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Congress Resolution and Other Papers
Relating to
Negotiations with Sir Stafford Cripps

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Tripurari Chakravarti

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DRAFT DECLARATION

Sir Stafford Cripps issued the following Draft Declaration on behalf of the British Government :

His Majesty's Government having considered the anxieties expressed in this country and in India as to the fulfilment of promises made in regard to the future of India, have decided to lay down in precise and clear terms the steps which they propose shall be taken for the earliest possible realization of self-government in India. The object is the creation of a new Indian Union which shall constitute a Dominion associated with the United Kingdom and other Dominions by a common allegiance to the Crown but equal to them in every respect, in no way subordinate in any aspect of its domestic and external affairs.

His Majesty's Govt. therefore make the following declaration :

(a) Immediately upon cessation of hostilities, steps shall be taken to set up in India in manner described hereafter an elected body charged with the task of framing a new Constitution for India.

(b) Provision shall be made, as set out below, for participation of Indian States in the constitution-making body.

(c) His Majesty's Government undertake to accept and implement forthwith the constitution so framed subject only to (i) The right of any province of British India that is not prepared to accept the new constitution to retain its present constitutional position, provision being made for its subsequent accession if it so decides.

With such non-acceding provinces, should they so desire, His Majesty's Government will be prepared to agree upon a new constitution giving them the same full status as the Indian Union and arrived at by a procedure analogous to that here laid down.

(ii) The signing of a treaty which shall be negotiated between His Majesty's Government and the constitution-making body. This treaty will cover all necessary matters arising out of the complete transfer of responsibility from British to Indian hands; it will make provision, in accordance with undertakings given by His Majesty's Govt. for the protection of racial and religious minorities; but will not impose any restriction on the power of the Indian Union to decide in future its relationship to other member States of the British Commonwealth.

Whether or not an Indian State elects to adhere to the constitution it will be necessary to negotiate a revision of its treaty arrangements so far as this may be required in the new situation.

(d) The constitution-making body shall be composed as follows unless the leaders of Indian opinion in the principal communities agree upon some other form before the end of hostilities.

Immediately upon the result being known of provincial elections which will be necessary at the end of hostilities, the entire membership of the Lower Houses of Provincial legislatures shall as a single electoral college proceed to the election of the constitution-making body by the system of proportional representation. This new body shall be in number about 1/10th of the number of the electoral college.

Indian States shall be invited to appoint representatives in the same proportion as to their total population as in the case of representatives of British India as a whole and with the same powers as Bri-

tish Indian members.

(e) During the critical period which now faces India and until the new constitution can be framed His Majesty's Government must inevitably bear the responsibility for and retain the control and direction of the Defence of India as part of their world war effort but the task of organising to the full the military, moral and material resources of India must be the responsibility of the Government of India with the cooperation of the peoples of India. His Majesty's Government desire and invite the immediate and effective participation of the leaders of the principal sections of the Indian people in the counsels of their country, of the Commonwealth and of the United Nations. Thus they will be enabled to give their active and constructive help in the discharge of a task which is vital and essential for the future freedom of India.

RESOLUTION OF THE WORKING COMMITTEE

A meeting of the Working Committee was held at Delhi from March 29 to April 11, 1942. It passed the following resolution on the draft proposals of the British Government. This resolution was however not released to the press till April 10th after the final failure of the negotiations. It was communicated to Sir Stafford Cripps on April 2nd.

The Working Committee have given their full and earnest consideration to the proposals made by the British War Cabinet in regard to India and the elucidation thereof by Sir Stafford Cripps. These proposals, which have been made at the very last hour because of the compulsion of events, have to be considered not only in relation to India's demand

for independence, but more especially in the present grave war crisis, with a view to meeting effectively the perils and dangers that confront India and envelop the world.

The Congress has repeatedly stated, ever since the commencement of the War in September 1939, that the people of India would line themselves with the progressive forces of the world and assume full responsibility to face the new problems and shoulder the new burdens that had arisen, and it asked for the necessary conditions to enable them to do so to be created. An essential condition was the freedom of India, for only the realisation of present freedom could light the flame which would illumine millions of hearts and move them to action. At the last meeting of the All India Congress Committee, after the commencement of the War in the Pacific, it was stated that: 'Only a free and independent India can be in a position to undertake the defence of the country on a national basis and be of help in the furtherance of the larger causes that are emerging from the storm of war.'

The British War Cabinet's new proposals relate principally to the future upon the cessation of hostilities. The Committee, while recognising that self-determination for the people of India is accepted in principle in that uncertain future, regret that this is fettered and circumscribed and certain provisions have been introduced which gravely imperil the development of a free and united nation and the establishment of a democratic State. Even the constitution-making body is so constituted that the people's right to self-determination is vitiated by the introduction of non-representative elements. The people of India have as a whole clearly demanded full independence and the Congress has repeatedly declared that no other status except that of independence for the whole of India could be agreed

to or could meet the essential requirements of the present situation. The Committee recognise that future independence may be implicit in the proposals but the accompanying provisions and restrictions are such that real freedom may well become an illusion. The complete ignoring of the ninety millions of the people of the Indian States and their treatment as commodities at the disposal of their rulers is a negation of both democracy and self-determination. While the representation of an Indian State in the constitution-making body is fixed on a population basis, the people of the State have no voice in choosing those representatives, nor are they to be consulted at any stage, while decisions vitally affecting them are being taken. Such States may in many ways become barriers to the growth of Indian freedom, enclaves where foreign authority still prevails and where the possibility of maintaining foreign armed forces has been stated to be a likely contingency, and a perpetual menace to the freedom of the people of the States as well as of the rest of India.

The acceptance before hand of the novel principle of non-accession for a province is also a severe blow to the conception of Indian unity and an apple of discord likely to generate growing trouble in the provinces, and which may well lead to further difficulties in the way of the Indian States merging themselves in the Indian Union. The Congress has been wedded to Indian freedom and unity and any break in that unity, especially in the modern world when people's minds inevitably think in terms of ever larger federations, would be injurious to all concerned and exceedingly painful to contemplate. Nevertheless the Committee cannot think in terms of compelling the people in any territorial unit to remain in an Indian Union against their declared and established will. While recognising this principle, the Committee feel that every effort should be made

⊗ See the Bombay Resolution of the Working Committee of the 1943 Resolution, sect. 1943.

to create conditions which would help the different units in developing a common and cooperative national life. The acceptance of the principle inevitably involves that no changes should be made which result in fresh problems being created and compulsion being exercised on other substantial groups within that area. Each territorial unit should have the fullest possible autonomy within the Union, consistently with a strong national State. The proposal now made on the part of the British War Cabinet encourages and will lead to attempts at separation at the very inception of a union and thus create friction just when the utmost cooperation and goodwill are most needed. This proposal has been presumably made to meet a communal demand, but it will have other consequences also and lead politically reactionary and obscurantist groups among different communities to create trouble and divert public attention from the vital issues before the country.

