurate, it expelled me by some kind of a resolution. I must confess that it had great provocation, but it might have given me some chance of explaining my position.

In the summer of 1927 my father came to Europe. I met him at Venice, and during the next few months we were often together. All of us—my father, my wife, my young sister, and I—paid a brief visit to Moscow in November during the tenth anniversary celebrations of the Soviet. It was a very brief visit, just three or four days in Moscow, decided upon at the last moment. But we were glad we went, for even that glimpse was worth while. It did not, and could not, teach us much about
the new Russia, but it did give us a background for our reading. To my father all such Soviet and collectivist ideas were wholly novel. His whole training had been legal and constitutional, and he could not easily get out of that framework. But he was definitely impressed by what he saw in Moscow.

We were in Moscow when the announcement about the Simon Commission was first made. We first read about it in a Moscow sheet. A few days afterwards, father was appearing in the Privy Council in London in an Indian appeal with Sir John Simon as a colleague. It was an old zamindari case in the earlier stages of which, many years previously, I had also appeared. I had no further interest in it, but at Sir John Simon's suggestion I accompanied my father on one occasion to Sir John's chambers for a consultation.

The year 1927 was drawing to an end, and our stay in Europe had been unduly prolonged. Probably we would have returned home sooner but for father visiting Europe. It was our intention to spend some time in south-eastern Europe and Turkey and Egypt on our way back. But there was no time for this then, and I was eager to be back in time for the next Congress session which was going to be held in Madras at Christmas-time. We sailed from Marseilles, my wife, sister, daughter and I, early in December for Colombo. My father remained in Europe for another three months.
RETURN TO INDIA AND PLUNGE BACK INTO POLITICS

I was returning from Europe in good physical and mental condition. My wife was not yet wholly recovered, but she was far better, and that relieved me of anxiety on her score. I felt full of energy and vitality, and the sense of inner conflict and frustration that had oppressed me so often previously was, for the time being, absent. My outlook was wider, and nationalism by itself seemed to me definitely a narrow and insufficient creed. Political freedom, independence, were no doubt essential, but they were steps only in the right direction; without social freedom and a socialistic structure of society and the State, neither the country nor the individual could develop much. I felt I had a clearer perception of world affairs, more grip on the present-day world, ever changing as it was. I had read largely, not only on current affairs and politics, but on many other subjects that interested me, cultural and scientific. I found the vast political, economic, and cultural changes going on in Europe and America a fascinating study. Soviet Russia, despite certain unpleasant aspects, attracted me greatly, and seemed to hold forth a message of hope to the world. Europe, in the middle 'twenties, was trying to settle down in a way; the great depression was yet to come. But I came back with the conviction that this settling down was superficial only, and big eruptions and mighty changes were in store for Europe and the world in the near future.

To train and prepare our country for these world events—to keep in readiness for them, as far as we could—seemed to be the immediate task. The preparation was largely an ideological one. First of all, there should be no doubt about the objective of political independence. This should be clearly understood as the only possible political goal for us; something radically different from the vague and confusing talk of Dominion Status. Then there was the social goal. It would be too much, I felt, to expect the Congress to go far in this direction just then. The Congress was a purely political and nationalistic body, unused to thinking on other lines. But a beginning might be made. Outside the Congress, in labour circles and among the young, the idea could be pushed on much further. For this purpose I wanted to keep myself free from Congress office, and I had a vague idea also of spending some months in remote rural areas to study their con-
ditions. But this was not to be, and events were to drag me again into the heart of Congress politics.

Immediately on our arrival in Madras I was caught in the whirl. I presented a bunch of resolutions to the Working Committee—resolutions on Independence, War Danger, association with the League against Imperialism, etc.—and nearly all of these were accepted and made into official Working Committee resolutions. I had to put them forward at the open session of the Congress, and, to my surprise, they were all almost unanimously adopted. The Independence resolution was supported even by Mrs. Annie Besant. This all-round support was very gratifying, but I had an uncomfortable feeling that the resolutions were either not understood for what they were, or were distorted to mean something else. That this was so became apparent soon after the Congress, when a controversy arose on the meaning of the Independence resolution.

These resolutions of mine were somewhat different from the usual Congress resolutions; they represented a new outlook. Many Congressmen no doubt liked them, some had a vague dislike for them, but not enough to make them oppose. Probably the latter thought that they were academic resolutions, making little difference either way, and the best way to get rid of them was to pass them and move on to something more important. The Independence resolution thus did not represent then, as it did a year or two later, a vital and irrepressible urge on the part of the Congress; it represented a widespread and growing sentiment.

Gandhiji was in Madras and he attended the open Congress sessions, but he did not take any part in the shaping of policy. He did not attend the meetings of the Working Committee of which he was a member. That had been his general political attitude in the Congress since the dominance of the Swaraj Party. But he was frequently consulted, and little of importance was done without his knowledge. I do not know how far the resolutions I put before the Congress met with his approval. I am inclined to think that he disliked them, not so much because of what they said, but because of their general trend and outlook. He did not, however, criticise them on any occasion. My father was, of course, away in Europe at the time.

The unreality of the Independence resolution came out in that very session of the Congress, when another resolution condemning the Simon Commission and appealing for its boycott was considered. As a corollary to this it was proposed to convene an All-Parties Conference, which was to draw up a constitution
for India. It was manifest that the moderate groups, with whom co-operation was sought, could never think in terms of Independence. The very utmost they could go to was some form of Dominion Status.

I stepped back into the Congress secretaryship. There were personal considerations—the desire of the President for the year, Dr. M. A. Ansari, who was an old and dear friend—and the fact that, as many of my resolutions had been passed, I ought to see them through. It was true that the resolution on the All-Parties Conference had partly neutralised the effect of my resolutions. Still, much remained. The real reason for my accepting office again was my fear that the Congress might, through the instrumentality of the All-Parties Conference, or because of other reasons, slide back to a more moderate and compromising position. It seemed to be in a hesitant mood, swinging alternately from one extreme to another. I wanted to prevent, as far as I could, the swing back to Moderation and to hold on to the Independence objective.

The National Congress always attracts a large number of side-shows at its annual sessions. One of the side-shows at Madras was a Republican Conference which held its first (and last) sessions that year. I was asked to preside. The idea appealed to me, as I considered myself a republican. But I hesitated, as I did not know who was at the back of the new venture, and I did not want to associate myself with mushroom growths. I presided, eventually, but later I repented of this, for the Republican Conference turned out to be, like so many others, a still-born affair. For several months I tried, and tried in vain, to get the text of the resolutions passed by it. It is amazing how many of our people love to sponsor new undertakings and then ignore them and leave them to shift for themselves. There is much in the criticism that we are not a persevering lot.

Before we had dispersed from Madras after the Congress, news came of the death of Hakim Ajmal Khan at Delhi. As an ex-president of the Congress he was one of its elder statesmen; but he was something more also, and he occupied a unique place in the Congress leadership. Brought up as he was, entirely in the old conservative way, with no touch of modernism in it, and steeped in the culture of imperial Delhi of Moghal days, it was a delight to watch his fine courtesy and hear his unhurried voice and listen to his dry humour. He was, in his manners, a typical aristocrat of the old order, with princely look and princely ways, and even his face bore a marked resemblance to the miniatures of the Moghal sovereigns. Such a person would not ordinarily
take to the rough-and-tumble of politics; and Britishers in India have often sighed for persons of this old type when the new breed of agitators has troubled them. Hakim Sahab had also little to do with politics in his early days. As the head of a famous family of physicians, he was busy with his enormous practice. But even during the latter part of the War events, and the influence of his old friend and colleague, Dr. M. A. Ansari, were driving him to the Congress; and subsequent happenings—Martial Law in the Punjab and the Khilafat question—moved him deeply, and he turned with approval to the new Gandhian technique of non-co-operation. He brought a rare quality and precious gifts to the Congress—he became a link between the old order and the new, and gave the support of the former to the national movement; and thus he produced a harmony between the two, and gave strength and a certain solidity to the advance guard of the movement. He brought the Hindus and Muslims much nearer to each other, for both honoured him and were influenced by his example. To Gandhiji he became a trusted friend, whose advice in regard to Hindu-Muslim matters was the final word for him. My father and Hakimji had naturally taken to each other.

Last year I was accused by some leaders of the Hindu Mahasabha of my ignorance of Hindu sentiments because of my defective education and general background of ‘Persian’ culture. What culture I possess, or whether I possess any at all, is a little difficult for me to say. Persian, as a language, unhappily, I do not even know. But it is true that my father had grown up in an Indo-Persian cultural atmosphere, which was the legacy in north India of the old Delhi court, and of which, even in these degenerate days, Delhi and Lucknow are the two chief centres. Kashmiri Brahmans had a remarkable capacity for adaptation, and coming down to the Indian plains and finding that this Indo-Persian culture was predominant at the time, they took to it, and produced a number of fine scholars in Persian and Urdu. Later they adapted themselves with equal rapidity to the changing order, when a knowledge of English and the elements of European culture became necessary. But even now there are many distinguished scholars in Persian among the Kashmiris in India—Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru and Raja Narendra Nath, to mention two of them.

Hakim Sahab and my father had thus much in common, and they even discovered old family connections. They became great friends and addressed each other as Bhai Sahab—brother. Politics was the least of their many bonds. In his domestic
habits Hakimji was extraordinarily conservative; he could not, or his family people could not, get out of old habits. I have never seen such amazingly strict purdah, or seclusion of women, as existed in his family. And yet Hakimji was firmly convinced that no nation advanced unless the women of that country freed themselves. He impressed this upon me, and told me how much he admired the part Turkish women had played in their freedom struggle. It was chiefly because of Turkish women, he said, that Kemal Pasha had succeeded.

The death of Hakim Ajmal Khan was a great blow to the Congress; it meant the removal of one of its stoutest supports. For all of us there has been since then something lacking in a visit to Delhi, for Delhi was so closely associated with Hakimji and his house in Billimaran.

The year 1928 was, politically, a full year, with plenty of activity all over the country. There seemed to be a new impulse moving the people forward, a new stir that was equally present in the most varied groups. Probably the change had been going on gradually during my long absence from the country; it struck me as very considerable on my return. Early in 1926 India was still quiescent, passive, perhaps not fully recovered from the effort of 1919-1922; in 1928 she seemed fresh, active, and full of suppressed energy. Everywhere there was evidence of this: among the industrial workers, the peasantry, middle-class youth, and the intelligentsia generally.

The Trade Union movement had grown greatly, and the All-India Trade Union Congress, established seven or eight years previously, was already a strong and representative body. It had not only grown in numbers and in organisation, but its ideology was becoming more militant and extreme. Strikes were frequent, and class-consciousness was growing. The textile industry and the railways were the best organised, and of these the strongest and most advanced unions were the Girni Kamgar Union of Bombay and the G.I.P. Railway Union. The growth of labour organisation had inevitably brought the seeds of internal conflict and disruption from the West, and hardly had the Indian Trade Union Movement established itself when it threatened to split up into rival and hostile camps. There were those who adhered to the Second International, and those who favoured the Third; those who were moderately reformist in their outlook, and those who were frankly revolutionary and out for radical changes. In between the two there were various shades and degrees of opinion and, as is unfortunately the case in all mass organisations, of opportunism.
The peasantry was also astir. This was noticeable in the United Provinces and especially in Oudh, where large gatherings of protesting tenants became common. It was realised that the new Oudh tenancy law, which gave a life-tenure and had promised a great deal, made little difference to the hard lot of the peasant. In Gujrat a conflict on a big scale developed between the peasantry and the Government because of the attempt of the latter to increase revenue—Gujrat being an area of peasant-proprietors where Government deals directly with the peasants. This struggle was the Bardoli Satyagraha under the leadership of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. It was gallantly carried through to the admiration of the rest of India. The Bardoli peasantry met with a considerable measure of success; the real success of their campaign, however, lay in the effect it produced amongst the peasantry all over India. Bardoli became a sign and a symbol of hope and strength and victory to the Indian peasant.

Another very noticeable feature of the India of 1928 was the growth of the Youth Movement. Everywhere youth leagues were being established, youth conferences were being held. They were a very varied lot, from semi-religious groups to others discussing revolutionary ideology and technique; but whatever their origin and auspices, such gatherings of youth always began to discuss the vital social and economic problems of the day, and generally, their tendency was for root-and-branch change.

From the purely political point of view the year was noted for the boycott of the Simon Commission and (what was called the constructive side of the boycott) the All-Parties Conference. The moderate groups co-operated with the Congress in this boycott, and it was remarkably successful. Wherever the Commission went it was greeted by hostile crowds and the cry of “Simon go back”, and thus vast numbers of the Indian masses became acquainted not only with Sir John Simon’s name but with two words of the English language, the only two they knew. These words must have become a hated obsession for the members of the Commission. The story is related that once, when they were staying at the Western Hostel in New Delhi, the refrain seemed to come to them in the night out of the darkness. They were greatly irritated at being pursued in this way, even at night. As a matter of fact, the noise that disturbed them came from the jackals that infest the waste places of the imperial capital.

The All-Parties Conference had no difficulty at all in settling the main principles of the constitution; they were to be of the democratic parliamentary variety, and almost any one could
draw them up. The real difficulty, and the only difficulty, came from the communal or minorities issue, and as the Conference had within its fold the representatives of all the extreme communal organisations, an agreement became extraordinarily difficult. It was a repetition of the old infructuous Unity Conferences. My father, who had returned from Europe in the spring, took great interest in the Conference. Ultimately, as a last resource, a small committee was appointed, with my father as chairman, to draft the constitution and make a full report on the communal issue. This Committee came to be known as the Nehru Committee, and their subsequent report, as the Nehru Report. Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru was also a member of this Committee, and was responsible for part of the Report.

I was not a member of this Committee, but as Congress Secretary I had much to do with it. It was an awkward situation for me, for I thought it wholly futile to draw up detailed paper constitutions when the real problem was the conquest of power. Another difficulty for me was the inevitable limitations by this mixed Committee of our goal to what was called Dominion Status and was, in fact, even less. For me the real importance of the Committee lay in the possibility of its finding a way out of the communal *impasse*. I did not expect a final solution of this question by some pact or agreement—that solution would only come by a diversion of interest to social and economic issues—but there was the possibility that even a temporary pact, if accepted by a sufficient number of people, would help to ease the situation and thus succeed in diverting interest to other issues. So I did not wish to obstruct the work of the Committee and I gave such help as I could.

Success seemed almost within grasp. Only two or three points remained to settle, and of these the really important one was the Punjab, where there was the Hindu-Muslim-Sikh triangle. The Committee in their report considered the question of the Punjab from a novel point of view, and supported their recommendation with the help of some revealing figures of the distribution of population. But all this was in vain. Fear and mistrust remained on either side, and the little step to cross the short distance that remained was not taken.

The All-Parties Conference met at Lucknow to consider the report of their Committee. Again some of us were in a dilemma, for we did not wish to come in the way of a communal settlement, if that was possible, and yet we were not prepared to yield on the question of independence. We begged that the conference leave this question open so that each constituent part
could have liberty of action on this issue—the Congress adhering to independence and the more moderate groups to Dominion Status. But my father had set his heart on the Report and he would not yield, nor perhaps could he under the circumstances. I was thereupon asked by our Independence group in the conference—and this was a large one—to make a statement to the Conference on its behalf, dissociating ourselves completely from everything that lowered the objective of independence. But we made it further clear that we would not be obstructive, as we did not wish to come in the way of the communal statement.

This was not a very effective line to adopt on such a major issue; at best it was a negative gesture. A positive side was given to our attitude by our founding that very day the Independence for India League.

The All-Parties Conference gave me another and a greater shock by adding to the Fundamental Rights in the proposed constitution, at the instance of the Oudh taluqads, a clause guaranteeing their vested rights in their taluqas. The whole constitution was, of course, based on the idea of private property, but it did seem to me an outrage to make the property rights in the huge semi-feudal estates one of the irremovable foundations of the constitution. This made it clear that the Congress leadership, and much more so the non-Congress people, preferred the company of the landed magnates to that of the socially advanced groups in their own ranks. It was obvious that a wide gulf separated us from many of our leaders, and it seemed a little absurd for me to carry on as General Secretary of the Congress under these circumstances. I offered my resignation on the ground of having been one of the founders of the Independence for India League. But the Working Committee would not agree to it and told me (as well as Subhas Bose, who had also offered to resign on the same ground) that we could carry on with the League without any conflict with the Congress policy. Indeed, the Congress had already declared for independence. And again I agreed. It was surprising how easy it was to win me over to a withdrawal of my resignation. This happened on many occasions, and as neither party really liked the idea of a break, we clung to every pretext to avoid it.

Gandhiji took no part in these All-Party Conference or Committee meetings. He was not even present at the Lucknow Conference.