Any proposal concerning the future of India must demand attention and scrutiny, but in today's grave crisis, it is the present that counts, and even proposals for the future are important in so far as they affect the present. The Committee have necessarily attached the greatest importance to this aspect of the question, and on this ultimately depends what advice they should give to those who look to them for guidance. For this present the British War Cabinet's proposals are vague and altogether incomplete, and it would appear that no vital changes in the present structure are contemplated. It has been made clear that the Defence of India will in any event remain under British control. At any time defence is a vital subject; during war time it is all important and covers almost every sphere of life and administration. To take away defence from the sphere of responsibility at this stage is to reduce

that responsibility to a farce and a nullity, and to make it perfectly clear that India is not going to be free in any way and her Government is not going to function as a free and independent government during the pendency of the War. The Committee would repeat that an essential and fundamental prerequisite for the assumption of responsibility by the Indian people in the present, is their realisation as a fact that they are free and are in charge of maintaining and defending their freedom. What is most wanted is the enthusiastic response of the people which cannot be evoked without the fullest trust in them and the devolution of responsibility on them in the matter of defence. It is only thus that even at this grave eleventh hour it may be possible to galvanise the people of India to rise to the height of the occasion. It is manifest that the present Government of India, as well as its provincial agencies, are lacking in competence, and are incapable of shouldering the burden of India's defence. It is only the people of India, through their popular representatives, who may shoulder this burden worthily. But that can only be done by present freedom, and full responsibility being cast upon them.

The Committee, therefore, are unable to accept the proposals put forward on behalf of the British War Cabinet.

Note: Sir Stafford Cripps, after receipt of the Working Committee resolution had an interview with the Congress President. With reference to the resolution Sir Stafford Cripps told the Congress President that he took it that the resolution will not be immediately released to the press. He also told him that he would consult His Majesty's Government as to what further step could be taken in order to meet the criticism of your Working Committee that under clause (e) of the draft declaration the defence of India would not fall to be administered by a representative Indian.

CORRESPONDENCE

The full text of the correspondence that passed between the Congress President and Sir Stafford Cripps in connection with the British Government's draft declaration is given below:

3, Queen Victoria Road
New Delhi, March 30, 1942

My dear Maulana Sahib

I had the opportunity of a short talk with H. E. the Viceroy last night, during which he discussed with me his views as to the implementation of clause (e) of the draft declaration.

It must be clearly understood that the final definition of the division of responsibilities between His Majesty's Government and the Government of India is as stated in paragraph (e) of the document. I propose to make the position as to this as clear as I can in my broadcast tonight.

The Viceroy would be prepared to consult with Indian leaders on this basis to see whether it were possible to designate an Indian to some office connected with the Government of India's defence responsibilities without in any way impinging upon the functions and duties of the Commander-in-Chief either in his capacity as supreme commander of the armed forces in India or as the member of the Executive Council in charge of Defence.

I give you this information as you put the question to me when last I had the pleasure of seeing you.

Yours sincerely

(Sd.) R. STAFFORD CRIPPS

The Congress President received wires from Shri Shanti Kumar Narottam Morarjee and others drawing his attention to the fact that while Sir Stafford Cripps had invited the representatives of British Commercial interests for a discussion with him he had sent no such invitation to the Indian Commercial interests. The President sent a copy of the wire from Shri Morarjee to Sir Stafford Cripps and invited his attention to the just complaint of the Indian Commercial community. Sir Stafford Cripps sent the following reply:

3, Queen Victoria Road
New Delhi, March 31, 1942

My dear Maulana Sahib

Thank you for your letter of to-day. The reply which I gave at my press conference, and to which Mr. Morarjee refers in the telegram you have sent me, was I assure you not intended to convey any lack of appreciation of the importance of Indian commercial interests. I was dealing with the position in regard to European commercial interests if the proposals which I have been discussing with you and the other leaders are given effect, and I said that I had seen representatives of the European community because the interests of that community might be affected. After all, the Europeans are a minority element in India who are entitled to be heard in such discussions as at present, not only in regard to their business interests but on other matters. Indian business interests will presumably be able to make their voice heard in the Constitution making Body through those members of the Provincial legislatures who represent their interests, and then would be the time and place at which their interests would have to receive consideration. It does not seem to me that it would really be helpful to the discussions I have come here to hold to

see Mr. Morarjee although I would have been happy to do so if I had been able to stay here longer than I can on this occasion.

I am exceedingly sorry that my letter of yesterday should have been delayed in reaching you. My Secretary took it to Birla House in the belief that the Working Committee was meeting there and understood that it would be immediately communicated to you.

Yours very sincerely
(Sd.) STAFFORD CRIPPS

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad
Birla House

3, Queen Victoria Road
New Delhi, April 1, 1942

Dear Maulana Sahib

I understand from the Hindu press that difficulties are still in the mind of Congress as to the question of the responsibility for the Defence of India.

I have done what I could to clarify this point but as I think it would be a tragedy if negotiations were to break down upon any misunderstanding of the position I should like to suggest that I should ask the Commander-in-Chief to meet yourself and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru with myself in order that he may explain fully to you the technical difficulties of the situation and in order that you may make to him any suggestions you wish as to the division of responsibilities in this sphere of government. Unfortunately he is at the moment away at Calcutta but he is expected back on Saturday next at the latest (and possibly earlier). If you consider this a helpful suggestion—as I hope you will—

I will ask him the moment he returns whether he will be prepared to attend such a meeting and I do not anticipate that there will be any difficulty about it.

I am sure you will realise that I do not want to be met with an impasse if there is any reasonable way out.

Yours sincerely
(Sd.) R. STAFFORD CRIPPS

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad
Kucha Chelan
Delhi

New Delhi, April 1, 1942

My Dear Sir Stafford

I have your letter of today's date, for which I thank you.

If you so desire it, I shall gladly meet the Commander-in-chief and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru will, I hope, be able to accompany me.

My Committee have already arrived at a decision in regard to the proposals communicated by you to us. It was my intention to send this to you this evening, or possibly to take it over in person, in case you wished to discuss any point contained in it. This decision naturally covers other points also apart from Defence. I hope to send it to you some time today. If you wish to meet me again in regard to this I shall gladly meet you.

In your letter you refer to the "Hindu Press." I do not know what exactly you mean by this.

Yours sincerely
(Sd.) ABUL KALAM AZAD

The Rt. Hon. Sir Stafford Cripps, K.C., M.P.
3, Queen Victoria Road
New Delhi

3, Queen Victoria Road
New Delhi, April 1, 1942

My dear Maulana Sahib

Thank you very much for your letter.

I will make the arrangement for the meeting with the Commander-in-Chief the moment he returns.

As to the document you are sending over, I understand this expresses the views of the Congress Working Committee upon the proposals, but that it is not intended to be a definite and final statement as to the Congress attitude, in view of our meeting again.

I should be most grateful if you could come over and see me with regard to it tomorrow morning at 10 A.M.

I apologise for the reference to the "Hindu Press." I was referring to the Hindustan Times amongst other papers.

Yours sincerely
(Sd.) R. STAFFORD CRIPPS

3, Queen Victoria Road
New Delhi, April 2, 1942

Dear Maulana Sahib

Mr. Jinnah has asked me to give him a clear picture of the method by which I have proposed that a Province should decide whether it will or will not join an Indian union set up in accordance with the procedure laid down in His Majesty's Government draft Declaration. I have told him in reply that the proposition which I have put orally to him and to the other leaders is that a Province should reach its decision by a vote in the Legislative Assembly on a

resolution that the Province should join the Indian Union, and that if the majority for accession is less than 60%, the minority would have the right to demand a plebiscite of the adult male population.