Meanwhile the Simon Commission had been moving about, pursued by black flags and hostile crowds shouting, “Go back.”
Occasionally there were minor conflicts between the police and the crowds. Lahore brought matters to a head and suddenly sent a thrill of indignation throughout the country. The anti-Simon Commission demonstration there was headed by Lala Lajpat Rai, and as he stood by the roadside in front of the thousands of demonstrators he was assaulted and beaten on his chest with a baton by a young English police officer. There had been no attempt whatever on the part of the crowd, much less on the part of Lalaji, to indulge in any methods of violence. Even so, as he stood peacefully by, he and many of his companions were severely beaten by the police. Any one who takes part in street demonstrations runs the risk of a conflict with the police, and, though our demonstrations were almost always perfectly peaceful, Lalaji must have known of this risk and taken it consciously. But still, the manner of the assault, the needless brutality of it, came as a shock to vast numbers of people in India. Those were the days when we were not used to lathi charges by the police; our sensitiveness had not been blunted by repeated brutality. To find that even the greatest of our leaders, the foremost and most popular man in the Punjab, could be so treated seemed little short of monstrous, and a dull anger spread all over the country, especially in north India. How helpless we were, how despicable when we could not even protect the honour of our chosen leaders!

The physical injury to Lalaji had been serious enough, as he had been hit on the chest and he had long suffered from heart disease. Probably, in the case of a healthy young man the injury would not have been great, but Lalaji was neither young nor healthy. What effect this physical injury had on his death a few weeks later it is hardly possible to say definitely, though his doctors were of opinion that it hastened the end. But I think that there can be no doubt that the mental shock which accompanied the physical injury had a tremendous effect on Lalaji. He felt angry and bitter, not so much at the personal humiliation, as at the national humiliation involved in the assault on him.

It was this sense of national humiliation that weighed on the mind of India, and when Lalaji’s death came soon after, inevitably it was connected with the assault, and sorrow itself gave pride of place to anger and indignation. It is well to appreciate this, for only so can we have some understanding of subsequent events, of the phenomenon of Bhagat Singh, and of his sudden and amazing popularity in north India. It is very easy and very fatuous to condemn persons or acts without seeking to under-
stand the springs of action, the causes that underlie them. Bhagat Singh was not previously well known; he did not become popular because of an act of violence, an act of terrorism. Terrorists have flourished in India, off and on, for nearly thirty years, and at no time, except in the early days in Bengal, did any of them attain a fraction of that popularity which came to Bhagat Singh. This is a patent fact which cannot be denied; it has to be admitted. And another fact, which is equally obvious, is that terrorism, in spite of occasional recrudescence, has no longer any real appeal for the youth of India. Fifteen years' stress on non-violence has changed the whole background in India and made the masses much more indifferent to, and even hostile to, the idea of terrorism as a method of political action. Even the classes from which the terrorists are usually drawn, the lower middle-classes and intelligentsia, have been powerfully affected by the Congress propaganda against methods of violence. Their active and impatient elements, who think in terms of revolutionary action, also realise fully now that revolution does not come through terrorism, and that terrorism is an outworn and profitless method which comes in the way of real revolutionary action. Terrorism is a dying thing in India and elsewhere, not because of Government coercion, which can only suppress and bottle up, not eradicate, but because of basic causes and world events. Terrorism usually represents the infancy of a revolutionary urge in a country. That stage passes, and with it passes terrorism as an important phenomenon. Occasional outbursts may continue because of local causes or individual suppressions. India has undoubtedly passed that stage, and no doubt even the occasional outbursts will gradually die out. But this does not mean that all people in India have ceased to believe in methods of violence. They have, very largely, ceased to believe in individual violence and terrorism but many, no doubt, still think that a time may come when organised, violent methods may be necessary for gaining freedom, as they have often been necessary in other countries. That is to-day an academic issue which time alone will put to the test; it has nothing to do with terroristic methods.

Bhagat Singh thus did not become popular because of his act of terrorism, but because he seemed to vindicate, for the moment, the honour of Lala Lajpat Rai, and through him of the nation. He became a symbol; the act was forgotten, the symbol remained, and within a few months each town and village of the Punjab, and to a lesser extent in the rest of northern India, resounded with his name. Innumerable songs
grew up about him, and the popularity that the man achieved was something amazing.

A short time after the Simon Commission beating, Lala Rajpat Rai attended a meeting of the All-India Congress Committee in Delhi. He bore marks of injuries, and was still suffering from the after-effects. The meeting was held after the Lucknow All-Parties Conference, and the question of Independence came up for discussion in some form or other. I forget the exact point that was in issue, but I remember speaking at some length, and pointing out that the time had come for the Congress to choose between a revolutionary outlook, which involved radical changes in our political and social structure, and a reformist objective and method. The speech had no importance, and I would have forgotten it but for the fact that Lalaji replied to it in the Committee, and criticised some parts of it. One of his warnings was to the effect that we should expect nothing from the British Labour Party. That warning was not necessary so far as I was concerned, for I was not an admirer of the official leadership of British Labour; the only thing that could surprise me in regard to it would have been to find it supporting the struggle for India's freedom, or doing anything effectively anti-imperialist or likely to lead to socialism.

On returning to Lahore, Lalaji reverted to the subject of my speech at the A.I.C.C. meeting, and began a series of articles on various issues connected with it in his weekly journal The People. Only the first article appeared; before the second could come out in the next week's issue, he was dead. That first unfinished article of his, perhaps his last writing for publication, has had a melancholy interest for me.
XXV

EXPERIENCE OF LATHI CHARGES

The assault on Lala Lajpat Rai, and his subsequent death, increased the vigour of the demonstrations against the Simon Commission in the places which it subsequently visited. It was due in Lucknow, and the local Congress Committee made extensive preparations for its 'reception'. Huge processions, meetings, and demonstrations were organised many days in advance, both as propaganda and as rehearsals for the actual show. I went to Lucknow, and was present at some of these. The success of these preliminary demonstrations, which were perfectly orderly and peaceful, evidently nettled the authorities, and they began to obstruct and issue orders against the taking out of processions in certain areas. It was in this connection that I had a new experience, and my body felt the baton and lathi blows of the police.

Processions had been prohibited, ostensibly to avoid any interference with the traffic. We decided to give no cause for complaint on this score, and arranged for small groups of sixteen, as far as I can remember, to go separately, along unfrequented routes to the meeting place. Technically, this was no doubt a breach of the order, for sixteen with a flag were a procession. I led one of the groups of sixteen and, after a big gap, came another such group under the leadership of my colleague, Govind Ballabh Pant. My group had gone perhaps about two hundred yards, the road was a deserted one, when we heard the clatter of horses' hoofs behind us. We looked back to find a bunch of mounted police, probably two or three dozen in number, bearing down upon us at a rapid pace. They were soon right upon us, and the impact of the horses broke up our little column of sixteen. The mounted policemen then started belabouring our volunteers with huge batons or truncheons and, instinctively, the volunteers sought refuge on the side-walks, and some even entered the petty shops. They were pursued and beaten down. My own instinct had urged me to seek safety when I saw the horses charging down upon us; it was a discouraging sight. But then, I suppose, some other instinct held me to my place and I survived the first charge, which had been checked by the volunteers behind me. Suddenly I found myself alone in the middle of the road; a few yards away from me, in various
directions, were the policemen beating down our volunteers. Automatically, I began moving slowly to the side of the road to be less conspicuous, but again I stopped and had a little argument with myself, and decided that it would be unbecoming for me to move away. All this was a matter of a few seconds only, but I have the clearest recollections of that conflict within me and the decision, prompted by my pride, I suppose, which could not tolerate the idea of my behaving like a coward. Yet the line between cowardice and courage was a thin one, and I might well have been on the other side. Hardly had I so decided, when I looked round to find that a mounted policeman was trotting up to me, brandishing his long new baton. I told him to go ahead, and turned my head away—again an instinctive effort to save the head and face. He gave me two resounding blows on the back. I felt stunned, and my body quivered all over but, to my surprise and satisfaction, I found that I was still standing. The police force was withdrawn soon after, and made to block the road in front of us. Our volunteers gathered together again, many of them bleeding and with split skulls, and we were joined by Pant and his lot, who had also been belaboured, and all of us sat down facing the police. So we sat for an hour or so, and it became dark. On the one side, various high officials gathered; on the other, large crowds began to assemble as the news spread. Ultimately, the officials agreed to allow us to go by our original route, and we went that way with the mounted policemen, who had charged us and belaboured us, going ahead of us as a kind of escort.

I have written about this petty incident in some detail because of its effect on me. The bodily pain I felt was quite forgotten in a feeling of exhilaration that I was physically strong enough to face and bear lathi blows. And a thing that surprised me was that right through the incident, even when I was being beaten, my mind was quite clear and I was consciously analysing my feelings. This rehearsal stood me in good stead the next morning, when a stiffer trial was in store for us. For the next morning was the time when the Simon Commission was due to arrive, and our great demonstration was going to take place.

My father was at Allahabad at the time, and I was afraid that the news of the assault on me, when he read about it in the next morning’s papers, would upset him and the rest of the family. So I telephoned to him late in the evening to assure him that all was well, and that he should not worry. But he did worry and, finding it difficult to sleep over it, he decided at about midnight to come over to Lucknow. The last train had
EXPERIENCE OF LATHI CHARGES

gone, and so he started by motor-car. He had some bad luck on the way, and it was nearly five in the morning by the time he had covered the journey of 146 miles and reached Lucknow, tired out and exhausted.

That was about the time when we were getting ready to go in procession to the station. The previous evening's incidents had the effect of rousing up Lucknow more than anything that we could have done, and even before the sun was out, vast numbers of people made their way to the station. Innumerable little processions came from various parts of the city, and from the Congress office started the main procession, consisting of several thousands, marching in fours. We were in this main procession. We were stopped by the police as we approached the station. There was a huge open space, about half a mile square, in front of the station (this has now been built over by the new station) and we were made to line up on one side of this maidan, and there our procession remained, making no attempt to push our way forward. The place was full of foot and mounted police, as well as the military. The crowd of sympathetic onlookers swelled up, and many of these persons managed to spread out in twos and threes in the open space. Suddenly we saw in the far distance a moving mass. They were two or three long lines of cavalry or mounted police, covering the entire area, galloping down towards us, and striking and riding down the numerous stragglers that dotted the maidan. That charge of galloping horsemen was a fine sight, but for the tragedies that were being enacted on the way, as harmless and very much surprised sightseers went under the horses' hoofs. Behind the charging lines these people lay on the ground, some still unable to move, others writhing in pain, and the whole appearance of that maidan was that of a battlefield. But we did not have much time for gazing on that scene or for reflections; the horsemen were soon upon us, and their front line clashed almost at a gallop with the massed ranks of our processionists. We held our ground, and, as we appeared to be unyielding, the horses had to pull up at the last moment and reared up on their hind legs with their front hoofs quivering in the air over our heads. And then began a beating of us, and battering with lathis and long batons both by the mounted and the foot police. It was a tremendous hammering, and the clearness of vision that I had had the evening before left me. All I knew was that I had to stay where I was, and must not yield or go back. I felt half blinded with the blows, and sometimes a dull anger seized me and a
desire to hit out. I thought how easy it would be to pull down the police officer in front of me from his horse and to mount up myself, but long training and discipline held and I did not raise a hand, except to protect my face from a blow. Besides, I knew well enough that any aggression on our part would result in a ghastly tragedy, the firing and shooting down of large numbers of our men.

After what seemed a tremendous length of time, but was probably only a few minutes, our line began to yield slowly, step by step, without breaking up. This left me somewhat isolated, and more exposed at the sides. More blows came, and then I was suddenly lifted off my feet from behind and carried off, to my great annoyance. Some of my young colleagues, thinking that a dead-set was being made at me, had decided to protect me in this summary fashion.

Our processionists lined up again about a hundred feet behind our original line. The police also withdrew and stood in a line, fifty feet apart from us. So we remained, when the cause of all this trouble, the Simon Commission, secretly crept away from the station in the far distance, more than half a mile away. But, even so, they did not escape the black flags or demonstrators. Soon after, we came back in full procession to the Congress office, and there dispersed, and I went on to father, who was anxiously waiting for us.

Now that the excitement of the moment had passed, I felt pains all over my body and great fatigue. Almost every part of me seemed to ache, and I was covered with contused wounds and marks of blows. But fortunately I was not injured in any vital spot. Many of our companions were less fortunate, and were badly injured. Govind Ballabh Pant, who stood by me, offered a much bigger target, being six foot odd in height, and the injuries he received then have resulted in a painful and persistent malady which prevented him for a long time from straightening his back or leading an active life. I emerged with a somewhat greater conceit of my physical condition and powers of endurance. But the memory that endures with me, far more than that of the beating itself, is that of many of the faces of those policemen, and especially of the officers, who were attacking us. Most of the real beating and battering was done by European sergeants, the Indian rank and file were milder in their methods. And those faces, full of hate and blood-lust, almost mad, with no trace of sympathy or touch of humanity! Probably the faces on our side just then were equally hateful to look at, and the fact that we were mostly
passive did not fill our minds and hearts with love for our opponents, or add to the beauty of our countenances. And yet, we had no grievance against each other; no quarrel that was personal, no ill-will. We happened to represent, for the time being, strange and powerful forces which held us in thrall and cast us hither and thither, and, subtly gripping our minds and hearts, roused our desires and passions and made us their blind tools. Blindly we struggled, not knowing what we struggled for and whither we went. The excitement of action held us; but, as it passed, immediately the question arose: To what end was all this? To what end?
XXVI

TRADE UNION CONGRESS

The Simon Commission boycott and the All Parties Conference bulked largely politically in the country that year, but my own interest and activities lay largely in other directions. As working General Secretary of the Congress, I was busy in looking after and strengthening its organisation, and I was particularly interested in directing people's attention to social and economic changes. The position gained in Madras in regard to Independence had also to be consolidated, especially as the tendency of the All Parties Conference was to pull us back. With this purpose in view I travelled a great deal and addressed many important gatherings. I presided, I think, over four provincial conferences in 1928—in the Punjab, in Malabar in the South, in Delhi, and in the United Provinces—as well as over Youth Leagues and Students' Conferences in Bengal and Bombay. From time to time I visited rural areas in the U.P. and occasionally I addressed industrial workers. The burden of my speeches was always much the same though the form varied according to local circumstances and the stress depended on the kind of audience I happened to be addressing. Everywhere I spoke on political independence and social freedom and made the former a step towards the attainment of the latter. I wanted to spread the ideology of socialism especially among Congress workers and the intelligentsia, for these people, who were the backbone of the national movement, thought largely in terms of the narrowest nationalism. Their speeches laid stress on the glories of old times; the injuries, material and spiritual, caused by alien rule; the sufferings of our people; the indignity of foreign domination over us and our national honour demanding that we should be free; the necessity for sacrifice at the altar of the motherland. They were familiar themes which found an echo in every Indian heart, and the nationalist in me responded to them and was moved by them (though I was never a blind admirer of ancient times in India or elsewhere). But though the truth in them remained, they seemed to grow a little thin and thread-bare with constant use, and their ceaseless repetition prevented the consideration of other problems and vital aspects of our struggle. They only fostered emotion and did not encourage thought.

I was by no means a pioneer in the socialist field in India. I—
deed I was rather backward and I had only advanced painfully,
step by step, where many others had gone ahead blazing a trail. 
The workers' trade union movement was, ideologically, definitely 
socialist, and so were the majority of the Youth Leagues. A 
vague confused socialism was already part of the atmosphere of 
India when I returned from Europe in December 1927, and even 
earlier than that there were many individual socialists. Mostly 
they thought along utopian lines, but Marxian theory was in-
fluencing them increasingly, and a few considered themselves as 
hundred per cent. Marxists. This tendency was strengthened in 
India, as in Europe and America, by developments in the Soviet 
Union, and particularly the Five-Year Plan.

Such importance as I possessed as a socialist worker lay in the 
fact that I happened to be a prominent Congressman holding 
important Congress offices. There were many other well-known 
Congressmen who were beginning to think likewise. This was 
most marked in the U.P. Provincial Congress Committee, and in 
this Committee we even tried, as early as 1926, to draw up a mild 
socialist programme. We are a zamindari and taluqadari pro-
vince, and the first question we had to face was that of the 
land. We declared that the existing land system must go and 
that there should be no intermediaries between the State and the 
cultivator. We had to proceed cautiously, as we were moving in 
an atmosphere which was, till then, unused to such ideas.

The next year, 1929, the U.P. Provincial Congress Committee 
got a step further and made a recommendation, definitely on 
socialist lines, to the All-India Congress Committee. This latter 
Committee, meeting in Bombay in the summer of 1929, adopted 
the preamble of the U.P. resolution and thus accepted the prin-
ciple of socialism underlying the whole resolution. The con-
sideration of the detailed programme given in the U.P. resolution 
was postponed for a later date. Most people seem to have for-
gotten these resolutions of the A.I.C.C. and the U.P.P.C.C. and 
imagine that the subject of socialism has suddenly cropped up in 
the Congress during the last year or so. It is true, however, that 
the A.I.C.C. passed that resolution without giving much thought 
to it and most members probably did not realise what they were 
doing.

The U.P. branch of the Independence for India League (con-
sisting entirely of principal Congress workers in the province) 
was definitely socialistic and it went a little further than a mixed 
body like the Congress Committee could go. Indeed one of the 
objects of the Independence League was social freedom. We had 
hoped to build up a strong League organisation all over India
and utilize it for propaganda in favour of independence and socialism. Unhappily, and much to my disappointment, the League never got going except to some extent in the U.P. This was not because of lack of support in the country. But most of our workers were also prominent workers in the Congress, and, the Congress having adopted Independence in theory at least, they could always work through the Congress organisation. Another reason was that some of the original sponsors of the League did not take it seriously enough as an organisation to be developed. They looked upon it as something to be used for bringing pressure to bear on the Congress executive, or even for influencing the elections for the Congress Working Committee. So the Independence League languished, and as the Congress grew more aggressive, it drew all the dynamic elements towards itself and the League grew weaker. With the coming of the Civil Disobedience struggle in 1930, the League got merged into the Congress and disappeared.