I explained this to you at our first meeting, but as I have written to Mr. Jinnah in this sense, I thought it desirable to give you a similar letter.

Yours sincerely

(Sd.) R. STAFFORD CRIPPS

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad
Kucha Chelan
New Delhi

April 3, 1942

Dear Maulana Sahib

I have now been able to see His Excellency the Commander-in-Chief and he will be very glad to meet you and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru to discuss the position regarding Defence. Subject to your convenience, 6 o'clock tomorrow evening would suit General Wavell and if you can manage this, I suggest that you should come here at 10 minutes to 6 P.M., and I will go up with you to the Commander-in-Chief's Office.

If there are any specific points of detail about organisation which you wish to raise, I should be very much obliged if you could let me have a note of them tonight or first thing tomorrow morning so that the Commander-in-Chief can consider them before the meeting.

Yours very sincerely

(Sd.) R. STAFFORD CRIPPS

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9 JAN 1969

After consulting His Majesty's Government on clause (e) of the draft declaration Sir Stafford Cripps sent the following letter to the Congress President.

3, Queen Victoria Road
New Delhi, April 7, 1942

My dear Maulana Sahib

I have, as I promised when I last saw you, consulted His Majesty's Government as to what further step could be taken in order to meet the criticism of your Working Committee that under clause (e) of the draft declaration the defence of India would not fall to be administered by a representative Indian. Although, as the Working Committee have fully understood, it is impossible to make any change in the existing constitution during the period of hostilities, His Majesty's Government are anxious to give representative Indians the maximum possible participation in the Government during that period, in accordance with the principle laid down in clause (e) of the draft declaration.

I have explained to you the technical difficulties with regard to the position of the Commander-in-Chief and will not here reiterate them.

I have also pointed out that all those main aspects of the defence of India which at present fall under the care of other members of the Executive (e.g., Civil Defence, Supply, Home Affairs, Communications, etc., etc.) will if the scheme is accepted, be administered by representative members in the new National Government.

His Majesty's Government are however anxious to do their utmost to meet the wishes of the Indian people, and to demonstrate their complete trust in the co-operative effort of the two peoples, British and Indian, which they hope may reinforce the

Defence of India.

They also appreciate the force of the arguments that have been put forward as to the necessities of an effective appeal to the Indian peoples for their own defence.

I am therefore authorised to propose to you as a way out of the present difficulties that,

(a) The Commander-in-Chief should retain a seat in the Viceroy's Executive Council as "War Member" and should retain his full control over all the war activities of the armed forces in India subject to the control of His Majesty's Government and the War Cabinet upon which body a representative Indian should sit with equal powers in all matters relating to the Defence of India. Membership of the Pacific Council would likewise be offered to a representative Indian.

(b) An Indian representative member would be added to the Viceroy's Executive, who would take over those sections of the Department of Defence which can organisationally be separated immediately from the Commander-in-Chief's War Department and which are specified under head (i) of the annexure. In addition this member would take over the Defence Co-ordination Department which is at present directly under the Viceroy, and certain other important functions of the Government of India which are directly related to Defence and which do not fall under any of the other existing departments and which are specified under head (ii) of the annexure.

His Majesty's Government very much hope, as I personally hope, that this arrangement will enable the Congress to come into the scheme so that if other important bodies of Indian opinion are also willing it will be possible for His Excellency the Viceroy to embark forthwith upon the task of form-

ing the new National Government in consultation with the leaders of the Indian opinion.

Yours sincerely

(Sd.) R. STAFFORD CRIPPS

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad

Kucha Chelan

New Delhi

ANNEXURE

(i) Matters now dealt with in the Defence Department which would be transferred to a defence Co-ordination Department.

- (a) Public relations.
- (b) Demobilization and post-War reconstruction.
- (c) Petroleum Officer, whose functions are to calculate the requirements of, and make provision for, all the petroleum products required for the Army, Navy and Air Force, and for the Civil Departments including Storage and distribution.
- (d) Indian representation on the Eastern Group Supply Council.
- (e) Amenities for, and welfare, of troops and their dependants, including Indian soldiers abroad.
- (f) All canteen organisations.
- (g) Certain non-technical educational institutions *e.g.*, Lawrence schools, K. G. R. I. M. Schools and the Prince of Wales' Royal Indian Military College.

(b) Stationery, Printing and forms for the Army.

(i) Reception, accommodation and social arrangements for all foreign missions, representatives and officers.

(ii) In addition the Defence Co-ordination Department would take over many major questions bearing directly on defence, but difficult to locate in any particular existing departments. Examples are

“Denial” policy.

Policy of evacuation from threatened areas.

Signals co-ordination.

Economic warfare.

The formula for defence suggested in the above letter, was considered by the Working Committee and rejected by them. In particular the functions allotted to the Defence Minister, as listed in the Annexure, were considered totally insufficient. The Committee, therefore, expressed their inability to accept this suggestion.

After the rejection of the above formula a second formula for Defence was placed before the Working Committee by a mutual friend, with the previous approval of Sir Stafford Cripps. There was no list of subjects or functions attached to this.

SECOND FORMULA FOR DEFENCE

In amplification of clause (e) of the draft declaration His Majesty's Government make the following proposition upon the subject-matter of the Defence of India.

(a) The Defence Department shall be placed in charge of a representative Indian member with the

exception of functions to be exercised by the Commander-in-Chief as war member of the Executive Council.

(b) A war department will be constituted which will take over such functions of the Defence Department as are not retained by the Defence Member. A list of all the retained functions has been agreed, to which will be added further important responsibilities including the matters now dealt with by the Defence Coordination Department and other vital matters related to the defence of India.

The Working Committee having considered the above formula varied it as follows:

WORKING COMMITTEE FORMULA

(a) The Defence Department shall be placed in the charge of a representative Indian member, but certain functions relating to the conduct of the war will be exercised, for the duration of war, by the Commander-in-Chief, who will be in control of the war activities of the armed forces in India, and who will be an extraordinary member of the National Cabinet for that purpose.

(b) A War Department will be constituted under the Commander-in-Chief. This Department will take over such functions as are to be exercised by the Commander-in-Chief. A list of such functions has been prepared and is attached.

(c) The Defence Member shall be in charge of all other matters relating to Defence, including those now dealt with by the Defence Coordination Department.

This formula was sent with a covering letter, dated April 8th, which stated, inter alia.

The new proposals made by Sir Stafford Cripps

on behalf of the British War Cabinet, were entirely unsatisfactory. Both the approach and the allocation of subjects were, in our opinion, wrong, and there was no real transfer of responsibility for Defence to representative Indians in the National Government. Such transfer is essential for the successful defence of the country, for on it depends the full mobilization of the war-potential of the country.

The approach made in the draft you gave me this morning seems to us a more healthy one. With some alterations that we suggest, it might be made the basis of further discussions. But, it must be remembered, that a very great deal depends on the allocation of subjects between the Defence Department and the War Department, and until this is done, it is not possible to give a final opinion.

Leaving aside this subject of allocation for the present, we would suggest that the formula which is to form the basis of discussion should be as follows: The formula is given above.

You will notice that this does not differ materially from your formula. The general approach is that the National Government is responsible for the entire government of the country including its defence. But, in view of the war and the obvious necessity of allowing full scope for war operations to the Commander-in-Chief, functions relating to the conduct of the war are delegated to him and are to be exercised by him for the duration of the war. He will, in effect have full control of these operations and of the war activities of the armed forces in India.