In the second half of 1928 and in 1929 there was frequent talk of my arrest. I do not know what reality lay behind the press references and the numerous private warnings I received from friends who seemed to be in the know, but the warnings produced a feeling of uncertainty in me and I felt I was always on the verge of it. I did not mind this particularly as I knew that, whatever the future held for me, it could not be a settled life of routine. The sooner I got used to uncertainty and sudden changes and visits to prison the better. And I think that on the whole I succeeded in getting used to the idea (and to a much lesser extent my people also succeeded) and whenever arrest came I took it more casually than I might otherwise have done. So rumours of arrest were not without compensation; they gave a certain excitement and a bite to my daily existence. Every day of freedom was something precious, a day gained. As a matter of fact I had a long innings in 1928 and 1929, and arrest came at last as late as April 1930. Since then my brief periods outside prison have had a measure of unreality about them, and I have lived in my house as a stranger on a short visit, or moved about uncertainly, not knowing what the morrow would hold for me, and with the constant expectation of a call back to gaol.

As 1928 approached its appointed end, the Calcutta Congress drew near. My father was to preside over it. He was full of the All Parties Conference and of his Report to it and wanted to push this through the Congress. To this he knew that I was not agreeable, because I was not prepared to compromise on the Independence issue, and this irritated him. We did not argue
about the matter much, but there was a definite feeling of mental conflict between us, an attempt to pull different ways. Differences of opinion we had often had before, vital differences which had kept us in different political camps. But I do not think that at any previous or subsequent occasion the tension had been so great. Both of us were rather unhappy about it. In Calcutta matters came to this, that my father made it known that if he could not have his way in the Congress—that is, if he could not have a majority for the resolution in favour of the All Parties Report—he would refuse to preside over the Congress. That was a perfectly reasonable and constitutional course to adopt. None the less it was disconcerting to many of his opponents who did not wish to force the issue to this extent. There has often been a tendency in the Congress, and elsewhere, I suppose, to criticise and condemn and yet shrink from accepting responsibility; there is always a hope that the criticism will make the other party change its course to our advantage without casting on us the burden of piloting the boat. Where responsibility is withheld from us and there is an irremovable and irresponsible executive, as there is in the Government of India to-day, criticism is all that is open to us (apart, of course, from action), and that criticism is bound to be negative criticism. Even so, if that negative criticism is to be effective, there must be behind it the mental preparation and preparedness to assume full control and responsibility whenever the opportunity offers itself—control over every department of government, civil and military, internal and foreign. To ask for partial control only, as, for instance, the Liberals do in the matter of the army, is to confess our inability to run the show and to take the sting out of the criticism.

This attitude of criticism and condemnation and yet a shrinking back from the natural consequences thereof, has been frequent in the case of Gandhiji's critics. There have been a number of people in the Congress who dislike many of his activities and criticise them strongly but who are not prepared to drive him out of the Congress. This attitude is easy to understand but it is hardly fair to either party.

Some such difficulties arose at the Calcutta Congress. There were negotiations between the two groups, and a compromise formula was announced, and then this fell through. It was all rather confusing and not very edifying. The main resolution of the Congress, as it was finally adopted, accepted the All Parties Report but intimated that if the British Government did not agree to that constitution within a year, the Congress would
revert to Independence. It was an offer of a year's grace and a polite ultimatum. The resolution was no doubt a come-down from the ideal of independence, for the All Parties Report did not even ask for full Dominion Status. And yet it was probably a wise resolution in the sense that it prevented a split when no one was ready for it, and kept the Congress together for the struggle that began in 1930. It was clear enough that the British Government were not going to accept the All Parties Constitution within a year. The struggle was inevitable and, as matters stood in the country, no such struggle could be at all effective without Gandhiji's lead.

I had opposed the resolution in the open Congress, though I did so half-heartedly. And yet I was again elected General Secretary. Whatever happened I managed to stick on to the secretaryship, and in the Congress sphere I seemed to act the part of the famous Vicar of Bray. Whatever president sat on the Congress throne, still I was secretary in charge of the organisation.

A few days before the Calcutta Congress, the All-India Trade Union Congress was held at Jharia, the centre of the coal mine area. I attended and participated in it for the first two days and then had to go away to Calcutta. It was my first Trade Union Congress and I was practically an outsider, though my activities amongst the peasantry, and lately amongst the workers, had gained for me a measure of popularity with the masses. I found the old tussle going on between the reformists and the more advanced and revolutionary elements. The main points in issue were the question of affiliation to one of the Internationals, as well as to the League against Imperialism and the Pan-Pacific Union, and the desirability of sending representatives to the International Labour Office Conference at Geneva. More important than these questions was the vast difference in outlook between the two sections of the Congress. There was the old trade union group, moderate in politics and indeed distrusting the intrusion of politics in industrial matters. They believed in industrial action only and that too of a cautious character, and aimed at the gradual betterment of workers' conditions. The leader of this group was N. M. Joshi, who had often represented Indian labour at Geneva. The other group was more militant, believed in political action, and openly proclaimed its revolutionary outlook. It was influenced, though by no means controlled, by some Communists and near-Communists. Bombay textile labour had been captured by this group, and under their leadership there had been a great, and partly successful, textile
strike in Bombay. A new and powerful textile union had risen in Bombay, the Girni Kamgar Union, which dominated the labour situation in Bombay. Another powerful union under the influence of the advanced group was the G.I.P. Railway Union.

Ever since the inception of the Trade Union Congress the executive and the office had been in the control of N. M. Joshi and his close colleagues, and Joshi had been responsible for building up the movement. The radical group, though more powerful in the rank and file, had little opportunity of influencing policy at the top. This was an unsatisfactory position and it did not reflect the true state of affairs. There was dissatisfaction and friction and a desire on the part of the radical elements to seize power in the T.U.C. At the same time there was a disinclination to carry matters too far, for a split was feared. The trade union movement was still in its early youth in India; it was weak and was largely being run by non-worker leaders. Always, under such circumstances, there is a tendency for outsiders to exploit workers and this was obvious enough in the Indian T.U.C. and labour unions. N. M. Joshi had, however, proved himself, by years of work, a sound and earnest trade unionist, and even those who considered him politically backward and moderate, acknowledged the worth of his services to the Indian Labour movement. This could be said of few others, moderate or advanced.

My own sympathies at Jharia were with the advanced group but, being a newcomer, I felt a little at sea in these domestic conflicts of the T.U.C. and I decided to keep aloof from them. After I had left Jharia the annual T.U.C. elections took place, and I learnt at Calcutta that I had been elected president for the next year. I had been put forward by the moderate group, probably because they felt that I stood the best chance of defeating the other candidate who was an actual worker (on the railways) and who had been put forward by the radical group. If I had been present at Jharia on the day of the election I am sure that I would have withdrawn in favour of the worker candidate. It seemed to me positively indecent that a newcomer and a non-worker should be suddenly thrust into the presidency. This was in itself a measure of the infancy and weakness of the trade union movement in India.

Nineteen twenty-eight had been full of labour disputes and strikes; nineteen twenty-nine carried on likewise. Bombay textile labour, miserable and militant, took the lead in these strikes. There was a big general strike in the Bengal Jute Mills. There
were also strikes in the Iron Works at Jamshedpur, and, I think, on the railways. A long drawn out struggle, bravely carried on for many months, took place in the Tin Plate Works in Jamshedpur. In spite of great public sympathy, the workers were crushed by the powerful company (connected with the Burma Oil Company) owning these works.

Altogether the two years were full of industrial unrest, and the conditions of labour were deteriorating. The post-war years had been boom years for industry in India and the most stupendous profits had been made. For five or six years the average dividend in the jute or cotton mills exceeded a hundred per cent. and was often 150 per cent. per annum. All these huge profits went to the owners and shareholders, and the workers continued as before. The slight rise in wages was usually counter-balanced by a rise in prices. During these days when millions were being made feverishly, most of the workers continued to live in the most miserable of hovels, and even their women-folk had hardly clothes to wear. The conditions in Bombay were bad enough, but perhaps even worse was the lot of the jute workers, within an hour's drive of the palaces of Calcutta. Semi-naked women, wild and unkempt, working away for the barest pittance, so that a broad river of wealth should flow ceaselessly to Glasgow and Dundee, as well as to some pockets in India.

In the boom years all went well for industry, though the workers carried on as before and profited little. But when the boom passed and it was not so easy to make large profits, the burden, of course, fell on the workers. The old profits were forgotten; they had been consumed. And if profits were not now sufficient, how could industry run? And so there was industrial unrest and labour troubles and the gigantic strikes in Bombay which impressed everybody and frightened both the employers and Government. The Labour Movement was becoming class-conscious, militant and dangerous, both in ideology and in organisation. The political situation was also developing fast, and, though the two were separate and unconnected, they were partly parallel, and the Government could not contemplate the future with any satisfaction.

In March 1929 the Government struck suddenly at organised labour by arresting some of its most prominent workers from the advanced groups. The leaders of the Bombay Girmi Kamgar Union were taken, as well as labour leaders from Bengal, the U.P. and the Punjab. Some of these were communists, others were near-communists, yet others were just trade unionists. This
was the beginning of the famous Meerut trial which lasted for four years and a half.

A defence committee was formed for the Meerut accused, of which my father was chairman, Dr. Ansari and others, including myself, were members. We had a difficult task. Money was not easy to collect; it seemed that the moneyed people had no great sympathy for communists and socialists and labour agitators. And lawyers would only sell their services for a full pound of somebody's flesh. We had some eminent lawyers on our Committee, my father and others, and they were always available for consultation and general guidance. That did not cost us anything, but it was not possible for them to sit down in Meerut for months at a time. The other lawyers whom we approached seemed to look upon the case as a means of making as much money as possible.

Apart from the Meerut Case I have been connected with some other defence committees—in M. N. Roy's case and others. On each occasion I have marvelled at the cupidity of men of my own profession. My first big shock came during the Punjab Martial Law trials in 1919 when a very eminent leader of the profession insisted on his full fee—and it was a huge fee—from the victims of Martial Law, one of them even a fellow-lawyer, and many of these people had to borrow money or sell property to pay him. My later experiences were even more painful. We had to collect money, often in coppers from the poorest workers, and pay out fat cheques to lawyers. It went against the grain. And the whole process seemed so futile for, whether we defended a political or labour case or not, the result was likely to be the same. In a case like the Meerut trial a defence was, of course, obviously called for from many points of view.

The Meerut Case Defence Committee did not have an easy time with the accused. There were different kinds of people among these, with different types of defences, and often there was an utter absence of harmony among them. After some months we wound up the formal committee, but we continued to help in our individual capacities. The development of the political situation was absorbing more and more of our attention, and in 1930 all of us were ourselves in gaol.
XXVII

THUNDER IN THE AIR

The 1929 Congress was going to be held in Lahore. After ten years it had come back to the Punjab, and people’s minds leapt over that decade and went back to the events of 1919—Jallianwala Bagh, martial law with all its humiliations, the Congress sessions at Amritsar, to be followed by the beginnings of non-co-operation. Much had happened during this decade and India’s face had changed, but there was no lack of parallels. Political tension was growing; the atmosphere of struggle was developing fast. The long shadow of the conflict to come lay over the land.

The Legislative Assembly and the Provincial Councils had long ceased to interest any one, except the handful who moved in their sacred orbits. They carried on in their humdrum way, providing some kind of a cloak—a torn and tattered affair—to the authoritarian and despotic nature of the Government, an excuse to some people to talk of India’s parliament, and allowances to their members. The last successful effort of the Assembly to draw attention to itself was when it passed a resolution in 1928 refusing its co-operation to the Simon Commission.

There had also been subsequently a conflict between the Chair and the Government. Vithalbhai Patel, the Swarajist President of the Assembly, had become a thorn in the tender side of the Government on account of his independence (of them) and attempts were made to clip his wings. Such happenings attracted attention but, on the whole, the public mind was now concentrated on events outside. My father was thoroughly disillusioned with Council work, and often expressed his opinion that nothing more could be got out of the legislatures at that stage. He wanted to get out of them himself if an opportunity presented itself. Constitutionally minded as he was and used to legal methods and procedure, force of circumstances had driven him to the painful conclusion that the so-called constitutional methods were ineffective and futile in India. He would justify this to his own legalist mind by saying that there was no constitution in India, nor was there any real rule of law when laws, in the shape of ordinances and the like, appeared suddenly, like rabbits from a conjurer’s hat, at the
will of an individual or a dictating group. In temperament and habit he was far from being a revolutionary, and if there had been anything like bourgeois democracy, he would undoubtedly have been a pillar of the constitution. But, as it was, talk of constitutional agitation in India, with a parade of a sham parliament, began to irritate him more and more.

Gandhi ji was still keeping away from politics, except for the part he played at the Calcutta Congress. He was, however, in full touch with developments and was often consulted by the Congress leaders. His main activity for some years had been Khadi propaganda, and with this object he had undertaken extensive tours all over India. He took each province by turn and visited every district and almost every town of any consequence, as well as remote rural areas. Everywhere he attracted enormous crowds, and it required a great deal of previous staff-work to carry through his programme. In this manner he has repeatedly toured India and got to know every bit of the vast country from the north to the far south, from the eastern mountains to the western sea. I do not think any other human being has ever travelled about India as much as he has done.

In the past there were great wanderers who were continually on the move, pilgrim souls with the wanderlust, but their means of locomotion were slow, and a life-time of such wandering could hardly compete with a year by railway and motor-car. Gandhi ji went by railway and automobile, but he did not confine himself to them; he tramped also. In this way he gathered his unique knowledge of India and her people, and in this way also scores of millions saw him and came into personal touch with him.

He came to the United Provinces in 1929 on his khadi tour, and spent many weeks in these provinces during the hottest part of the year. I accompanied him occasionally for a few days at a time and, despite previous experience, could not help marveling at the vast crowds he attracted. This was especially noticeable in our eastern districts, like Gorakhpur, where the swarms of human beings reminded one of hordes of locusts. As we motored through the rural areas, we would have gatherings of from ten thousand to twenty-five thousand every few miles, and the principal meeting of the day might even exceed a hundred thousand. There were no broadcasting facilities, except rarely in a few big cities, and it was manifestly impossible to be heard by these crowds. Probably they did not expect to hear anything; they were satisfied if they saw the Mahatma.
Gandhiji usually addressed them briefly, avoiding undue strain; it would have been quite impossible to carry on otherwise in this fashion from hour to hour and day to day.

I did not accompany him throughout his U.P. tour as I could be of no special use to him, and there was no point in my adding to the number of the touring party. I had no objection to crowds, but there was not sufficient inducement to get pushed and knocked about and my feet crushed—the usual fate of people accompanying Gandhiji. I had plenty of other work to do, and had no desire to confine myself to khadi propaganda, which seemed to me a relatively minor activity in view of the developing political situation. To some extent I resented Gandhiji’s pre-occupation with non-political issues, and I could never understand the background of his thought. In those days he was collecting funds for khadi work, and he would say frequently that he wanted money for Daridranarayan, the ‘Lord of the Poor’, or ‘God that resides in the Poor’; meaning thereby, presumably, that he wanted it to help the poor to find employment and work in cottage industries. But behind that word there seemed to be a glorification of poverty; God was especially the Lord of the poor; they were His chosen people. That, I suppose, is the usual religious attitude everywhere. I could not appreciate it, for poverty seemed to me a hateful thing, to be fought and rooted out and not to be encouraged in any way. This inevitably led to an attack on a system which tolerated and produced poverty, and those who shrunk from this had of necessity to justify poverty in some way. They could only think in terms of scarcity and could not picture a world abundantly supplied with the necessaries of life; probably, according to them, the rich and the poor would always be with us.

Whenever I had occasion to discuss this with Gandhiji he would lay stress on the rich treating their riches as a trust for the people; it was a viewpoint of considerable antiquity, and one comes across it frequently in India as well as medieval Europe. I confess that I have always been wholly unable to understand how any person can reasonably expect this to happen, or imagine that therein lies the solution of the social problem.

The Legislative Assembly, as I have said above, was becoming a somnolent affair and few people took interest in its dreary activities. A rude awakening came to it one day when Bhagat Singh and B. K. Dutt threw two bombs from the visitors’ gallery on to the floor of the house. No one was seriously hurt, and
probably the bombs were intended, as was stated by the accused later, to make a noise and create a stir, and not to injure.

They did create a stir both in the Assembly and outside. Other activities of Terrorists were not so innocuous. A young English police officer, who was alleged to have hit Lala Lajpat Rai, was shot down and killed in Lahore. In Bengal and elsewhere there seemed to be a recrudescence of terrorist activity. A number of conspiracy cases were launched, and the number of detenus—people kept in prison or otherwise detained without trial or conviction—rapidly increased.

In the Lahore conspiracy case some extraordinary scenes were enacted in the court by the police, and a great deal of public attention was drawn to the case because of this. As a protest against the treatment given to them in court and in prison, there was a hunger-strike on the part of most of the prisoners. I forget the exact reason why it began, but ultimately the question involved became the larger one of treatment of prisoners, especially Politicals. This hunger-strike went on from week to week and created a stir in the country. Owing to the physical weakness of the accused, they could not be taken to court, and the proceedings had to be adjourned repeatedly. The Government of India thereupon initiated legislation to allow court proceedings to continue even in the absence of the accused or their counsel. The question of prison treatment had also to be considered by them.

I happened to be in Lahore when the hunger-strike was already a month old. I was given permission to visit some of the prisoners in the prison, and I availed myself of this. I saw Bhagat Singh for the first time, and Jatindranath Das and a few others. They were all very weak and bed-ridden, and it was hardly possible to talk to them much. Bhagat Singh had an attractive, intellectual face, remarkably calm and peaceful. There seemed to be no anger in it. He looked and talked with great gentleness, but then I suppose that any one who has been fasting for a month will look spiritual and gentle. Jatin Das looked milder still, soft and gentle like a young girl. He was in considerable pain when I saw him. He died later, as a result of fasting, on the sixty-first day of the hunger-strike.

Bhagat Singh’s chief ambition seemed to be to see, or at least to have news of, his uncle, Sardar Ajit Singh, who had been deported, together with Lala Lajpat Rai, in 1907. For many years he had been an exile abroad. There were some vague reports that he had settled in South America, but I do not
think anything definite is known about him. I do not even know if he is alive or dead.

Jatin Das's death created a sensation all over the country. It brought the question of the treatment of political prisoners to the front, and Government appointed a committee on the subject. As a result of the deliberations of this committee, new rules were issued creating three classes of prisoners. No special class of political prisoners was created. These new rules, which seemed to promise a change for the better, as a matter of fact made little difference, and the position remained, and still remains, highly unsatisfactory.

As the summer and monsoon months gradually shaded off into the autumn, the Provincial Congress Committees busied themselves with the election of the President for the Lahore session of the Congress. This election is a lengthy process, and used to go on from August to October. In 1929 there was almost unanimity in favour of Gandhiji. This desire to have him as President for a second time did not, of course, push him any higher in the Congress hierarchy, for he had been a kind of super-president for many years. It was generally felt, however, that as a struggle was impending, and he was bound to be the de facto leader of it, he might as well be the de jure head of the Congress for the occasion. Besides, there was really no other person outstanding enough and obvious enough for the presidency.

So Gandhiji was recommended for the presidency by the Provincial Committees. But he would have none of it. His refusal, though emphatic, seemed to leave some room for argument, and it was hoped that he would reconsider it. A meeting of the All-India Congress Committee was held in Lucknow to decide finally, and almost to the last hour all of us thought that he would agree. But he would not do so, and at the last moment he pressed my name forward. The A.I.C.C. was somewhat taken aback by his final refusal, and a little irritated at being placed in a difficult and invidious position. For want of any other person, and in a spirit of resignation, they finally elected me.

I have seldom felt quite so annoyed and humiliated as I did at that election. It was not that I was not sensible of the honour, for it was a great honour, and I would have rejoiced if I had been elected in the ordinary way. But I did not come to it by the main entrance or even a side entrance; I appeared suddenly by a trap-door and bewildered the audience into acceptance. They put a brave face on it, and, like a necessary
pill, swallowed me. My pride was hurt, and almost I felt like handing back the honour. Fortunately I restrained myself from making an exhibition of myself, and stole away with a heavy heart.

Probably the person who was happiest about this decision was my father. He did not wholly like my politics, but he liked me well enough, and any good thing that came my way pleased him. Often he would criticise me and speak a little curtly to me, but no person who cared to retain his goodwill could run me down in his presence.

My election was indeed a great honour and a great responsibility for me; it was unique in that a son was immediately following his father in the presidential chair. It was often said that I was the youngest President of the Congress—I was just forty when I presided. This was not true. I think Gokhale was about the same age, and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad (though he is a little older than me) was probably just under forty when he presided. But Gokhale was considered one of the elder statesmen even when he was in his late thirties, and Abul Kalam Azad has especially cultivated a look of venerable age to give a suitable background to his great learning. As statesmanship has seldom been considered one of my virtues, and no one has accused me of possessing an excess of learning, I have escaped so far the accusation of age, though my hair has turned grey and my looks betray me.

The Lahore Congress drew near. Meanwhile events were marching, step by step, inevitably, pushed onward, so it seemed, by some motive force of their own. Individuals, for all the brave show they put up, played a very minor rôle. One had the feeling of being a cog in a great machine which swept on relentlessly.

Hoping perhaps to check this onward march of destiny, the British Government took a forward step, and the Viceroy, Lord Irwin, made an announcement about a forthcoming Round Table Conference. It was an ingeniously worded announcement, which could mean much or very little, and it seemed to many of us obvious that the latter was the more likely contingency. And in any event, even if there was more in the announcement, it could not be anywhere near what we wanted. Hardly had this Viceregal announcement been made when, almost with indecent haste, so it seemed, a “Leaders’ Conference” was arranged at Delhi, and people from various groups were invited to it. Gandhiji was there, so was my father; Vithalbhai Patel (still President of the Assembly) was also there, and Moderate leaders
like Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru and others. A joint resolution or manifesto was agreed to, accepting the Viceroy’s declaration subject to some conditions, which, it was stated, were vital and must be fulfilled. If these conditions were accepted by Government, then co-operation was to be offered. These conditions1 were solid enough and would have made a difference.

It was a triumph to get such a resolution agreed to by representatives of all the groups, moderate and advanced. For the Congress it was a come-down; as a common measure of agreement it was high. But there was a fatal catch in it. The conditions were looked upon from at least two different view-points. The Congress people considered them to be essential, the *sine qua non*, without which there could be no co-operation. For them they represented the minimum required. This was made clear by a subsequent meeting of the Congress Working Committee, which further stated that this offer was limited to the date of the next Congress. For the Moderate groups they were a desirable maximum which should be stated, but which could not be insisted on to the point of refusal of co-operation. For them the conditions, though called vital, were not really conditions.

And so it happened that later on, though none of these conditions were satisfied and most of us lay in gaol, together with scores of thousands of others, our Moderate and Respon-sivist friends, who had signed that manifesto with us, gave their full co-operation to our gaolers.

Most of us suspected that this would happen—though hardly to the extent it did happen—but there was some hope that this joint action, whereby the Congress people had to some extent curbed themselves, would also result in curbing the propensities of the Liberals and others to indiscriminate and almost invariable co-operation with the British Government. A more powerful motive for some of us, who heartily disliked the compromising resolution, was to keep our own Congress ranks well knit to-

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1 The conditions were:

(i) All discussions at the proposed conference to be on the basis of full Dominion Status for India.

(ii) There should be a predominant representation of Congressmen at the conference.

(iii) A general amnesty of political prisoners.

(iv) The Government of India to be carried on from now onwards, as far as is possible under existing conditions, on the lines of a Dominion government.
gether. On the eve of a big struggle we could not afford to split up the Congress. It was well known that Government was not likely to accept the conditions laid down by us, and our position would thus be stronger and we could easily carry our Right Wing with us. It was only a question of a few weeks; December and the Lahore Congress were near.

And yet that joint manifesto was a bitter pill for some of us. To give up the demand for independence, even in theory and even for a short while, was wrong and dangerous; it meant that it was just a tactical affair, something to bargain with, not something which was essential and without which we could never be content. So I hesitated and refused to sign the manifesto (Subhas Bose had definitely refused to sign it), but, as was not unusual with me, I allowed myself to be talked into signing. Even so, I came away in great distress, and the very next day I thought of withdrawing from the Congress presidenchip, and wrote accordingly to Gandhiji. I do not suppose that I meant this seriously, though I was sufficiently upset. A soothing letter from Gandhiji and three days of reflection calmed me.

Just prior to the Lahore Congress, a final attempt was made to find some basis of agreement between Congress and the Government. An interview with Lord Irwin, the Viceroy, was arranged. I do not know who took the initiative in arranging this interview, but I imagine that Vithalbhai Patel was the prime mover. Gandhiji and my father were present at the interview, representing the Congress viewpoint, and I think also present were Mr. Jinnah, Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru and President Patel. The interview came to nothing; there was no common ground, and the two main parties—the Government and Congress—were far apart from each other. So now nothing remained but for the Congress to go ahead. The year of grace given at Calcutta was ending; independence was to be declared once for all the objective of the Congress, and the necessary steps taken to carry on the struggle to attain it.

During these final weeks prior to the Lahore Congress I had to attend to important work in another field. The All-India Trade Union Congress was meeting at Nagpur, and, as President for the year, I had to preside over it. It was very unusual for the same person to preside over both the National Congress and the Trade Union Congress within a few weeks of each other. I had hoped that I might be a link between the two and bring them closer to each other—the National Congress to become more socialist, more proletarian, and organised Labour to join the national struggle.
It was, perhaps, a vain hope, for nationalism can only go far in a socialistic or proletarian direction by ceasing to be nationalism. Yet I felt that, bourgeois as the outlook of the National Congress was, it did represent the only effective revolutionary force in the country. As such, Labour ought to help it and co-operate with it and influence it, keeping, however, its own identity and ideology distinct and intact. And I hoped that the course of events and the participation in direct action would inevitably drive the Congress to a more radical ideology and to face social and economic issues. The development of the Congress during recent years had been in the direction of the peasant and the village. If this development continued, it might in course of time become a vast peasant organisation, or, at any rate, an organisation in which the peasant element predominated. Already in many of our U.P. District Congress Committees the peasantry were strongly represented, though the middle-class intelligentsia held the leadership in their hands.

There was thus a possibility of the eternal conflict between the village and the city influencing the relations of the National Congress with the T.U.C. The contingency was remote, as the present National Congress is run by middle-class people and is controlled by the city, and, so long as the question of national freedom is not solved, its nationalism will dominate the field and be the most powerful sentiment in the country. Still it seemed to me obviously desirable to bring the Congress nearer to organised labour, and in the U.P. we even invited delegates to our Provincial Congress Committee from the provincial branch of the T.U.C. Many Congressmen also took prominent part in Labour activities.

The advanced sections of Labour, however, fought shy of the National Congress. They mistrusted its leaders, and considered its ideology bourgeois and reactionary, which indeed it was, from the Labour point of view. The Congress was, as its very name implied, a nationalist organisation.

Throughout 1929 Trade Unions in India were agitated over a new issue—the appointment of a Royal Commission on Labour in India, known as the Whitley Commission. The Left Wing was in favour of a boycott of the Commission, the Right Wing in favour of co-operation, and the personal factor came in, as some of the Right Wing leaders were offered membership of the Commission. In this matter, as in many others, my sympathies were with the Left, especially as this was also the policy of the National Congress. It seemed absurd to co-operate with official
Commissions when we were carrying on, or going to carry on, a direct action struggle.

At the Nagpur T.U. Congress, this question of the boycott of the Whitley Commission became a major issue, and on this, as well as on several other matters in dispute, the Left Wing triumphed. I played a very undistinguished rôle at this Congress. Being a newcomer in the Labour field and still feeling my way, I was a little hesitant. Generally, I expressed my views in favour of the more advanced groups, but I avoided acting with any group, and played the part more of an impartial speaker than a directing president. I was thus an almost passive spectator of the breaking-up of the T.U.C. and the formation of a new moderate organisation. Personally, I felt that the Right groups were not justified in breaking away, and yet some of the leaders of the Left had forced the pace and given them every pretext to depart. Between the quarrels of the Right and Left, a large Centre group felt a little helpless. Perhaps given a right lead, it could have curbed the two and avoided the break-up of the T.U.C., and, even if the break came, it would not have had the unfortunate consequences which resulted.

As it was, the Trade Union Movement in India suffered a tremendous blow from which it has not yet recovered. The Government had already started its campaign against the advanced wings of the Labour movement, and the Meerut case was among the first fruits thereof. This campaign continued. The employers also thought the moment opportune to push their advantage home. The world depression had already begun in that winter of 1929–30, and buffeted by this, and attacked on every side, and with their own trade union organisations at their lowest ebb, the Indian working class had a very hard time, and were the helpless witnesses of a progressive deterioration in their own condition. The Trade Union Congress experienced another split in the course of the next year or two, when a Communist faction broke off. Thus there were in theory three federations of Trade Unions in India—a Moderate group, the main T.U.C., and a Communist group. In practice they were all weak and ineffective, and their mutual quarrels disgusted the rank-and-file workers. I was out of all this from 1930 onwards, as I was mostly in prison. During my short periods outside I learnt that attempts at unity were being made. They were not successful.¹ The Moderate group of unions gained strength by the

¹ Subsequent efforts to bring about Trade Union unity have been more successful, and the various groups are now working in some co-operation with each other.
adhesion of railway workers to them. They had one advantage over the other groups, as Government recognised them and accepted their recommendations for the Labour Conferences at Geneva. The lure of a visit to Geneva pulled some Labour leaders to them, and they brought their unions with them.
XXVIII

INDEPENDENCE AND AFTER

The Lahore Congress remains fresh in my memory—a vivid patch. That is natural, for I played a leading rôle there, and, for a moment, occupied the centre of the stage; and I like to think sometimes of the emotions that filled me during those crowded days. I can never forget the magnificent welcome that the people of Lahore gave me, tremendous in its volume and its intensity. I knew well that this overflowing enthusiasm was for a symbol and an idea, not for me personally; yet it was no little thing for a person to become that symbol, even for a while, in the eyes and hearts of great numbers of people, and I felt exhilarated and lifted out of myself. But my personal reactions were of little account, and there were big issues at stake. The whole atmosphere was electric and surcharged with the gravity of the occasion. Our decisions were not going to be mere criticisms or protests or expressions of opinion, but a call to action which was bound to convulse the country and affect the lives of millions.

What the distant future held for us and our country, none dare prophesy; the immediate future was clear enough, and it held the promise of strife and suffering for us and those who were dear to us. This thought sobered our enthusiasms and made us very conscious of our responsibility. Every vote that we gave became a message of farewell to ease and comfort and domestic happiness and the intercourse of friends, and an invitation to lonely days and nights and physical and mental distress.

The main resolution on Independence, and the action to be taken in furtherance of our freedom struggle, was passed almost unanimously, barely a score of persons, out of many thousands, voting against it. The real voting took place on a side issue, which came in the form of an amendment. This amendment was defeated and the voting figures were announced and the main resolution declared carried, by a curious coincidence, at the stroke of midnight on December 31st, as the old year yielded place to the new. Thus even as the year of grace, fixed by the Calcutta Congress, expired, the new decision was taken and preparations for the struggle launched. The wheels had been set moving, but we were still in darkness as to how and when we
were to begin. The All-India Congress Committee had been authorised to plan and carry out our campaign, but all knew that the real decision lay with Gandhiji.

The Lahore Congress was attended by large numbers of people from the Frontier Province near by. Individual delegates from this province had always come to the Congress sessions, and for some years past Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan had been attending and taking part in our deliberations. In Lahore for the first time a large batch of earnest young men from the Frontier came into touch with all-India political currents. Their fresh minds were impressed, and they returned with a sense of unity with the rest of India in the struggle for freedom and full of enthusiasm for it. They were simple but effective men of action, less given to talk and quibbling than the people of any other province in India, and they started organising their people and spreading the new ideas. They met with success, and the men and women of the Frontier, the latest to join in India's struggle, played an outstanding and remarkable part from 1930 onwards.

Immediately after the Lahore Congress, and in obedience to its mandate, my father called upon the Congress members of the Legislative Assembly and the Provincial Councils to resign from their seats. Nearly all of them came out in a body, a very few refusing to do so, although this involved a breach of their election promises.

Still we were vague about the future. In spite of the enthusiasm shown at the Congress session, no one knew what the response of the country would be to a programme of action. We had burned our boats and could not go back, but the country ahead of us was an almost strange and uncharted land. To give a start to our campaign, and partly also to judge the temper of the country, January 26th was fixed as Independence Day, when a pledge of independence was to be taken all over the country.

And so, full of doubt about our programme, but pushed on by enthusiasm and the desire to do something effective, we waited for the march of events. I was in Allahabad during the early part of January; my father was mostly away. It was the time of the great annual fair, the Magh Mela; probably it was the special Kumbh year, and hundreds of thousands of men and women were continually streaming into Allahabad, or holy Prayag, as it was to the pilgrims. They were all kinds of people, chiefly peasants, also labourers, shopkeepers, artisans, merchants, business men, professional people—indeed, it was a cross-section of Hindu India. As I watched these great crowds and the un-
ending streams of people going to and from the river, I wondered how they would react to the call for civil resistance and peaceful direct action. How many of them knew or cared for the Lahore decisions? How amazingly powerful was that faith which had for thousands of years brought them and their forbears from every corner of India to bathe in the holy Ganga! Could they not divert some of this tremendous energy to political and economic action to better their own lot? Or were their minds too full of the trappings and traditions of their religion to leave room for other thought? I knew, of course, that these other thoughts were already there, stirring the placid stillness of ages. It was the movement of these vague ideas and desires among the masses that had caused the upheavals of the past dozen years and had changed the face of India. There was no doubt about their existence and of the dynamic energy behind them. But still doubt came and questions arose to which there was no immediate answer. How far had these ideas spread? What strength lay behind them, what capacity for organised action, for long endurance?