It is presumed of course that there will be full cooperation between the Defence Department and the War Department. The National Government will inevitably strain every nerve towards the successful defence of the country and will give all possible help to the Commander-in-Chief in this behalf.

Sir Stafford Cripps has already stated that a representative Indian will be a member of the War Cabinet in London, and that membership of the Pacific Council would likewise be offered to a representative Indian.

There are many other important matters which have to be considered, but I do not wish to trouble you with them at this stage. I should like to refer to them, however, in order to prevent any misapprehension later on. In the draft declaration proposed to be made by the British Government there is much with which we do not agree. The preamble commits us to Dominion Status, though there is a possibility of our voting ourselves out later on. Clauses C and D relate, inter alia, to the right of a province not to join the Union and to the nomination by the Rulers of States' representatives to the constitution-making body. We think these provisions are bad and likely to have dangerous consequences. We have indicated our views in regard to them in the resolution a copy of which I have already sent you. All these provisions are for the future and they need not come in the way of a present arrangement. As controversial matter, this might be left out of any proposed declaration at this stage. It will be open to any group or party to adhere to its own opinions in regard to them and yet co-operate in a settlement for present action. We hope that it may be possible for us to arrive at a satisfactory settlement about them at a future date.

One other matter to which we attach importance might be mentioned, though it does not arise out of the present talks. We presume that the independent status of India will be recognized by the United Nations. Whenever this is done, it will greatly help our common cause and strengthen our bonds with each other.

SIR STAFFORD CRIPPS' FORMULA

Sir Stafford Cripps amended as follows the Working Committee's formula given above.

(a) The Defence Department shall be placed in the charge of a representative Indian member, but certain functions relating to the conduct of the war will be exercised, until the new constitution comes into operation, by the Commander-in-Chief, who will be in control of the war activities of the armed forces in India, and who will be a member of the Executive Council for that purpose.

(b) A War Department will be constituted under the Commander-in-Chief. This Department will take over such functions as are to be exercised by the Commander-in-Chief. A list of such functions has been prepared and is attached.

(c) The Defence Member shall be in charge of all other matters relating to Defence in the Defence Department and those now dealt with by the Defence Co-ordination Department in addition to other important matters closely related to Defence.

(d) In the event of any new functions falling to be discharged in relation to Defence or any dispute arising as to the allocation of any old functions it shall be decided by His Majesty's Government.

To this was added a comprehensive description of the functions of the War Minister:

The War Department, for which the Commander-in-Chief will be Member, will be responsible for the governmental relations of G.H.Q., N.H.Q. and A.H.Q., which include:—

(1) Examining and sanctioning all proposals emanating from G.H.Q. and A.H.Q.

(2) Representing the policy of Government on all questions connected with the war which originate in or concern G.H.Q., N.H.Q. or A.H.Q.

(3) Acting as the channel of communication between the Government of India and H.M.G. on all such questions.

(4) Acting as liaison between these headquarters and the other Departments of Government, and Provincial Governments.

The above formula was received on the afternoon of April 8th. Immediately on receipt of it a letter was sent on behalf of the Working Committee pointing out that the description of the War Minister's functions appeared as all-comprehensive. It was, therefore, requested, that illustrative lists of the functions of both the Defence Minister and the War Minister be supplied to enable the Working Committee to understand the implications of the proposal. No such lists were supplied then or at any time later.

The Working Committee met, as usual in the morning and afternoon of April 9th and gave full consideration to the new proposal. In view of the absence of the list of functions no definite decision could be taken.

In order to avoid further delay it was decided that the matter be further considered in a personal interview between the Congress President and Sir Stafford Cripps. Also there were other matters that needed elucidation. The interview took place in the late afternoon of April 9th. On the 10th morning a report of what transpired at the interview was placed before the Working Committee, who came to the decision that they could not accept the British Government's proposals as they stood. The following letter was therefore sent by the Congress President to Sir Stafford Cripps:

Note: G. H. Q.=General Headquarters; N. H. Q.=Navy Headquarters; A.H.Q.=Air Headquarters.

Birla Park
New Delhi, April 10, 1942

Dear Sir Stafford

On the 2nd April I sent you the resolution of the Working Committee of the Congress containing their views on the tentative proposals put forward by you on behalf of the British Government. In this resolution we expressed our dissent from several important and far-reaching proposals for the future. Further consideration of these proposals has only strengthened us in our conviction in regard to them, and we should like to repeat that we cannot accept them as suggested. The Working Committee's resolution gives expression to our conclusions relating to them which we reached after the most earnest consideration.

That resolution, however, emphasized the gravity of the present situation and stated that the ultimate decision that we might take would be governed by the changes made in the present. The over-riding problem before all of us, and more especially before all Indians, is the defence of the country from aggression and invasion. The future, important as it is, will depend on what happens in the next few months and years. We were therefore prepared to do without any assurances for this uncertain future, hoping that through our sacrifices in the defence of our country we would lay the solid and enduring foundations for a free and independent India. We concentrated, therefore, on the present.

Your original proposals in regard to the present, as contained in clause (e) of the proposed declaration, were vague and incomplete, except in so far as it was made clear that "His Majesty's Government must inevitably bear the full responsibility for the defence of India." These proposals, in effect,

asked for participation in the tasks of to-day with a view to ensure "the future freedom of India." Freedom was for an uncertain future, not for the present; and no indication was given in clause (e) of what arrangements or governmental and other changes would be made in the present. When this vagueness was pointed out, you said that this was deliberate, so as to give you freedom to determine these changes in consultation with others. In our talks you gave us to understand that you envisaged a National Government which would deal with all matters except Defence.

Defence at any time, and more particularly in war time, is of essential importance and without it a National Government functions in a very limited field. Apart from this consideration, it was obvious that the whole purpose of your proposals and our talks centred round the urgency of the problems created by the threat of the invasion of India. The chief functions of a National Government must necessarily be to organize Defence both intensively and on the widest popular basis and to create a mass psychology of resistance to an invader. Only a National Government could do that, and only a government on whom this responsibility was laid. Popular resistance must have a national background, and both the soldier and the civilian must feel that they are fighting for their country's freedom under national leadership.

We pointed this out to you. The question became one not of just satisfying our national aspirations but of effective prosecution of the war and fighting to the last any invader who set foot on the soil of India. On general principles a National Government would control defence through a Defence Minister, and the Commander-in-Chief would control the armed forces and would have full latitude in the carrying out of operations connected with the

war. An Indian National Government should have normally functioned in this way. We made it clear that the Commander-in-Chief in India would have control of the armed forces and the conduct of operations and other matters connected therewith. With a view to arriving at a settlement, we were prepared to accept certain limitations on the normal powers of the Defence Minister. We had no desire to upset in the middle of the war the present military organization or arrangements. We accepted also that the higher strategy of the war should be controlled by the War Cabinet in London which would have an Indian member. The immediate object before us was to make the defence of India more effective, to strengthen it, to broad base it on the popular will, and to reduce all red tape, delay and inefficiency from it. There was no question of our interfering with the technical and operational sides. One thing, of course, was of paramount importance to us; India's safety and defence. Subject to this primary consideration, there was no reason why there should be any difficulty in finding a way out of the present impasse in accordance with the unanimous desire of the Indian people, for in this matter there are no differences amongst us.