Our house attracted crowds of pilgrims. It lay conveniently situated near one of the places of pilgrimage, Bharadwaj, where in olden times there was a primitive university, and on the days of the mela an endless stream of visitors would come to us from dawn to dusk. Curiosity, I suppose, brought most of them, and the desire to see well-known persons they had heard of, especially my father. But a large proportion of those who came were politically inclined, and asked questions about the Congress and what it had decided and what was going to happen; and they were full of their own economic troubles and wanted to know what they should do about them. Our political slogans they knew well, and all day the house resounded with them. I started the day by saying a few words to each group of twenty or fifty or a hundred as it came, one after the other, but soon this proved an impossible undertaking, and I silently saluted them when they came. There was a limit to this, too, and then I tried to hide myself. It was all in vain. The slogans became louder and louder, the verandas of the house were full of these visitors of ours, each door and window had a collection of prying eyes. It was impossible to work or talk or feed or, indeed, do anything. This was not only embarrassing, it was annoying and irritating. Yet there they were, these people looking up with shining eyes full of affection, with generations of poverty and suffering behind them, and still pouring out their gratitude and love and asking for little in return, except fellow-feeling and sympathy.
It was impossible not to feel humbled and awed by this abundance of affection and devotion.

A dear friend of ours was staying with us at the time, and often it became impossible to carry on any conversation with her, for every five minutes or less I had to go out to say a word or two to a crowd that had assembled, and in between we listened to the slogans and shouting outside. She was amused at my plight and a little impressed, I think, by what she considered my great popularity with the masses. (As a matter of fact the principal attraction was my father, but, as he was away, I had to face the music.) She turned to me suddenly and asked me how I liked this hero-worship. Did I not feel proud of it? I hesitated a little before answering, and this led her to think that she had, perhaps, embarrassed me by too personal a question. She apologised. She had not embarrassed me in the least, but I found the question difficult to answer. My mind wandered away, and I began to analyse my own feelings and reactions. They were very mixed.

It was true that I had achieved, almost accidentally as it were, an unusual degree of popularity with the masses; I was appreciated by the intelligentsia; and to young men and women I was a bit of a hero, and a halo of romance seemed to surround me in their eyes. Songs had been written about me, and the most impossible and ridiculous legends had grown up. Even my opponents had often put in a good word for me and patronisingly admitted that I was not lacking in competence or in good faith.

Only a saint, perhaps, or an inhuman monster could survive all this, unscathed and unaffected, and I can place myself in neither of these categories. It went to my head, intoxicated me a little, and gave me confidence and strength. I became (I imagine so, for it is a difficult task to look at oneself from outside) just a little bit autocratic in my ways, just a shade dictatorial. And yet I do not think that my conceit increased markedly. I had a fair measure of my abilities, I thought, and I was by no means humble about them. But I knew well enough that there was nothing at all remarkable about them, and I was very conscious of my failings. A habit of introspection probably helped me to retain my balance and view many happenings connected with myself in a detached manner. Experience of public life showed me that popularity was often the handmaiden of undesirable persons; it was certainly not an invariable sign of virtue or intelligence. Was I popular then because of my failings or my accomplishments? Why indeed was I popular?
Not because of intellectual attainments, for they were not extraordinary, and, in any event, they do not make for popularity. Not because of so-called sacrifices, for it is patent that hundreds and thousands in our own day in India have suffered infinitely more, even to the point of the last sacrifice. My reputation as a hero is entirely a bogus one, and I do not feel at all heroic, and generally the heroic attitude or the dramatic pose in life strikes me as silly. As for romance, I should say that I am the least romantic of individuals. It is true that I have some physical and mental courage, but the background of that is probably pride: personal, group, and national, and a reluctance to be coerced into anything.

I had no satisfactory answer to my question. Then I proceeded along a different line of inquiry. I found that one of the most persistent legends about my father and myself was to the effect that we used to send our linen weekly from India to a Paris laundry. We have repeatedly contradicted this, but the legend persists. Anything more fantastic and absurd it is difficult for me to imagine, and if anyone is foolish enough to indulge in this wasteful snobbery, I should have thought he would get a special mention for being a prize fool.

Another equally persistent legend, often repeated in spite of denial, is that I was at school with the Prince of Wales. The story goes on to say that when the Prince came to India in 1921 he asked for me; I was then in gaol. As a matter of fact, I was not only not at school with him, but I have never had the advantage of meeting him or speaking to him.

I do not mean to imply that my reputation or popularity, such as they are, depend on these or similar legends. They may have a more secure foundation, but there is no doubt that the superstructure has a thick covering of snobbery, as is evidenced by these stories. At any rate, there is the idea of mixing in high society and living a life of luxury and then renouncing it all, and renunciation has always appealed to the Indian mind. As a basis for a reputation this does not at all appeal to me. I prefer the active virtues to the passive ones, and renunciation and sacrifice for their own sakes have little appeal for me. I do value them from another point of view—that of mental and spiritual training—just as a simple and regular life is necessary for the athlete to keep in good physical condition. And the capacity for endurance and perseverance in spite of hard knocks is essential for those who wish to dabble in great undertakings. But I have no liking or attraction for the ascetic view of life, the negation of life, the terrified abstention from its joys and sensations. I
have not consciously renounced anything that I really valued; but then values change.

The question that my friend had asked me still remained unanswered: did I not feel proud of this hero-worship of the crowd? I disliked it and wanted to run away from it, and yet I had got used to it, and when it was wholly absent, I rather missed it. Neither way brought satisfaction, but, on the whole, the crowd had filled some inner need of mine. The notion that I could influence them and move them to action gave me a sense of authority over their minds and hearts; and this satisfied, to some extent, my will to power. On their part, they exercised a subtle tyranny over me, for their confidence and affection moved inner depths within me and evoked emotional responses. Individualist as I was, sometimes the barriers of individuality seemed to melt away, and I felt that it would be better to be accursed with these unhappy people than to be saved alone. But the barriers were too solid to disappear, and I peeped over them with wondering eyes at this phenomenon which I failed to understand.

Conceit, like fat on the human body, grows imperceptibly, layer upon layer, and the person whom it affects is unconscious of the daily accretion. Fortunately the hard knocks of a mad world tone it down or even squash it completely, and there has been no lack of these hard knocks for us in India during recent years. The school of life has been a difficult one for us, and suffering is a hard taskmaster.

I have been fortunate in another respect also—the possession of family members and friends and comrades, who have helped me to retain a proper perspective and not to lose my mental equilibrium. Public functions, addresses by municipalities and local boards and other public bodies, processions and the like, used to be a great strain on my nerves and my sense of humour and reality. The most extravagant and pompous language would be used, and everybody would look so solemn and pious that I felt an almost uncontrollable desire to laugh, or to stick out my tongue, or stand on my head, just for the pleasure of shocking and watching the reactions on the faces at that august assembly! Fortunately for my reputation and for the sober respectability of public life in India, I have suppressed this mad desire and usually behaved with due propriety. But not always. Sometimes there has been an exhibition on my part in a crowded meeting, or more often in processions, which I find extraordinarily trying. I have suddenly left a procession, arranged in our honour, and disappeared in the crowd, leaving my wife or
some other person to carry on, perched up in a car or carriage, with that procession.

This continuous effort to suppress one's feelings and behave in public is a bit of a strain, and the usual result is that one puts on a glum and solid look on public occasions. Perhaps because of this I was once described in an article in a Hindu magazine as resembling a Hindu widow! I must say that, much as I admire Hindu widows of the old type, this gave me a shock. The author evidently meant to praise me for some qualities he thought I possessed—a spirit of gentle resignation and renunciation and a smileless devotion to work. I had hoped that I possessed—and, indeed, I wish that Hindu widows would possess—more active and aggressive qualities and the capacity for humour and laughter. Gandhiji once told an interviewer that if he had not had the gift of humour he might have committed suicide, or something to this effect. I would not presume to go so far, but life certainly would have been almost intolerable for me but for the humour and light touches that some people gave to it.

My very popularity and the brave addresses that came my way, full (as is, indeed, the custom of all such addresses in India) of choice and flowery language and extravagant conceits, became subjects for raillery in the circle of my family and intimate friends. The high-sounding and pompous words and titles that were often used for all those prominent in the national movement, were picked out by my wife and sisters and others and bandied about irreverently. I was addressed as Bharat Bhushan—'Jewel of India' Tyagamurti—'O Embodiment of Sacrifice'; and this light-hearted treatment soothed me, and the tension of those solemn public gatherings, where I had to remain on my best behaviour, gradually relaxed. Even my little daughter joined in the game. Only my mother insisted on taking me seriously, and she never wholly approved of any sarcasm or raillery at the expense of her darling boy. Father was amused; he had a way of quietly expressing his deep understanding and sympathy.

But all these shouting crowds, and dull and wearying public functions, and interminable arguments, and the dust and tumble of politics touched me on the surface only, though sometimes the touch was sharp and pointed. My real conflict lay within me, a conflict of ideas, desires and loyalties, of subconscious depths struggling with outer circumstances, of an inner hunger unsatisfied. I became a battleground, where various forces struggled for mastery. I sought an escape from this; I tried to find harmony and equilibrium, and in this attempt I rushed
into action. That gave me some peace; outer conflict relieved the strain of the inner struggle.

Why am I writing all this sitting here in prison? The quest is still the same, in prison or outside, and I write down my past feelings and experiences in the hope that this may bring me some peace and psychic satisfaction.
XXIX

CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE BEGINS

Independence Day came, January 26th, 1930, and it revealed to us, as in a flash, the earnest and enthusiastic mood of the country. There was something vastly impressive about the great gatherings everywhere, peacefully and solemnly taking the pledge of independence\(^1\) without any speeches or exhortation. This celebration gave the necessary impetus to Gandhiji, and he felt, with his sure touch on the pulse of the people, that the time was ripe for action. Events followed then in quick succession, like a drama working up to its climax.

As Civil Disobedience approached and electrified the atmosphere, our thoughts went back to the movement of 1921–22 and the manner of its sudden suspension after Chauri Chaura. The country was more disciplined now, and there was a clearer appreciation of the nature of the struggle. The technique was understood to some extent, but more important still from Gandhiji’s point of view, it was fully realised by every one that he was terribly in earnest about non-violence. There could be no doubt about that now as there probably was in the minds of some people ten years before. Despite all this, how could we possibly be certain that an outbreak of violence might not occur in some locality either spontaneously or as the result of an intrigue? And if such an incident occurred, what would be its effect on our civil disobedience movement? Would it be suddenly wound up as before? That prospect was most disconcerting.

Gandhiji probably thought over this question also in his own way, though the problem that seemed to trouble him, as far as I could gather from scraps of conversation, was put differently.

The non-violent method of action to bring about a change for the better was to him the only right method and, if rightly pursued, an infallible method. Must it be said that this method required a specially favourable atmosphere for its functioning and success, and that it should not be tried if outward conditions were not suited to it? That led to the conclusion that the non-violent method was not meant for all contingencies, and was thus neither a universal nor an infallible method. This conclusion was intolerable for Gandhiji, for he firmly believed that it was a universal and infallible method. Therefore, necessarily,

\(^1\) This pledge is given in Appendix A. (p. 612)
it must function even though the external conditions were unfavourable, and even in the midst of strife and violence. The way of its functioning might be varied to suit varying circumstances, but to stop it would be a confession of failure of the method itself.

Perhaps his mind worked in some such way, but I cannot be sure of his thoughts. He did give us the impression that there was a slightly different orientation to his thinking, and that Civil Disobedience, when it came, need not be stopped because of a sporadic act of violence. If, however, the violence became in any way part of the movement itself, then it ceased to be a peaceful civil disobedience movement, and its activities had to be curtailed or varied. This assurance went a long way in satisfying many of us. The great question that hung in the air now was—how? How were we to begin? What form of civil disobedience should we take up that would be effective, suited to the circumstances, and popular with the masses? And then the Mahatma gave the hint.

Salt suddenly became a mysterious word, a word of power. The Salt Tax was to be attacked, the salt laws were to be broken. We were bewildered and could not quite fit in a national struggle with common salt. Another surprising development was Gandhiji’s announcement of his ‘Eleven Points’. What was the point of making a list of some political and social reforms—good in themselves, no doubt—when we were talking in terms of independence? Did Gandhiji mean the same thing when he used this term as we did, or did we speak a different language? We had no time to argue for events were on the move. They were moving politically before our eyes from day to day in India; and, hardly realised by us at the time, they were moving fast in the world and holding it in the grip of a terrible depression. Prices were falling, and the city dwellers welcomed this as a sign of the plenty to come, but the farmer and the tenant saw the prospect with alarm.

Then came Gandhiji’s correspondence with the Viceroy and the beginning of the Dandi Salt March from the Ashram at Sabarmati. As people followed the fortunes of this marching column of pilgrims from day to day, the temperature of the country went up. A meeting of the All-India Congress Committee was held at Ahmedabad to make final arrangements for the struggle that was now almost upon us. The Leader in the struggle was not present, for he was already tramping with his pilgrim band to the sea, and he refused to return. The A.I.C.C. planned what should be done in case of arrests, and large powers
were given to the President to act on behalf of the Committee, in case it could not meet, to nominate members of the Working Committee in place of those arrested, and to nominate a successor for himself with the same powers. Similar powers were given by Provincial and local Congress Committees to their presidents.

Thus was inaugurated a régime when so-called 'dictators' flourished and controlled the struggle on behalf of the Congress. Secretaries of State for India and Viceroy and Governors have held up their hands in horror and proclaimed how vicious and degraded was the Congress because it believed in dictatorships; they, of course, being convinced adherents of democracy. Occasionally the Moderate Press in India has also preached to us the virtues of democracy. We listened to all this in silence (because we were in prison) and in amazement. Brazen-faced hypocrisy could hardly go further. Here was India being governed forcibly under an absolute dictatorship with Ordinance laws and suppression of every kind of civil liberty, and yet our rulers talked unctuously of democracy. Even normally, where was the shadow of democracy in India? It was no doubt natural for the British Government to defend its power and vested interests in India and to suppress those who sought to challenge its authority. But its assertion that all this was the democratic method was worthy of record for future generations to admire and ponder over.

The Congress had to face a situation when it would be impossible for it to function normally; when it would be declared an unlawful organisation, and its committees could not meet for consultation or any action, except secretly. Secrecy was not encouraged by us, as we wanted to keep our struggle a perfectly open one, and thus to keep up our tone and influence the masses. But even secret work did not take us far. All our leading men and women at the centre, as well as in the provinces and in local areas, were bound to be arrested. Who was then to carry on? The only course open to us was, after the fashion of an army in action, to make arrangements for new commanders to be appointed as old ones were disabled. We could not sit down in the field of battle and hold committee meetings. Indeed, we did so sometimes, but the object of this, and the inevitable result, was to have the whole committee arrested en bloc. We did not even have the advantage of a general staff sitting safely behind the lines, or a civilian cabinet in still greater safety elsewhere. Our general staffs and cabinets had to keep, by the very nature of our struggle, in the most advanced and exposed positions, and
they were arrested and removed in the early stages. And what was the power we conferred on our 'dictators'? It was an honour for them to be put forward as symbols of the national determination to carry on the struggle; but the actual authority they had was largely confined to 'dictating' themselves to prison. They could only function at all when the committee they represented could not meet on account of force majeure; and wherever and whenever that committee could meet, the 'dictator' lost his individual authority, such as it was. He or she could not tackle any basic problems or principles; only minor and superficial phases of the movement could be affected by the 'dictator'. Congress 'dictatorships' were really stepping-stones to prison; and from day to day this process went on, new persons taking the place of those who were disabled.

And so, having made our final preparations, we bade good-bye to our comrades of the All-India Congress Committee at Ahmedabad, for none knew when or how we would meet again, or whether we would meet at all. We hastened back to our posts to give the finishing touches to our local arrangements, in accordance with the new directions of the A.I.C.C., and, as Sarojini Naidu said, to pack up our toothbrushes for the journey to prison.

On our way back, father and I went to see Gandhiji. He was at Jambusar with his pilgrim band and we spent a few hours with him there, and then saw him stride away with his party to the next stage in the journey to the salt sea. That was my last glimpse of him then as I saw him, staff in hand, marching along at the head of his followers, with firm step and a peaceful but undaunted look. It was a moving sight.

At Jambusar my father had decided, in consultation with Gandhiji, to make a gift of his old house in Allahabad to the nation and to rename this Swaraj Bhawan. On his return to Allahabad he made the announcement, and actually handed over charge to the Congress people; part of the large house being converted into a hospital. He was unable to go through the legal formalities at the time, and, a year and half later, I created a trust of the property, in accordance with his wishes.

April came, and Gandhiji drew near to the sea, and we waited for the word to begin civil disobedience by an attack on the salt laws. For months past we had been drilling our volunteers, and Kamala and Krishna (my wife and sister) had both joined them and donned male attire for the purpose. The volunteers had, of course, no arms or even sticks. The object of training them was to make them more efficient in their work and capable of dealing
with large crowds. The 6th of April was the first day of the National Week, which is celebrated annually in memory of the happenings in 1919, from Satyagraha Day to Jallianwala Bagh. On that day Gandhiji began the breach of the salt laws at Dandi beach, and three or four days later permission was given to all Congress organisations to do likewise and begin Civil Disobedience in their own areas.

It seemed as though a spring had been suddenly released; and all over the country, in town and village, salt manufacture was the topic of the day, and many curious expedients were adopted to produce salt. We knew precious little about it, and so we read it up where we could, and issued leaflets giving directions, and collected pots and pans and ultimately succeeded in producing some unwholesome stuff, which we waved about in triumph, and often auctioned for fancy prices. It was really immaterial whether the stuff was good or bad; the main thing was to commit a breach of the obnoxious Salt Law, and we were successful in that, even though the quality of our salt was poor. As we saw the abounding enthusiasm of the people and the way salt-making was spreading like a prairie fire, we felt a little abashed and ashamed for having questioned the efficacy of this method when it was first proposed by Gandhiji. And we marvelled at the amazing knack of the man to impress the multitude and make it act in an organised way.

I was arrested on the 14th of April as I was entraining for Raipur in the Central Provinces, where I was going to attend a conference. That very day I was tried in prison and sentenced to six months' imprisonment under the Salt Act. In anticipation of arrest I had nominated (under the new powers given to me by the A.I.C.) Gandhiji to act as Congress President in my absence, but, fearing his refusal, my second nomination was for father. As I expected, Gandhiji would not agree, and so father became the acting-President of the Congress. He was in poor health, nevertheless he threw himself into the campaign with great energy; and, during those early months, his strong guidance and enforcement of discipline was of tremendous benefit to the movement. The movement benefited greatly, but it was at the cost of such health and physical fitness as had remained in him.

Those were days of stirring news—processions and lathi charges and firing; frequent hartals to celebrate noted arrests, and special observances, like Peshawar Day, Garhwali Day, etc. For the time being the boycott of foreign cloth and all British goods was almost complete. When I heard that my aged mother
and, of course, my sisters used to stand under the hot summer sun picketing before foreign cloth shops, I was greatly moved. Kamala did so also, but she did something more. She threw herself into the movement in Allahabad city and district with an energy and determination which amazed me, who thought I had known her so well for so many years. She forgot her ill-health and rushed about the whole day in the sun, and showed remarkable powers of organisation. I heard of this vaguely in gaol. Later, when my father joined me there, I was to learn from him how much he had himself appreciated Kamala’s work, and especially her organising capacity. He did not at all fancy my mother or the girls rushing about in the hot sun, but, except for an occasional remonstrance, he did not interfere.

The biggest news of all that came to us in those early days was of the occurrences in Peshawar on April 23rd, and subsequently all over the Frontier Province. Anywhere in India such a remarkable exhibition of disciplined and peaceful courage before machine-gun firing would have stirred the country. In the Frontier Province it had an additional significance, for the Pathans, noted for their courage, were not noted for their peaceful nature; and these Pathans had set an example which was unique in India. In the Frontier Province also occurred the famous incident of the refusal to fire on the civil population by the Garhwali soldiers. They refused to fire because of a soldier’s distaste for firing on an unarmed crowd, and because, no doubt, of sympathy with the crowd. But even sympathy is not usually enough to induce a soldier to take the grave step of refusing to obey his officer’s orders. He knows the consequences. The Garhwalis probably did so (in common with some other regiments elsewhere whose disobedience did not receive publicity) because of a mistaken notion that the British power was collapsing. Only when such an idea takes possession of the soldier does he dare to act according to his own sympathies and inclinations. Probably for a few days or weeks the general commotion and civil disobedience led some people to think that the last days of British rule had come, and this influenced part of the Indian Army. Soon it became obvious that no such thing was going to happen in the near future, and then there was no more disobedience in the army. Care was also taken not to put them in compromising positions.

Many strange things happened in those days, but undoubtedly the most striking was the part of the women in the national struggle. They came out in large numbers from the seclusion
of their homes and, though unused to public activity, threw themselves into the heart of the struggle. The picketing of foreign cloth and liquor shops they made their preserve. Enormous processions consisting of women alone were taken out in all the cities; and, generally, the attitude of the women was more unyielding than that of the men. Often they became Congress 'dictators' in provinces and in local areas.

The breach of the Salt Act soon became just one activity, and civil resistance spread to other fields. This was facilitated by the promulgation of various ordinances by the Viceroy prohibiting a number of activities. As these ordinances and prohibitions grew, the opportunities for breaking them also grew, and civil resistance took the form of doing the very thing that the ordinance was intended to stop. The initiative definitely remained with the Congress and the people, and as each ordinance law failed to control the situation from the point of view of government, fresh ordinances were issued by the Viceroy. Many of the Congress Working Committee members had been arrested, but it continued to function with new members added on to it, and each official ordinance was countered by a resolution of the Working Committee giving directions as to how to meet it. These directions were carried out with surprising uniformity all over this country—with one exception, the one relating to the publication of newspapers.

When an ordinance was issued for the further control of the Press and the demand of security from newspapers, the Working Committee called upon the Nationalist Press to refuse to give any security, and to stop publication instead. This was a hard pill to swallow for the newspapermen, for just then the public demand for news was very great. Still the great majority of newspapers—some Moderate papers excepted—stopped publication, with the result that all manner of rumours began to spread. But they could not hold out for long, the temptation was too great, and the sight of their moderate rivals picking up their business too irritating. So most of them drifted back to publication.

Gandhi had been arrested on May 5th. After his arrest big raids on the salt pans and depots were organized on the west coast. There were very painful incidents of police brutality during these raids. Bombay then occupied the centre of the picture with its tremendous hartals and processions and lathi charges. Several emergency hospitals grew up to treat the victims of these lathi charges. Much that was remarkable happened in Bombay, and being a great city it had the advantage of pub-
licity. Occurrences of equal importance in small towns and the rural areas received no publicity.

In the latter half of June my father went to Bombay, and with him went my mother and Kamala. They had a great reception, and during their stay there occurred some of the fiercest of the lathi charges. These were, indeed, becoming frequent occurrences in Bombay. A fortnight or so later an extraordinary all-night ordeal took place there, when Malaviyaji and members of the Working Committee, at the head of a huge crowd, spent the night facing the police, who blocked their way.

On his return from Bombay father was arrested on June 30th, and Syed Mahmud was arrested with him. They were arrested as acting-President and Secretary of the Working Committee, which was declared unlawful. Both of them were sentenced to six months. My father's arrest was probably due to his having issued a statement defining the duties of a soldier or policeman in the event of an order to fire on civil populations being given. The statement was strictly a legal affair, and contained the present British Indian law on this point. Nevertheless, it was considered a provocative and dangerous document.

The Bombay visit had been a great strain on father, and from early morning to late at night he was kept busy, and he had to take the responsibility for every important decision. He had long been unwell, but now he returned fagged out, and decided, at the urgent advice of his doctors, to take complete rest immediately. He arranged to go to Mussoorie and packed up for it, but the day before he intended leaving for Mussoorie, he appeared before us in our barrack in Naini Central Prison.
XXX

IN NAINI PRISON

I had gone back to gaol after nearly seven years, and memories
of prison life had somewhat faded. I was in Naini Central
Prison, one of the big prisons of the province, and I was to have
the novel experience of being kept by myself. My enclosure was
apart from the big enclosure containing the gaol population of
between 2200 and 2300. It was a small enclosure, circular in
shape, with a diameter of about one hundred feet, and with a
circular wall about fifteen feet high surrounding it. In the middle
of it was a drab and ugly building containing four cells. I was
given two of these cells, connecting with each other, one to
serve as a bathroom and lavatory. The others remained un-
occupied for some time.

After the exciting and very active life I had been leading
outside, I felt rather lonely and depressed. I was tired out, and
for two or three days I slept a great deal. The hot weather had
already begun, and I was permitted to sleep at night in the open,
outside my cell in the narrow space between the inner building
and the enclosing wall. My bed was heavily chained up, lest I
might take it up and walk away, or, more probably, to avoid
the bed being used as a kind of scaling ladder to climb the wall
of the enclosure. The nights were full of strange noises. The
convict overseers, who guarded the main wall, frequently shouted
to each other in varying keys, sometimes lengthening out their
cries till they sounded like the moaning of a distant wind; the
night-watchmen in the barracks were continually counting away
in a loud voice the prisoners under their charge and shouting out
that all was well; and several times a night some gaol official,
going his rounds, visited our enclosure and shouted an enquiry
to the warden on duty. As my enclosure was some distance away
from the others, most of these voices reached me indistinctly,
and I could not make out at first what they were. At times I felt
as if I was on the verge of the forest, and the peasantry were
shouting to keep the wild animals away from their fields; some-
times it seemed the forest itself and the beasts of the night were
keeping up their nocturnal chorus.

Was it my fancy, I wonder, or is it a fact that a circular wall
reminds one more of captivity than a rectangular one? The
absence of corners and angles adds to the sense of oppression.
In the daytime that wall even encroached on the sky and only allowed a glimpse of a narrow-bounded portion. With a wistful eye I looked

"Upon that little tent of blue
Which prisoners call the sky,
And at every drifting cloud that went
With sails of silver by."

At night that wall enclosed me all the more, and I felt as if I was at the bottom of a well. Or else that part of the star-lit sky that I saw ceased to be real and seemed part of an artificial planetarium.

My barrack and enclosure were popularly known throughout the gaol as the Kuttagh—or the Dog House. This was an old name which had nothing to do with me. The little barrack had been built originally, apart from all others, for especially dangerous criminals who had to be isolated. Latterly it had been used for political prisoners, detenus, and the like who could thus be kept apart from the rest of the gaol. In front of the enclosure, some distance away, was an erection that gave me a shock when I first had a glimpse of it from my barrack. It looked like a huge cage, and men went round and round inside it. I found out later that it was a water-pump worked by human labour, as many as sixteen persons being employed at a time. I got used to it as one gets used to everything, but it has always seemed to me one of the most foolish and barbarous ways of utilising human labour-power. And whenever I pass it I think of the zoo.

For some days I was not permitted to go outside my enclosure for exercise or any other purpose. I was later allowed to go out for half an hour in the early mornings, when it was almost dark, and to walk or run under the main wall. That early morning hour had been fixed for me so that I might not come in contact with, or be seen by, the other prisoners. I liked that outing, and it refreshed me tremendously. In order to compress as much open-air exercise as I could in the short time at my disposal, I took to running, and gradually increased this to over two miles daily.

I used to get up very early in the morning, about four, or even half-past three, when it was quite dark. Partly this was due to going to bed early, as the light provided was not good for much reading. I liked to watch the stars, and the position of some well-known constellation would give me the approximate time. From where I lay I could just see the Pole Star peeping over the wall, and as it was always there, I found it extraordinarily
comforting. Surrounded by a revolving sky, it seemed to be a symbol of cheerful constancy and perseverance.

For a month I had no companion, but I was not alone, as I had the warden and the convict overseers and a convict cook and cleaner in my enclosure. Occasionally other prisoners came there on some business, most of them being convict overseers—C.O.’s—serving out long sentences. ‘Lifers’—convicts sentenced for life—were common. Usually a life-sentence was supposed to terminate after twenty years, or even less, but there were many in prison then who had served more than twenty years already. I saw one very remarkable case in Naini. Prisoners carry about, attached to their clothes at the shoulder, little wooden boards giving information about their convictions and mentioning the date when release was due. On the board of one prisoner I read that his date of release was 1906! He had already, in 1930, served out several years, and he was then a person of middle age. Probably he had been given several sentences and they had been added up one after the other; the total, I think, amounting to seventy-five years.

For years and years many of these ‘lifers’ do not see a child or woman, or even animals. They lose touch with the outside world completely, and have no human contacts left. They brood and wrap themselves in angry thoughts of fear and revenge and hatred; forget the good of the world, the kindness and joy, and live only wrapped up in the evil, till gradually even hatred loses its edge and life becomes a soulless thing, a machine-like routine. Like automatons they pass their days, each exactly like the other, and have few sensations, except one—fear! From time to time the prisoner’s body is weighed and measured. But how is one to weigh the mind and the spirit which wilt and stunt themselves and wither away in this terrible atmosphere of oppression? People argue against the death penalty, and their arguments appeal to me greatly. But when I see the long drawn-out agony of a life spent in prison, I feel that it is perhaps better to have that penalty rather than to kill a person slowly and by degrees. One of the ‘lifers’ came up to me once and asked me: “What of us lifers? Will Swaraj take us out of this hell?”

Who are these lifers? Many of them come in gang cases, when large numbers, as many as fifty or a hundred, may be convicted en bloc. Some of these are probably guilty, but I doubt if most of those convicted are really guilty; it is easy to get people involved in such cases. An approver’s evidence, a little identification, is all that is needed. Dacoities are increasing now-
adays and the prison population goes up year by year. If people starve, what are they to do? Judges and magistrates wax eloquent about the increase of crime, but are blind to the obvious economic causes of it.

Then there are the agriculturists who have a little village riot over some land dispute, lathis fly about, and somebody dies—result, many people in gaol for life or for a long term. Often all the menfolk in a family will be imprisoned in this way, leaving the women to carry on as best they can. Not one of these is a criminal type. Generally they are fine young men, considerably above the average villager, both physically and mentally. A little training, some diversion of interest to other subjects and jobs, and these people would be valuable assets to the country.

Indian prisons contain, of course, hardened criminals, persons who are aggressively anti-social and dangerous to the community. But I have been amazed to find large numbers of fine types in prison, boys and men, whom I would trust unhesitatingly. I do not know what the proportion of real criminals to non-criminal types is, and probably no one in the prison department has ever even thought of this distinction. Some interesting figures are given on this subject by Lewis E. Lawes, the Warden of Sing Sing Prison in New York. He says of his prison population, that to his knowledge 50 per cent. are not criminally inclined at all; that 25 per cent. are the products of circumstances and environment; that of the remaining 25 per cent. only a possible half, that is 12½ per cent., are aggressively anti-social. It is a well-known fact that real criminality flourishes more in the big cities and centres of modern civilisation than in the undeveloped countries. American gangsterdom is notorious, and Sing Sing has a special reputation as a prison where some of the worst criminals go. And yet, according to its warden, only 12½ per cent. of its prisoners are really bad. I think it may very safely be said that this proportion is far less in an Indian prison. A more sensible economic policy, more employment, more education would soon empty out our prisons. But of course to make that successful, a radical plan, affecting the whole of our social fabric, is essential. The only other real alternative is what the British Government is doing: increasing its police forces and enlarging its prisons in India. The number of persons sent to gaol in India is appalling. In a recent report issued by the Secretary of the All-India Prisoners' Aid Society, it is stated that in the Bombay Presidency alone 128,000 persons were sent to gaol in 1933, and the
figure for Bengal for the same year was 124,000.¹ I do not know the figures for all the provinces, but if the total for two provinces exceeds a quarter of a million, it is quite possible that the All-India total approaches the million mark. This figure does not, of course, represent the permanent gaol population, for a large number of persons get short sentences. The permanent population will be very much less, but still it must be enormous. Some of the major provinces in India are said to have the biggest prison administrations in the world. The U.P. is among those supposed to have this doubtful honour, and very probably it is, or was, one of the most backward and reactionary administrations. Not the least effort is made to consider the prisoner as an individual, a human being, and to improve or look after his mind. The one thing the U.P. administration excels in is keeping its prisoners. There are remarkably few attempts to escape, and I doubt if one in ten thousand succeeds in escaping.

One of the most saddening features of the prisons is the large number of boys, from fifteen upwards, who are to be found in them. Most of them are bright-looking lads who, if given the chance, might easily make good. Lately some beginnings have been made to teach them the elements of reading and writing but, as usual, these are absurdly inadequate and inefficient. There are very few opportunities for games or recreation, no newspapers of any kind are permitted nor are books encouraged. For twelve hours or more all prisoners are kept locked up in their barracks or cells with nothing whatever to do in the long evenings.

Interviews are only permitted once in three months, and so are letters—a monstrously long period. Even so, many prisoners cannot take advantage of them. If they are illiterate, as most are, they have to rely on some gaol official to write on their behalf; and the latter, not being keen on adding to his other work, usually avoids it. Or, if a letter is written, the address is not properly given and the letter does not reach. Interviews are still more difficult. Almost invariably they depend on a gratification for some gaol official. Often prisoners are transferred to different gaols, and their people cannot trace them. I have met many prisoners who had lost complete touch with their families for years, and did not know what had happened. Interviews, when they do take place after three months or more, are most extraordinary. A number of

¹ Statesman, December 11, 1934.
prisoners and their interviewers are placed together on either side of a barrier, and they all try to talk simultaneously. There is a great deal of shouting at each other, and the slight human touch that might have come from the interview is entirely absent.

A very small number of prisoners, ordinarily not exceeding one in a thousand (Europeans excepted), are given some extra privileges in the shape of better food and more frequent interviews and letters. During a big political civil resistance movement, when scores of thousands of political prisoners go to gaol, this figure of special class prisoners goes up slightly, but even so it is very low. About 95 per cent. of these political prisoners, men and women, are treated in the ordinary way and are not given even these facilities.