The emphasis on Defence led you to reconsider the matter and you wrote to me on the 7th April suggesting a formula for Defence.

In this letter you said: "As the Working Committee have understood, it is impossible to make any change in the existing constitution during the period of hostilities." The Working Committee's attitude in the matter has been completely misunderstood and I should like to clear this up, although we are not immediately concerned with it. The Committee do not think that there is any inherent difficulty in the way of constitutional changes during the war. Everything that helps in the war not only can be but

must be done, and done with speed. That is the only way to carry on and win a war. No complicated enactments are necessary. A recognition of India's freedom and right to self-determination could easily be made, if it were so wished, together with certain other consequential but important changes. The rest can be left to future arrangements and adjustments. I might remind you that the British Prime Minister actually proposed a union of France and England on the eve of the fall of France. No greater or more fundamental change could be imagined, and this was suggested at a period of grave crisis and peril. War accelerates change; it does not fit in with static conceptions.

The formula for Defence that you sent us was considered by us together with its annexure which gave a list of subjects or departments which were to be transferred to the Defence Department. This list was a revealing one as it proved that the Defence Minister would deal with relatively unimportant matters. We were unable to accept this and we informed you accordingly.

Subsequently, a new formula for Defence was suggested to us, but without any list of subjects. This formula seemed to us to be based on a more healthy approach and we suggested certain changes pointing out that our ultimate decision would necessarily depend on the allocation of subjects. A revised formula was then sent back to us together with an indication of the functions of the War Department.

This was so widely and comprehensively framed that it was difficult for us to know what the actual allocation of subjects and departments, as between the Defence Department and the War Department, would be. A request was made on our behalf that illustrative lists of these subjects might be supplied to enable us to consider the matter. No such lists

were supplied to us.

In the interview we had with you yesterday we discussed the new formula and expressed our viewpoint in regard to it. I need not repeat what I said then. The wording of the formula is after all a minor matter and we would not allow that to come in our way, unless some important principle is at stake. But behind that wording lay certain ideas and we were surprised to find that during the past few days we had been proceeding on wrong assumptions.

When we asked you for illustrative lists of subjects for the two departments, you referred us to the old list for the Defence Department which you had previously sent us and which we had been unable to accept. You added that certain residuary subjects might be added to this but, in effect, there was not likely to be any such subject as the allocation was complete. Thus, you said, that substantially there was no change between the old list and any new one that might be prepared. If this was so, and we were to go back ultimately to the place we started from, then what was the purpose of our searching for new formula? A new set of words meaning the same thing made no difference. In the course of our talks many other matters were also cleared up, unfortunately to our disadvantage. You had referred both privately and in the course of public statements to a National Government and a "Cabinet" consisting of "ministers." These words have a certain significance and we had imagined that the new Government would function with full powers as a Cabinet, with the Viceroy acting as a constitutional head. But the new picture that you placed before us was really not very different from the old, the difference being one of degree and not of kind. The new Government could neither be called except vaguely and inaccurately, nor could it function

as a National Government. It would just be the Viceroy and his executive council with the Viceroy having all his old powers. We did not ask for any legal changes but we did ask for definite assurances and conventions which would indicate that the new Government would function as a free government the members of which act as members of a cabinet in a constitutional government. In regard to the conduct of the war and connected activities the Commander-in-Chief would have freedom, and he would act as war minister.

We were informed that nothing can be said at this stage, even vaguely and generally, about the conventions that should govern the Government and the Viceroy. Ultimately there was always the possibility of the members of the Executive Council resigning or threatening to resign if they disagreed with the Viceroy. That sanction or remedy is of course always open, but it is curious that we should base our approach to a new government on the probability of conflict and resignation at the very outset.

The picture therefore placed before us is not essentially different from the old one. The whole object which we, and I believe you have in view—that is, to create a new psychological approach to the people, to make them feel that their own national government had come, that they were defending their newly won freedom—would be completely frustrated when they saw this old picture again, with even the old labels on. The continuation of the India Office which has been a symbol of evil to us, would confirm this picture. It has almost been taken for granted for sometime past that the India Office would soon disappear as it was an anachronism. But now we are told that even this undesirable relic of a past age is going to continue.

The picture of the government, which was so like the old in all essential features, is such that we cannot fit into it. Normally we would have had little difficulty in disposing of this matter for it is so far removed from all that we have striven for, but in the circumstances of today we were prepared to give full consideration to every proposal which might lead to an effective organisation of the defence of India. The peril that faces India affects us more than it can possibly affect any foreigner, and we are anxious and eager to do our utmost to face it and overcome it. But we cannot undertake responsibilities when we are not given the freedom and power to shoulder them effectively and when an old environment continues which hampers the national effort.

While we cannot accept the proposals you have made, we want to inform you that we are yet prepared to assume responsibility provided a truly national government is formed. We are prepared to put aside for the present all questions about the future, though as we have indicated, we hold definite views about it. But in the present, the National Government must be a cabinet government with full power and must not merely be a continuation of the Viceroy's Executive Council. In regard to defence we have already stated what, in our opinion, the position should be at present. We feel that such an arrangement is the very minimum that is essential for the functioning of a National Government and for making the popular appeal which is urgently needed.

We would point out to you that the suggestions we have put forward are not ours only but may be considered to be the unanimous demand of the Indian people. On these matters there is no difference of opinion among various groups and parties, and the difference is as between the Indian people as

a whole and the British Government. Such differences as exist in India relate to constitutional changes in the future. We are agreeable to the postponement of this issue so that the largest possible measure of unity might be achieved in the present crisis for the defence of India. It would be a tragedy that even when there is this unanimity of opinion in India, the British Government should prevent a free National Government from functioning and from serving the cause of India as well as the larger causes for which millions are suffering and dying today.

Yours sincerely
(Sd.) ABUL KALAM AZAD

The Rt. Hon. Sir Stafford Cripps
3, Queen Victoria Road
New Delhi

3, Queen Victoria Road
New Delhi, the 11th April, 1942

My Dear Maulana Sahib,

I was extremely sorry to receive from you your letter of April 10th expressing the rejection by the Congress Working Committee of His Majesty's Government's draft declaration.

I will not deal with those points which are covered by the original resolution of your Committee which you sent me, as they were clearly not the reason for your decision.

Nor need I go into the question of the division of duties between the Defence Minister and the

Commander-in-Chief as War Member with which you deal at length. This division allotted to the Defence Minister all functions outside those actually connected with the General Headquarters, Navy Headquarters and Air Headquarters which are under the Commander-in-Chief as head of the fighting forces in India.

In addition to these functions in the narrow field of "Defence" it was suggested that all other portfolios relating to that subject such as :—

Home Department—Internal order, police, refugees, etc.

Finance Department—All war finance in India.

Communications Department — Railways, roads, transport, etc.

Supply Department—Supplies for all forces and munitions.

Information and Broadcasting Department— Propaganda, publicity, etc.

Civil Defence Department—A. R. P. and all forms of civilian defence.

Legislative Department—Regulations and orders.

Labour Department—Man power.

Defence Department—Administration of Indian personnel, etc.

should be put in the hands of representative Indians as members of the Executive Council.

Nothing further could have been done by way of giving responsibility for Defence services to representative Indian members without jeopardising the immediate defence of India under the Commander-in-Chief. This defence is, as you know, a paramount duty and responsibility of His Majesty's Government, while unity of Command is essential

in the interests of the Allied help to India.

The real substance of your refusal to take part in a National Government is that the form of Government suggested is not such as would enable you to rally the Indian people as you desire.

You make two suggestions. First that the constitution might now be changed. In this respect I would point out that you made this suggestion for the first time last night, nearly three weeks after you had received the proposals, and I would further remark that every other representative with whom I have discussed this view has accepted the practical impossibility of any such legislative change in the middle of a war and at such a moment as the present.

Second you suggest "a truly National Government" be formed, which must be a "cabinet Government with full power."

Without constitutional changes of a most complicated character and on a very large scale this would not be possible, as you realise.

Were such a system to be introduced by convention under the existing circumstances, the nominated cabinet (nominated presumably by the major political organisations) would be responsible to no one but itself, could not be removed and would in fact constitute an absolute dictatorship of the majority.

This suggestion would be rejected by all minorities in India, since it would subject all of them to a permanent and autocratic majority in the Cabinet. Nor would it be consistent with the pledges already given by His Majesty's Government to protect the rights of those minorities.

In a country such as India where communal divisions are still so deep an irresponsible majority Government of this kind is not possible.

Apart from this, however, until such time as the

Indian peoples frame their new constitution, His Majesty's Government must continue to carry out its duties to those large sections of the Indian people to whom it has given its pledges.

The proposals of His Majesty's Government went as far as possible short of a complete change in the constitution which is generally acknowledged as impracticable in the circumstances of to-day.

While therefore both I and His Majesty's Government recognise the keen desire of your Working Committee to carry on the war against the enemy by every means in their power, they regret that your Working Committee has not seen its way to join in the war effort upon the conditions sincerely offered, the only conditions which could have brought together all the different communities and sections of the Indian people.

Yours sincerely
(Sd.) STAFFORD CRIPPS

I propose to publish this answer.

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad
Birla House
New Delhi

Birla House
Albuquerque Road
New Delhi
April 11, 1942

Dear Sir Stafford,

I have just received your letter of April 10th and I must confess that my colleagues and I were considerably surprised to read it. I am sending you

this reply immediately and can only deal briefly here with some of the points you have raised.

The points covered by our original resolution are important and represent my Committee's well-considered views on the British proposals as a whole. But we pointed out to you that so far as the proposals relate to the future they might be set aside, as we were anxious to assume responsibility for India's government and defence in this hour of danger. This responsibility could only be undertaken, however, if it was real responsibility and power.

As regards the division of functions between the Defence Minister and the War Minister you did not give illustrative lists, as requested by us, and referred us to the previous list of the Defence Minister's functions, which, as you know, we had been wholly unable to accept. In your letter under reply you mention certain subjects, directly or indirectly related to the war, which will be administered by other departments. So far as the Defence Minister is concerned, it is clear that his functions will be limited by the first list that you sent.

No one has suggested any restrictions on the normal powers of the Commander-in-Chief. Indeed we went beyond this and were prepared to agree to further powers being given to him as War Minister. But it is clear that the British Government's conception and ours in regard to defence differ greatly. For us it means giving it a national character and calling upon every man and woman in India to participate in it. It means trusting our own people and seeking their full co-operation in this great effort. The British Government's view seems to be based on an utter lack of confidence in the Indian people and in withholding real power from them. You refer to the paramount duty and responsibility of His Majesty's Government in regard to defence. That duty and responsibility can-

not be discharged effectively unless the Indian people are made to have and feel their responsibility, and the recent past stands witness to this. The Government of India do not seem to realise that the war can only be fought on a popular basis.

Your statement that we have for the first time after three weeks suggested a change in the constitution is hardly correct. In the course of our talks reference was made to it, but it is true that we did not lay stress on it as we did not want to introduce new issues. But when you stated explicitly in your letter that we had agreed that no constitutional changes could be made during the war, we had to deny this and correct your impression.

It is the last part of your letter that has especially surprised and pained us. It seems that there has been a progressive deterioration in the British Government's attitude as our negotiations proceeded. What we were told in our very first talk with you is now denied or explained away. You told me then that there would be a National Government which would function as a Cabinet and that the position of the Viceroy would be analogous to that of the King in England vis-a-vis his Cabinet. In regard to the India Office, you told me, that you were surprised that no one had so far mentioned this important matter, and that the practical course was to have this attached or incorporated with the Dominions' Office.

The whole of this picture which you sketched before us has now been completely shattered by what you told us during our last interview.

You have put forward an argument in your letter which at no time during our talks was mentioned by you. You refer to the 'absolute dictatorship of the majority.' It is astonishing that such a statement should be made in this connection and at this stage. This difficulty is inherent in any

scheme of a mixed cabinet formed to meet an emergency, but there are many ways in which it can be provided for. Had you raised this question we would have discussed it and found a satisfactory solution. The whole approach to this question has been that a mixed cabinet should be formed and should co-operate together. We accepted this. We are not interested in the Congress as such gaining power, but we are interested in the Indian people as a whole having freedom and power. How the Cabinet should be formed and should function was a question which might have been considered after the main question was decided; that is, the extent of power which the British Government would give up to the Indian people. Because of this we never discussed it with you or even referred to it. Nevertheless you have raised this matter for the first time, in what is presumably your last letter to us, and tried most unjustifiably to sidetrack the real issue between us.

You will remember that in my very first talk with you, I pointed out that the communal or like questions did not arise at this stage. As soon as the British Government made up its mind to transfer real power and responsibility, the other questions could be tackled successfully by those concerned. You gave me the impression that you agreed with this approach.

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

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

You mention that you propose to publish your letter to me. I presume that you have no objection now to our publishing our original resolution, your letters to us, and our letters to you.

Yours sincerely
(Sd.) ABUL KALAM AZAD

The Right Hon'ble Sir Stafford Cripps
3, Queen Victoria Road
New Delhi

3, Queen Victoria Road
New Delhi, April 11, 1942

My dear Maulana Sahib

Thank you for your letter which I have just received in reply to mine of the 10th April. I have no objection to your releasing the Congress resolution and our correspondence whenever you desire to do so.

Yours sincerely
STAFFORD CRIPPS

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad
Birla House
New Delhi

Note :—On receipt of this letter the resolution of the Working Committee as also the correspondence that passed between the Congress President and Sir Stafford Cripps were released to the press.

THE CONGRESS PRESIDENT AT A PRESS CONFERENCE

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad met a large number of journalists on April 11th in Delhi and spoke to them about his talks with Sir Stafford Cripps. In particular, he referred to his first interview with Sir Stafford, and said that he had laid emphasis on three issues.

Firstly, he told Sir Stafford that the approach to the Indian problem made in the Draft Declaration was not only not correct but was likely to lead to greater complications. If the British Government desired to infuse a new spirit in India even at this eleventh hour and send out a person like Sir Stafford for the task, the simple method would have been to send out through Sir Stafford the announcement that Britain was prepared to part with power. Sir Stafford could then have asked Indians to draw up a scheme. If we failed to draw one up, the entire responsibility would have been ours.

Sir Stafford, in reply, referred to the first part of the Draft Declaration and asserted that it was a considered decision of principle. He added that provision had already been made in it for different political organisations and it was open to them to come to an agreement at any time.