Some individuals, sentenced for revolutionary activities for life or long terms of imprisonment, are often kept in solitary confinement for long periods. In the U.P., I believe, all such persons are automatically kept in solitary cellular confinement. Ordinarily, this solitary confinement is awarded as a special punishment for a prison offence. But in the case of these persons—usually young boys—they are kept alone although their behaviour in gaol might be exemplary. Thus an additional and very terrible punishment is added by the Gaol Department to the sentence of the court, without any reason therefor. This seems very extraordinary, and hardly in conformity with any rule of law. Solitary confinement, even for a short period, is a most painful affair; for it to be prolonged for years is a terrible thing. It means the slow and continuous deterioration of the mind, till it begins to border on insanity; and the appearance of a look of vacancy, or a frightened animal type of expression. It is the killing of the spirit by degrees, the slow vivisection of the soul. Even if a man survives it, he becomes abnormal and an absolute misfit in the world. And the question always arises—was this man guilty at all of any act or offence? Police methods in India have long been suspect; in political matters they are doubly so.

European or Eurasian prisoners, whatever their crime or status, are automatically placed in a higher class and get better food, lighter work and more interviews and letters. A weekly visit from a clergyman keeps them in touch with outside affairs. The parson brings them foreign illustrated and humorous papers, and communicates with their families when necessary.

No one grudges the European convicts these privileges, for they are few enough, but it is a little painful to see the utter
absence of any human standard in the treatment of others—men and women. The convict is not thought of as an individual human being, and so he or she is seldom treated as such. One sees in prison the inhuman side of the State apparatus of administrative repression at its worst. It is a machine which works away callously and unthinkingly, crushing all that come in its grip, and the gaol rules have been purposely framed to keep this machine in evidence. Offered to sensitive men and women, this soulless régime is a torture and an anguish of the mind. I have seen long-term convicts sometimes breaking down at the dreariness of it all, and weeping like little children. And a word of sympathy and encouragement, so rare in this atmosphere, has suddenly made their faces light up with joy and gratitude.

And yet among the prisoners themselves there were often touching instances of charity and good comradeship. A blind 'habitual' prisoner was once discharged after thirteen years. After this long period he was going out, wholly unprovided for, into a friendless world. His fellow convicts were eager to help him, but they could not do much. One gave his shirt deposited in the gaol office, another some other piece of clothing. A third had that very morning received a new pair of chappals (leather sandals) and he had shown them to me with some pride. It was a great acquisition in prison. But when he saw this blind companion of many years going out bare-footed, he willingly parted with his new chappals. I thought then that there appeared to be more charity inside the gaol than outside it.

That year 1930 was full of dramatic situations and inspiring happenings; what surprised most was the amazing power of Gandhiji to inspire and enthuse a whole people. There was something almost hypnotic about it, and we remembered the words used by Gokhale about him: how he had the power of making heroes out of clay. Peaceful civil disobedience as a technique of action for achieving great national ends seemed to have justified itself, and a quiet confidence grew in the country, shared by friend and opponent alike, that we were marching towards victory. A strange excitement filled those who were active in the movement, and some of this even crept inside the gaol. "Swaraj is coming!" said the ordinary convicts; and they waited impatiently for it, in the selfish hope that it might do them some good. The warders, coming in contact with the gossip of the bazaars, also expected that Swaraj was near; the petty gaol official grew a little more nervous.

We had no daily newspapers in prison, but a Hindi weekly
brought us some news, and often this news would set our imagination afire. Daily lathi charges, sometimes firing, martial law at Sholapur with sentences of ten years for carrying the national flag. We felt proud of our people, and especially of our womenfolk, all over the country. I had a special feeling of satisfaction because of the activities of my mother, wife and sisters, as well as many girl cousins and friends; and though I was separated from them and was in prison, we grew nearer to each other, bound by a new sense of comradeship in a great cause. The family seemed to merge into a larger group, and yet to retain its old flavour and intimacy. Kamala surprised me, for her energy and enthusiasm overcame her physical ill-health and, for some time at least, she kept well in spite of strenuous activities.

The thought that I was having a relatively easy time in prison, at a time when others were facing danger and suffering outside, began to oppress me. I longed to go out, and as I could not do that, I made my life in prison a hard one, full of work. I used to spin daily for nearly three hours on my own charkha; for another two or three hours I did newar weaving, which I had especially asked for from the gaol authorities. I liked these activities. They kept me occupied without undue strain or requiring too much attention, and they soothed the fever of my mind. I read a great deal, and otherwise busied myself with cleaning up, washing my clothes, etc. The manual labour I did was of my own choice as my imprisonment was 'simple'.

And so, between thought of outside happenings and my gaol routine, I passed my days in Naini Prison. Watching the working of an Indian prison, it struck me that it was not unlike the British government of India. There is great efficiency in the apparatus of government, which goes to strengthen the hold of the Government on the country, and little or no care for the human material of the country. Outwardly the prison must appear efficiently run, and to some extent this was true. But no one seemed to think that the main purpose of the prison must be to improve and help the unhappy individuals who come to it. Break them!—that is the idea, so that by the time they go out, they may not have the least bit of spirit left in them. And how is the prison controlled, and the convicts kept in check and punished? Very largely with the help of the convicts themselves, some of whom are made convict-warders (C.W.'s.) or convict-overseers (C.O.'s.), and are induced to cooperate with the authorities because of fear, and in the hope of rewards and special remissions. There are relatively few
paid non-convict-warders; most of the guarding inside the prison is done by convict-warders and C.O.'s. A widespread system of spying pervades the prison, convicts being encouraged to become stool pigeons and to spy on each other; and no combination or joint action is, of course, permitted among the prisoners. This is easy to understand, for only by keeping them divided up could they be kept in check.

Outside, in the government of our country, we see much of this duplicated on a larger, though less obvious, scale. But there the C.W.'s. or C.O.'s. are known differently. They have impressive titles, and their liveries of office are more gorgeous. And behind them, as in prison, stands the armed guard with weapons ever ready to enforce conformity.

How important and essential is a prison to the modern State! The prisoner at least begins to think so, and the numerous administrative and other functions of the government appear almost superficial before the basic functions of the prison, the police, the army. In prison one begins to appreciate the Marxian theory, that the State is really the coercive apparatus meant to enforce the will of a group that controls the government.

For a month I was alone in my barrack. Then a companion came—Narmada Prasad Singh—and his coming was a relief. Two and a half months later, on the last day of June 1930, our little enclosure was the scene of unusual excitement. Unexpectedly, early in the morning, my father and Dr. Syed Mahmud, were brought there. They had both been arrested in Anand Bhawan, while they were actually in their beds, that morning.
XXXI

NEGOTIATIONS AT YERAVDA

My father's arrest was accompanied by, or immediately preceded by, the declaration of the Congress Working Committee as an unlawful body. This led to a new development outside—the Committee would be arrested *en bloc* when it was having a meeting. Substitute members were added to it, under the authority given to the Acting-Presidents, and in this way several women became acting members. Kamala was one of them.

Father was in very poor health when he came to gaol, and the conditions in which he was kept there were of extreme discomfort. This was not intentional on the part of the Government, for they were prepared to do what they could to lessen those discomforts. But they could not do much in Naini Prison. Four of us were now crowded together in the four tiny cells of my barrack. It was suggested by the superintendent of the prison that father might be kept in some other part of the gaol where he might have a little more room, but we preferred to be together, so that some of us could attend personally to his comforts.

The monsoon was just beginning and it was not particularly easy to keep perfectly dry even inside the cells, for the rain-water came through the roof occasionally and dripped in various places. At night it was always a problem where to put father's bed, in the little 10ft. by 5ft. veranda attached to our cell, in order to avoid the rain. Sometimes he had fever. The gaol authorities ultimately decided to build an additional veranda, a fine broad one, attached to our cell. This veranda was built and it was a great improvement, but father did not profit by it much, as he was discharged soon after it was ready. Those of us who continued to live in that barrack took full advantage of it later.

Towards the end of July there was a great deal of talk about Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru and Mr. M. R. Jayakar, endeavouring to bring about peace between the Congress and the Government. We read about it in a daily newspaper, which was supplied as a special favour to father. We read in this paper the correspondence that had passed between the Viceroy, Lord Irwin, and Messrs. Sapru and Jayakar, and then we learnt that
the so-called 'peacemakers' had visited Gandhiji. We did not know at all what had induced them to take this initiative, or what they were driving at. Later we were told by them that they had been encouraged to proceed in the matter because of a brief statement that father had agreed to in Bombay a few days before his arrest. The statement had been drafted by Mr. Slocombe (a correspondent of the London Daily Herald then in India) after a conversation with my father, and had been approved by the latter. This statement considered the possibility of the Congress withdrawing the civil disobedience campaign, subject to the Government agreeing to a number of conditions. It was a vague and tentative affair, and it made it quite clear that even those vague conditions could not be considered till father had a chance of consulting Gandhiji and me. I came in as the President of the Congress for the year. I remember father mentioning it to me in Naini, after his arrest, and adding that he was rather sorry that he had given such a vague statement in a hurry, as it was possible that it might be misunderstood. It was indeed misunderstood, as even the most exact and explicit statements are likely to be, by people whose way of thinking is entirely different.

Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru and Mr. Jayakar suddenly descended on us in Naini Prison, on July 27th, with a note from Gandhiji.

1 Statement, dated Bombay, June 25, 1930, agreed to by Pandit Motilal Nehru: “If in certain circumstances the British Government and the Government of India, although unable to anticipate the recommendations that may in perfect freedom be made by the Round Table Conference or the attitude which the British Parliament may reserve for such recommendations, would nevertheless be willing to give a private assurance that they would support the demand for full responsible government for India, subject to such mutual adjustments and terms of transfer as are required by the special needs and conditions of India and by her long association with Great Britain and as may be decided by the Round Table Conference; Pandit Motilal Nehru would undertake to take personally such an assurance—or the indication received from a responsible third party that such an assurance would be forthcoming—to Mr. Gandhi and to Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. If such an assurance were offered and accepted it would render possible a general measure of conciliation which would entail the simultaneous calling off of the civil disobedience movement, the cessation of the Government's present repressive policy and a general measure of amnesty for political prisoners, and would be followed by Congress participation in the Round Table Conference on terms to be mutually agreed upon.”
On that day and the next we had long interviews with them, which were very exhausting for father as he was actually feverish then. We talked and argued in a circle, hardly understanding each other’s language or thought, so great was the difference in political outlook. It was obvious to us that there was not the faintest chance of any peace between the Congress and the Government as matters stood. We refused to make any suggestions without first consulting our colleagues of the Working Committee, especially Gandhiji. And we wrote something to this effect to Gandhiji.

Eleven days later, on August 8th, Dr. Sapru came to see us again with the Viceroy’s reply. The Viceroy had no objection to our going to Yeravda (the prison in Poona where Gandhiji was kept) but he and his Council could not allow us to meet Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and other members of the Working Committee who were outside and were still carrying on an active campaign against the Government. Dr. Sapru asked us if we were prepared to go to Yeravda under these circumstances. We told him that we had and could have no objection to going to see Gandhiji at any time, but as we could not meet our other colleagues there was no chance of our deciding anything finally. That very day’s paper (or perhaps that of the day before) had given the news of a fierce lathi charge in Bombay, and the arrest there of Vallabhbhai Patel, Malaviyaji, Tasadduk Sherwani and others as permanent or acting members of the Working Committee. We pointed out to Dr. Sapru that this had not improved matters, and we asked him to make the position quite clear to the Viceroy. Dr. Sapru, however, said that there would be no harm in our meeting Gandhiji as soon as possible. We had previously pointed out to him that in case we were sent to Yeravda, our colleague, Dr. Syed Mahr:ud, who was with us at Naini, should also go there as he was the Congress secretary.

Two days later, on August 10th, the three of us—father, Mahmud and I—were sent by a special train from Naini to Poona. Our train did not stop at the big stations; we rushed past them, stopping at the small wayside ones. Still news of us travelled ahead, and large crowds gathered both at the stations where we stopped and at those where we did not stop. We reached Kirkee, near Poona, late at night on the 11th.

We expected to be kept in the same barrack as Gandhiji or, at least, to see him soon. That was the arrangement made by the Superintendent of Yeravda prison, but at the last moment he had to change his arrangements because of some instructions
received through the police officer who had accompanied us from Naini. Lt.-Col. Martin, the Superintendent, would not tell us the secret, but a little subtle questioning by father made it clear to us that the idea was that we should not meet Gandhi (for the first time, at least) except in the presence of Messrs. Sapru and Jayakar. It was feared that a previous meeting between us might stiffen our attitude, or make us hold together more firmly than otherwise. So that night and the whole of the next day and night, we were kept apart in a separate barrack, and father was exceedingly irritated at this. It was tantalising and annoying to be there and not to be allowed to see Gandhi, to meet whom he had come all the way from Naini. On the forenoon of the 13th we were told that Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru and Mr. Jayakar had arrived, and Mr. Gandhi had joined them in the prison office, and we were asked to go there ourselves. Father refused to go, and only agreed after various explanations and apologies, and on condition that we should see Gandhi alone first. At our joint request later, Vallabhbhai Patel and Jairamdas Doulatram, who had both been brought to Yeravda, as well as Sarojini Naidu, who was kept in the Women's Prison opposite, were allowed to join our conference. That evening father, Mahmud and I were moved to Gandhi's enclosure and there we remained for the rest of our stay in Yeravda. Vallabhbhai Patel and Jairamdas Doulatram were also brought there for those few days to enable us to consult together.

Our conferences in the prison office with Messrs. Sapru and Jayakar lasted three days, the 13th, 14th and 15th August, and we exchanged letters giving expression to our views and indicating the minimum conditions necessary to enable us to withdraw civil disobedience and offer co-operation to the Government. These letters were subsequently published in the newspapers.¹

The strain of these conferences had told on father, and on the 16th he suddenly got high fever. This delayed our return, and we started back on the night of the 19th, again by special train, for Naini. Every effort was made by the Bombay Government to provide a comfortable journey for father, and even in Yeravda, during our brief stay there, his comforts were studied. I remember an amusing incident on the night of our arrival at Yeravda. Colonel Martin, the Superintendent, asked father

¹ The letter containing these minimum conditions is given in Appendix B. (p. 613).
what kind of food he would like. Father told him that he took very simple and light food, and then he enumerated his various requirements from early morning tea in bed to dinner at night. (In Naini we used to get food for him daily from home.) The list father gave in all innocence and simplicity consisted certainly of light foods, but it was impressive. Very probably at the Ritz or the Savoy it would have been considered simple and ordinary food, as father himself was convinced that it was. But in Yerawda Prison it seemed strange and far away and most inappropriate. Mahmud and I were highly amused to watch the expression on Colonel Martin’s face as he listened to father’s numerous and expensive requirements in the way of food. For a long time he had had in his keeping the greatest and most famous of India’s leaders, and all that he had required in the way of food was goat’s milk, dates, and perhaps oranges occasionally. The new type of leader that had come to him was very different.

During our journey back from Poona to Naini we again rushed by the big stations and stopped in out-of-the-way places. But the crowds were larger still, filling the platforms and sometimes even swarming over the railway lines, especially at Harda, Itarsi and Sohagpur. Accidents were narrowly averted.

Father’s condition was rapidly deteriorating. Many doctors came to examine him, his own doctors as well as doctors sent on behalf of the Provincial Government. It was obvious that gaol was the worst place for him and there could be no proper treatment there. And yet, when a suggestion was made by some friend in the Press that he should be released because of his illness, he was irritated, as he thought that people might think that the suggestion came from him. He even went to the length of sending a telegram to Lord Irwin, saying that he did not want to be released as a special favour. But his condition was growing worse from day to day; he was losing weight rapidly, and physically he was a shadow of himself. On the 8th September he was discharged after exactly ten weeks of prison.

Our barrack became a dull and lifeless place after his departure. There was so much to be done when he was with us, little services to add to his comfort, and all of us—Mahmud, Narmada Prasad and I—filled our days with this joyful service. I had given up newar weaving, I spun very little, and I did not have much time for books either. And now that he was gone, we reverted rather heavily and joylessly to the old routine. Even the daily newspaper stopped after father’s release. Four
or five days later my brother-in-law, Ranjit S. Pandit, was arrested, and he joined us in our barrack.

A month later, on October 11th, I was discharged on the expiry of six months' sentence. I knew I would have little freedom, for the struggle was going on and becoming more intense. The attempts of the 'peacemakers'—Messrs. Sapru and Jaya-kar—had failed. On the very day I was discharged one or two more ordinances were announced. I was glad to be out and eager to do something effective during my short spell of freedom.

Kamala was in Allahabad then, busy with her Congress work; father was under treatment at Mussoorie, and my mother and sisters were with him. I spent a busy day and a half in Allahabad before going up to Mussoorie myself with Kamala. The great question before us then, was whether a no-tax campaign in the rural areas should be started or not. The time for rent collection and payment of revenue was close at hand, and, in any event, collections were going to be difficult because of the tremendous fall in the prices of agricultural produce. The world slump was now very evident in India.