“I pointed out,” said the Maulana, “that after concrete proposals had been introduced by him, the task of independent agreement among the parties in India had been made difficult.”

“Secondly,” proceeded the Maulana, “I told Sir Stafford that the Draft Declaration laid much greater emphasis on the future than on the immediate present, while India demanded changes in the present system. The proposals relating to the present were not positive; they were negative.

"I said to him that as far as the Congress was concerned I do not see how it could accept the proposals. War, I said, was threatening India; but the light had gone out of the hearts of the millions, who might have sacrificed themselves for their country.

"Our common task now demanded that we should find a psychological approach in order to re-ignite the spark of patriotic fervour in those hearts. This could not be achieved merely by holding out promises for the future, but people must be made to feel that they were free in their own country to-day and had to defend their own freedom and their own country.

"Sir Stafford, speaking with great confidence, assured me that clause (e) of the Draft Declaration provided for complete freedom and transfer of power, with only one reservation about defence.

"I then pointed out that defence of the country was the demand of the moment as far as the country was concerned and during the war. Civil administration had disappeared because problems of defence permeated every civil department, and if you reserved defence you practically reserve all the powers which you say are being transferred to India.

"Sir Stafford said by way of reassurance that the reservations related only to the functions of the Commander-in-Chief.

"The rest of the discussion proceeded in respect of this particular question.

"The third point emphasised by me was that in tackling the political question in India, communal questions were bound to arise at some stage or other and would have to be solved. I assured him that as soon as the main political problem was settled, the responsibility of finding a satisfactory solution of the communal and other problems would be ours, and I could confidently assert that we would find a satisfactory solution.

"Sir Stafford entirely agreed with me and said

this was exactly what he had said before the War Cabinet before he came out to India.

"This naturally conjured up in my mind a picture of the present not found in the cold words of the Draft Declaration, and I, therefore, naturally decided to call a meeting of the Working Committee to examine it.

"I, however, regret to say that the first impression of the picture created as a result of my earlier interviews with Sir Stafford gradually became blurred as the discussions on material points proceeded from stage to stage. And when I last met him on the night of April 9, the whole picture had completely faded out."

Referring to his interview with General Wavell, the Maulana said: "In the course of our talks, Sir Stafford Cripps had repeatedly emphasised the technical difficulties in the way of transferring defence to an Indian member. He had suggested that we should meet General Wavell, because he could explain the technical side of the question much better.

"But curiously enough, throughout our interview with the Commander-in-Chief, at which other military officers were present, not a word was spoken about any technical difficulty; the entire discussion proceeded on political lines. It did not strike me for a moment that we were interviewing a military expert but an expert politician.

"I think," the Maulana went on "I must clarify the position created by certain speculations in a section of the press as regards Mahatma Gandhi's part in the discussions. The Mahatma's views as regards participation in any war are well known and it would be entirely untrue to suggest that the Working Committee's decisions have in any way been influenced by those views.

"In fact, Mahatma Gandhi made it clear to the Working Committee that they were perfectly free

to come to their own decisions on the merits of the proposals. He did not really want to participate even in the earlier sittings of the Working Committee but he was persuaded by me to stay on from day to day as long as he could afford to do so. Eventually, my persuasion proved powerless to make him stay longer.

"I want to repeat what I said yesterday that the Working Committee's decision has at every stage been unanimous," he declared.

He concluded: "It is deeply to be regretted that the aim which all of us had passionately desired has not been reached, but I must acknowledge that all these discussions were carried on in a friendly atmosphere and in spite of profound differences which at times led to heated controversy. We and Sir Stafford have parted as friends. The cordiality of the talks was maintained to the last."

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU MEETS THE PRESS

Jawaharlal Nehru met a number of Indian and foreign journalists at a press conference in New Delhi on April 12th 1942 and dealt at length with the Cripps' negotiations and the attitude taken up on behalf of the Congress.

Who is responsible for the failure of the Cripps' negotiations? In answer to this question, Pandit Nehru explained in detail the various stages of the negotiations. If he had been asked just before his last interview with Sir Stafford Cripps, he would have said that the chances of coming to an agreement were about 75 per cent. At that interview, however, the full picture which Sir Stafford, suddenly and for the first time, put before them of the proposals was such that he could not agree to it. "A big change had occurred somewhere in the middle" said Pandit Nehru. It was obvious, he added, that there was some trouble between Sir Stafford and others.

Pandit Nehru went on to say: "While it was my extreme desire to find a way out and make India function effectively for defence and make the war a popular effort—so great was my desire that some things I have stood for during the last quarter of a century, things which I could never have imagined for a moment I would give up, I now agreed to give up—I am convinced personally that it is impossible for us to agree to the proposals as they eventually emerged from the British Government's mind. I am in complete and whole-hearted agreement with the Congress resolution and the letters of the Congress President."

The change in the attitude of Sir Stafford Cripps which led to the sudden breakdown of the negotiations was then described by Pandit Nehru. From the

first, the impression which Sir Stafford had given was that the new Government would be a National Government. Sir Stafford had himself often used the words, "National Cabinet." He had also said that the position of the Viceroy would be analogous to that of the King, in other words, a constitutional head. The language used by Sir Stafford had led them to assume that everything was being transferred except Defence and also that the Viceroy would not interfere with the decision of the Cabinet though he might have special powers such as in connection with the States or some major issue. So the question of the new Government's powers, etc., was not even discussed. At the last interview on Thursday night, however, the picture which Sir Stafford gave showed that the premises and assumptions on which they had been arguing had no real foundation. Sir Stafford began to talk of the Viceroy's "Executive Council" and not a "National Government." Names did make a difference. "If we go to the country, talking about the Viceroy's Executive Council, what would the people think?" asked Pandit Nehru amidst laughter. They agreed to the legal phraseology, but contrary to their old assumptions, Sir Stafford suddenly made it perfectly clear that there would be no essential change between the position of the Viceroy's Council and that of the new Government which they were asked to join. "I was amazed," declared Pandit Nehru. It might be that Sir Stafford had been pulled up by his senior partner in England or someone here. "We cannot change laws," said Sir Stafford, but when he was asked: "Tell us at least what conventions you propose. Will they function as a Cabinet? Will the Viceroy work as a constitutional head?" Sir Stafford replied: "I am totally unable to say anything on the subject, because it is completely within the discretion of the Viceroy. Go to him later on and discuss the matter with him. I cannot

interfere or indicate what should be done." So it amounted to the old August offer again—with a few minor changes. They were merely asked to agree to join the Viceroy's Council practically unconditionally—with the vague background provided by the Cabinet's declaration.

Dealing with the Defence question, Pandit Nehru said that at no time had it been suggested by the Congress that the normal powers of the Commander-in-Chief for carrying on the war in an effective way should be interfered with. But in addition to his powers as Commander-in-Chief, he was now having other powers which were really those of a Defence Minister. Pandit Nehru said that the removal of Defence from their responsibilities made the position of the Defence Minister absurd and ridiculous. Their conception of defence was different from that of the Government. It was not keeping a regiment here and there, but they wanted to mobilize hundreds of millions of Indians. They wanted to make every man and woman do something for the war—make it a popular war. The military conception was to fight with their armies and, if the latter failed, to surrender, but their conception was different. They would not surrender whatever happened—whatever happened to military forces, popular resistance should continue to the end—as in China and Russia. Could they discharge their duty in this spirit? Could they make India hum as an organized unit of resistance? Could they make India feel that she was fighting her own war for her freedom? That was their idea in asking for a popular conception of Defence, but the Government's attitude as put to them was a singularly complacent attitude—a conception of India from a standpoint which was peculiar only to England. "We are in the right. All those who are against us, are not only in the wrong, but damnably in the wrong."