It seemed an ideal opportunity for a no-tax campaign, both as a part of the general civil disobedience movement and, independently, on its own merits. It was manifestly impossible both for landlords and tenants to pay up the full demand out of that year's produce. They had to fall back on old reserves, if they had any, or borrow. The zamindars usually had something to fall back upon, or could borrow more easily. The average tenant, always on the verge of destitution and starvation, had nothing to fall back upon. In any democratic country, or where the agriculturists were properly organised and had influence, it would have been quite impossible, under those circumstances, to make them pay much. In India their influence was negligible, except in so far as the Congress, in some parts of the country, stood for them; and except, of course, for the ever-present fear of peasant risings when the situation became intolerable for them. But they had been trained for generations past to stand almost anything without much murmuring.

In Gujrat, and in some other parts, there were no-tax campaigns in progress at the time, but they were almost wholly political campaigns, started as parts of the civil disobedience movement. These were areas where the ryotwari system prevailed and the peasant proprietors dealt directly with the Government. Their non-payment of revenue affected the State immediately. The United Provinces were different, for we were
a zamindari and taluqadari area, and there were middlemen between the cultivator and the State. If the tenants stopped paying their rent the landlord suffered immediately. A class issue also was thus raised. The Congress, as a whole, was a purely nationalist body, and included many middling zamindars and a few of the larger ones also. Its leaders were terribly afraid of doing anything which might raise this class issue or irritate the zamindar elements. So, right through the first six months of civil disobedience, they avoided calling for a general no-tax campaign in the rural areas, although conditions for this seemed to me to be ripe. I was not afraid of raising the class issue in this way or any other way, but I recognised that the Congress, being what it was, could not then patronise class conflict. It could, however, call upon both parties, zamindars and tenants, not to pay. The average zamindar would probably pay up the revenue demanded from him by the Government, but that would be his fault.

When I came out of gaol in October, both political and economic conditions seemed to me to be crying out for a no-tax campaign in rural areas. The economic difficulties of the agriculturists were obvious enough. Politically, our civil disobedience activities, though still flourishing everywhere, were getting a bit stale. People went on going to gaol in small numbers, and sometimes in large groups, but the sting had gone from the atmosphere. The cities and the middle classes were a bit tired of the hartals and processions. Obviously something was needed to liven things up, a fresh infusion of blood was necessary. Where could this come from except from the peasantry?—and the reserve stocks there were enormous. It would again become a mass movement touching the vital interests of the masses, and, what was to me very important, would raise social issues.

We discussed these matters, my colleagues and I, during the brief day and a half I was at Allahabad. At short notice we convened a meeting there of the executive of our Provincial Congress Committee, and, after long debate, we decided to sanction a no-tax campaign, making it permissive for any district to take it up. We did not declare it ourselves in any part of the province, and the Executive Council made it apply to zamindars as well as tenants, to avoid the class issue if possible. We knew, of course, that the main response would come from the peasantry.

Having got this permission to go ahead, our district of Allaha-bad wanted to take the first step. We decided to convene a representative kisan or peasants' conference of the district a
week later, to give the new campaign a push. I felt that I had done a good first day's work after release from gaol. I added to it a big mass meeting in Allahabad city, where I spoke at length. It was for this speech that I was subsequently convicted again.

And then, on October 13th, Kamala and I went off to Mussoorie to spend three days with father. He was looking just a little better, and I was happy to think that he had turned the corner and was getting well. I remember those quiet and delightful three days well; it was good to be back in the family. Indira, my daughter, was there; and my three little nieces, my sister's daughters. I would play with the children and sometimes we would march bravely round the house in a stately procession, led, flag in hand, by the youngest, aged three or four, singing Jhanda uncha rahe hamara, our flag song. And those three days were the last I was to have with father before his fatal illness came to snatch him away from me.

Expecting my re-arrest soon, and desiring perhaps to see a little more of me, father suddenly decided to return to Allahabad also. Kamala and I were going down from Mussoorie on the 17th October to be in time for the Peasant Conference at Allahabad on the 19th. Father arranged to start with the others on the 18th, the day after us.

We had a somewhat exciting journey back, Kamala and I. At Dehra Dun an order under Section 144 Criminal Procedure Code was served on me almost as I was leaving. At Lucknow we got off for a few hours, and I learnt that another order under Section 144 awaited me there, but it was not actually served on me, as the police officer could not reach me owing to the large crowds. I was presented with an address by the Municipality, and then we left by car for Allahabad, stopping at various places en route to address some peasant gatherings. We reached Allahabad on the night of the 18th.

The morning of the 19th brought yet another order under Section 144 for me! The Government was evidently hot on my trail and my hours were numbered. I was anxious to attend the kisan conference before my re-arrest. We called this conference a private one of delegates only, and so it was, and did not allow outsiders to come in. It was very representative of Allahabad District, and, as far as I remember, about 1,600 delegates were present. The conference decided very enthusiastically to start the no-tax campaign in the district. There was some hesitation among our principal workers, some doubt about the success of such a venture, for the influence and the power
of the big zamindars to terrorise, backed as this was by the Government, was very great, and they wondered if the peasantry would be able to withstand this. But there was no hesitation or doubt in the minds of the sixteen hundred and odd peasants of all degrees who were present, or at any rate it was not apparent. I was one of the speakers at the conference. I do not know if thereby I committed a breach of the Section 144 order which had forbidden me from speaking in public.

I then went to the station to receive my father and the rest of the family. The train was late, and, immediately after their arrival, I left them to attend a public meeting, a joint affair of the peasants, who had come from the surrounding villages, and the townspeople. Kamala and I were returning from this meeting, thoroughly tired out, after 8 p.m. I was looking forward to a talk with father, and I knew that he was waiting for me, for we had hardly spoken to each other since his return. On our way back our car was stopped almost in sight of our house, and I was arrested and carried off across the river Jumna to my old quarters in Naini. Kamala went on, alone, to Anand Bhawan to inform the waiting family of this new development; and, at the stroke of nine, I re-entered the great gate of Naini Prison.
XXXII

THE NO-TAX CAMPAIGN IN THE UNITED PROVINCES

After eight days' absence I was back again in Naini, and I rejoined Syed Mahmud, Narmada Prasad and Ranjit Pandit in the same old barrack. Some days afterwards I was tried in prison on a number of charges, all based on various parts of that one speech I had delivered at Allahabad, the day after my discharge. As usual with us, I did not defend myself, but made a brief statement in court. I was sentenced for sedition under Section 124A to 18 months' rigorous imprisonment and a fine of Rs.500; under the Salt Act of 1882 to six months and a fine of Rs.100; and under Ordinance VI of 1930 (I forget what this Ordinance was about) also to six months and a fine of Rs.100. As the last two were concurrent, the total sentence was two years' rigorous imprisonment and, in addition, five months in default of fines. This was my fifth term.

My re-arrest and conviction had some effect on the tempo of the civil disobedience movement for a while; it put on a little spurt and showed greater energy. This was largely due to father. When news was brought to him by Kamala of my arrest, he had a slightly unpleasant shock. Almost immediately he pulled himself together and banged a table in front of him, saying that he had made up his mind to be an invalid no longer. He was going to be well and to do a man's work, and not to submit weakly to illness. It was a brave resolve, but unhappily no strength of will could overcome and crush that deep-seated disease that was eating into him. Yet for a few days it worked a marked change, to the surprise of those who saw him. For some months past, ever since he was at Yeravda, he had been bringing up blood in his sputum. This stopped quite suddenly after this resolve of his, and for some days it did not reappear. He was pleased about it, and he came to see me in prison and mentioned this fact to me in some triumph. It was unfortunately a brief respite, for the blood came later in greater quantities and the disease reasserted itself. During this interval he worked with his old energy and gave a push to the civil disobedience movement all over India. He conferred with many people from various places and issued detailed instructions. He fixed one day (it was my birthday in November!) for an all-
India celebration at which the offending passages from my speech, for which I had been convicted, were read out at public meetings. On that day there were numerous lathi charges and forcible dispersals of processions and meetings, and it was estimated that, on that day alone, about five thousand arrests were made all over the country. It was a unique birthday celebration.

Ill as he was, this assumption of responsibility and pouring out of energy was very bad for father, and I begged of him to take absolute rest. I realised that such rest might not be possible for him in India, for his mind would always be occupied with the ups and downs of our struggle and, inevitably, people would go to him for advice. So I suggested to him to go for a short sea voyage towards Rangoon, Singapore, and the Dutch Indies, and he rather liked the idea. It was arranged that a doctor friend might accompany him on the voyage. With this object in view he went to Calcutta, but his condition grew slowly worse and he was unable to go far. In a Calcutta suburb he remained for seven weeks, and the whole family joined him there, except Kamala, who remained in Allahabad for most of the time, doing Congress work.

My re-arrest had probably been hastened because of my activities in connection with the no-tax campaign. As a matter of fact few things could have been better for that campaign than my arrest on that particular day, immediately after the kisan conference, while the peasant delegates were still in Allahabad. Their enthusiasm grew because of it, and they carried the decisions of the conference to almost every village in the district. Within a couple of days the whole district knew that the no-tax campaign had been inaugurated, and everywhere there was a joyful response to it.

Our chief difficulty in those days was one of communication, of getting people to know what we were doing or what we wanted them to do. Newspapers would not publish our news for fear of being penalised and suppressed by Government; printing presses would not print our leaflets and notices; letters and telegrams were censored and often stopped. The only reliable method of communication open to us was to send couriers with despatches, and even so our messengers were sometimes arrested. The method was an expensive one and required a great deal of organisation. It was organised with some success, and the provincial centres were in constant touch with headquarters as well as with their principal district centres. It was not difficult to spread any information in the cities. Many of
these issued unauthorised news-sheets, usually cyclostyled, daily or weekly, and there was always a great demand for them. For our public notifications, one of the city methods was by beat of drum; this resulted usually in the arrest of the drummer. This did not matter, as arrests were sought, not avoided. All these methods suited the cities and were not easily applicable to the rural areas. Some kind of touch was kept up with principal village centres by means of messengers and cyclostyled notices, but this was not satisfactory, and it took time for our instructions to percolate to distant villages.

The kisan conference at Allahabad got over this difficulty. Delegates had come to it from practically every important village in the district and, when they dispersed, they carried the news of the fresh decisions affecting the peasantry, and of my arrest in connection with them, to every part of the district. They became, sixteen hundred of them, effective and enthusiastic propagandists for the no-tax campaign. The initial success of the movement thus became assured, and there was no doubt that the peasantry as a whole in that area would not pay their rent to begin with, and not at all unless they were frightened into doing so. No one, of course, could say what their powers of endurance would be in face of official or zamindari violence and terrorism.

Our appeal had been addressed both to zamindars and tenants not to pay; in theory it was not a class appeal. In practice most of the zamindars did pay their revenue, even some who sympathised with the national struggle. The pressure on them was great and they had more to lose. The tenantry, however, stood firm and did not pay, and our campaign thus became practically a no-rent campaign. From the Allahabad district it spread to some other districts of the United Provinces. In many districts it was not formally adopted or declared, but in effect tenants withheld their rents or, in many cases, were wholly unable to pay them owing to the fall in prices. As it happened, neither Government nor the big zamindars took any widespread action to terrorise the recalcitrant tenantry for several months. They were not sure of their ground, as they had the political struggle with civil disobedience on the one side, and the economic slump, resulting in agricultural distress, on the other. The two merged into each other, and the Government was always afraid of an agrarian upheaval. With the Round Table Conference in session in London, they were not keen on adding to their troubles in India or on giving a still more striking demonstration of 'strong' government.
The no-tax movement in the United Provinces had one important result so far as this province was concerned. It shifted the centre of gravity of our struggle from the urban to the rural areas, and it thereby revitalised the movement and put it on a broader and more enduring basis. Though our city people became bored and tired, and our middle-class workers were obviously rather stale, the movement itself in the U.P. was as strong, or even stronger, than it had been at any other time. In the other provinces this change-over from urban to rural, from political to economic issues, did not take place to the same extent, and consequently they continued to be dominated by the cities and to suffer increasingly from the weariness of the middle-class elements. Even the city of Bombay, which had all along played a prominent part in the movement, began to grow a little stale. Defiance of authority would go on there and elsewhere, and arrests would continue, but all this seemed somewhat artificial. The organic element had gone. This was natural enough, as it is impossible to keep the masses at a certain revolutionary pitch for long periods. Ordinarily, this was a question of days, but civil disobedience had the remarkable capacity for lengthening this period to many months, and even then of carrying on at a lower pitch for an indefinite period.

Government repression grew. Local Congress Committees, Youth Leagues, etc., which had rather surprisingly carried on so far, were declared illegal and suppressed. The treatment of political prisoners in gaols became worse. Government was especially irritated when people returned to gaol for a second sentence soon after their discharge. This failure to bend in spite of punishment hurt the morale of the rulers. In November or early December 1930 there were some cases of flogging of political prisoners in U.P. prisons, apparently for offences against gaol discipline. News of this reached us in Naini Prison and upset us—since then we have got used to this, as well as many worse happenings in India—for flogging seemed to me to be an undesirable infliction, even on hardened criminals of the worst type. For young, sensitive boys and for technical offences of discipline, it was barbarous. We four in our barrack wrote to the Government about it, and, not receiving any reply for about two weeks, we decided to take some definite step to mark our protest at the floggings and our sympathy with the victims of this barbarity. We undertook a complete fast for three days—72 hours. This was not much as fasts go, but none of us was accustomed to fasting, and did not know how we would stand it. My previous fasts had seldom exceeded 24 hours.
We went through that fast without any great difficulty, and I was glad to find out that it was not such an ordeal as I feared. Very foolishly I carried on my strenuous exercises—running, jerks, etc.—right through that fast. I do not think that did me much good, especially as I had been feeling a little unwell previously. Each one of us lost seven to eight pounds in weight during those three days. This was in addition to the fifteen to twenty-six pounds that each had lost in the previous months in Naini.

Quite apart from our fasting, there was a fair amount of agitation outside against the flogging, and I believe that the U.P. Government issued orders to its Gaol Department not to indulge in it in future. But these orders were not to remain unchanged for long, and a little more than a year later there was going to be no lack of flogging in the gaols of the United Provinces and the other provinces.

Except for these occasional alarms, we lived a quiet life in prison. The weather was agreeable, for winter in Allahabad is very pleasant. Ranjit Pandit was an acquisition to our barrack, for he knew much about gardening, and soon that dismal enclosure of ours was full of flowers and was gay with colour. He even arranged in that narrow, restricted space a miniature golf course!

One of the welcome excitments of our prison existence at Naini was the passage of aeroplanes over our heads. Allahabad is one of the ports of call for all the great air lines between East and West, and the giant planes going to Australia, Java, and French Indo-China would pass almost directly above our heads at Naini. Most stately of all were the Dutch liners flying to and from Batavia. Sometimes, if we were lucky, we saw a plane in the early winter morning, when it was still dark and the stars were visible. The great liner was brightly lit up, and at both ends it had red lights. It was a beautiful sight, as it sailed by, against the dark background of the early morning sky.

Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya was also transferred to Naini from some other gaol. He was kept separately, not in our barrack, but we met him daily, and perhaps I saw more of him there than I had done outside. He was a delightful companion, full of vitality and a youthful interest in things. He even started, with Ranjit's help, to learn German, and he showed quite a remarkable memory. He was in Naini when news of the floggings came, and he was greatly upset and wrote to the Acting-Governor of the Province. Soon afterwards he fell ill.
He was unable to bear the cold in the conditions that prevailed in prison. His illness grew serious, and he had to be removed to the city hospital, and later to be discharged before his term was over. Happily, he recovered in hospital.

The New Year’s Day, the first of January 1931, brought us the news of Kamala’s arrest. I was pleased, for she had so longed to follow many of her comrades to prison. Ordinarily, if they had been men, both she and my sister and many other women would have been arrested long ago. But at that time the Government avoided, as far as possible, arresting women, and so they had escaped for so long. And now she had her heart’s desire! How glad she must be, I thought. But I was apprehensive, for she was always in weak health, and I feared that prison conditions might cause her much suffering.

As she was arrested, a pressman who was present asked her for a message, and, on the spur of the moment and almost unconsciously, she gave a little message that was characteristic of her: “I am happy beyond measure and proud to follow in the footsteps of my husband. I hope the people will keep the flag flying.” Probably she would not have said just that if she had thought over the matter, for she considers herself a champion of woman’s right against the tyranny of man. But at that moment the Hindu wife in her came uppermost and even man’s tyranny was forgotten.

My father was in Calcutta and was far from well, but news of Kamala’s arrest and conviction shook him up, and he decided to return to Allahabad. He sent on my sister Krishna immediately to Allahabad, and followed himself, with the rest of the family, a few days later. On the 12th of January he came to see me in Naini. I saw him after nearly two months, and I had a shock which I could conceal with difficulty. He seemed to be unaware of the dismay that his appearance had produced in me, and told me that he was much better than he had lately been in Calcutta. His face was swollen up, and he seemed to think that this was due to some temporary cause.

That face of his haunted me. It was so utterly unlike him. For the first time a fear began to creep in my mind that there was real danger for him ahead. I had always associated him with strength and health, and I could not think of death in connection with him. He had always laughed at the idea of death, made fun of it, and told us that he proposed to live for a further long term of years. Latterly I had noticed that whenever an old friend of his youth died, he had a sense of loneliness, of being left by himself in strange company, and even a