Referring to the Defence question during the Cripps' negotiations Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru said that at first a certain formula was given by Sir Stafford according to which the Commander-in-Chief was to be War Minister and the Defence Minister was to have certain functions entrusted to him. Attached to it was a list—practically exhaustive—of the functions entrusted to the Defence Minister. They were propaganda, canteens, petroleum, amenities, stationery and subjects of that kind. The subjects proposed to be allotted were such that “they would have made the Defence Minister’s position ridiculous in the eyes of the public,” said Pandit Nehru. It was not acceptable to the Congress Working Committee. Then came a new formula—at the instance of a third party but presumably with Sir Stafford’s approval—with no list of subjects attached.

In the Working Committee’s opinion, this afforded a basis for arriving at an agreed formula for Defence, but the really important point was—what would be the subjects transferred to the Defence Minister? Sir Stafford did not reply to a letter asking for a list of these subjects: “At no stage did we receive them” said Pandit Nehru. When they asked him personally, Sir Stafford referred them to the Army Manual. Later, Sir Stafford entered into a long disquisition on the Indian Army—that it was really an offshoot of the British Army controlled by the British Government, through their representative, the Commander-in-Chief. It was explained to Sir Stafford on behalf of the Congress that it was not their intention to do anything to upset present arrangements, but what they wanted was, firstly, to make the Indian Army feel that the Army was theirs. They wanted to give the National background, the psychological appeal, necessary for a popular war. Sir Stafford’s attitude was, however, rigid. In the end, he said that the list of subjects were those already given

in his original formula.

Sir Stafford refused to follow the Australian model saying that Mr. Curtin in Australia had even greater powers than Mr. Churchill had in England. As regards the citizen army, Sir Stafford said that the matter would lie within the discretion of the Commander-in-Chief, but he added that the Commander-in-Chief would probably agree. If he did not agree, it was open to the Ministers to resign.

Commenting on this attitude of the Government, Pandit Nehru said: "That is not the way to bring about a settlement." He went on to say: "That is not the way to fight a war—not the lackadaisical way of the Viceroy's House and the Government of India. If there is a National Government, everybody will have to work or get out. It is not an evening dress war. It is work, work, work. Those who sit to dinner in evening dress at 8-15 are not going to win this war." In reply to those who talked of the want of equipment as a reason against a citizen army, he cited the example of China and Spain. The former was now self-sufficient so far as small arms were concerned. In India, with a National Government, they could double or treble the production of our factories. They could do without luxuries and turn those factories producing non-essential goods into factories for small arms. The whole conception of the citizen army was, he said, a practical conception, a psychological conception, an essential conception.

Pandit Nehru went on to narrate how a person who had become a German prisoner and had managed to escape told him and others what the Germans thought of the Indian troops, how much they had been struck by their courage and efficiency in action. "It is a magnificent army. What would we not do, if we had such people to draw upon?" said the Germans. "If they fight like this in a mercenary

way, how much better would they fight if they thought they were fighting for their own freedom?" It was really a question of psychological approach, declared Pandit Nehru. Explaining further, he said:

"The whole approach was one of lighting a spark in hundreds of millions of minds in India. It was not an easy responsibility for anyone to undertake. Nevertheless, we felt that circumstances demanded it and whatever our grievances with the British Government, whatever the past history of our relations, we could not allow that to come in the way of what we considered our duty to our country at present."

Referring to the future, Pandit Nehru said: "India and Russia are the two important theatres of war. Little else counts for the present. Much will, of course, depend on the next two or three months in the Russo-German War. A great deal will depend on India or what happens as between Germany and Russia; but apart from that India is going to be for the next three or four months the crux of the war. It will make a difference to the length of the war and the intensity of the war. Every country in the world realizes this, except, of course, the big people in New Delhi and Whitehall—they are slow of understanding and comprehension—and, therefore, you have these frantic radio appeals from Germany and Japan.

"If today a National Government of India said, 'We are going to arm the Indian people. We may not have the best of modern arms, aeroplanes, tanks; but we are going to arm them with such guns as we can make,' think how the world situation will change; what reaction it will have on Germany and Japan and also in the Allied countries."

In answer to a question, Pandit Nehru said:—

"So far as I know India, and I know it tolerably

well, the major sentiment in India naturally is one of hostility to the British in India. You cannot root out 150 years of past history and all that has happened in those years. It has sunk deep down into the Indian soul. Suppose we had come to an agreement and had to convert, to change that sentiment suddenly, we could have done it if we could have given a sensation of freedom to the people of India. The fundamental factor today is distrust or dislike of the British Government. It is not pro-Japanese sentiment. It is anti-British sentiment. That may occasionally lead individuals to pro-Japanese expression of views. This is short-sighted. It is a slave's sentiment, a slave's way of thinking, to imagine that to get rid of one person who is dominating us we can expect another person to help us and not dominate us later. Free men ought not to think that way. It distresses me that any Indian should talk of the Japanese liberating India. The whole past history of Japan has been one of dominating others. Japan comes here either for Imperialist reasons straight out or to fight with the British Government. Anyhow, whatever the reason, if it comes here, it does not come here to liberate."

In the course of his talk, Pandit Nehru removed two or three misconceptions. In reply to Sir Stafford's charge that the Congress had, for the first time, in its letter of April 10 asked for big changes immediately in the constitution, Jawaharlalji explained that the reference in the letter was only intended to remove a misunderstanding. In one of his letters Sir Stafford had said that the Congress had agreed that there should be no constitutional changes in the interim period. As this was not correct, the President explained the position. The Congress had merely said that it did not want to enter into an argument now on these constitutional questions, but they had made no commitment of the kind that they agreed

not to ask for any immediate constitutional changes. Their position was this: "While we are not agreeing, we are not pressing this. It is not an issue." Sir Stafford was not, therefore, correct in saying that a major issue had been raised.

Pandit Nehru referred to the offer made by Mr. Churchill, at a critical time in the war, to France for a union with England. The suggestion made by Pandit Nehru was that Parliament should pass a small Bill of six sections giving independent status to India and agreeing to the principle of self-determination. Other details, communal and other, could be left over for settlement later, but if this had been done, the whole approach to the question would have become different—as between England and India and also between the communities. The Congress point of view was this—they were prepared to have a National Government for war purposes, but as regards the future Government, they were prepared to leave over for future consideration the question of detailed and precise proposals for future Government. Pandit Nehru said, however, that the present proposals would have also to be considered with the viewpoint of the future. If the independence of India was now accepted in principle, it would have a great psychological effect on the people.

Asked about Sir Stafford's reference to the "tyrannical rule of a majority" in his farewell statement, Pandit Nehru said:

"I want to make it perfectly clear that throughout our talks and correspondence, except for the last two letters, there was no reference at all at any stage in the slightest degree to the question of majority rule, because much as we disliked it we accepted the idea of a composite Cabinet formed from different groups representing different ideologies in the country, some coming among others from the Muslim League and from the Hindu Mahasabha and Sikhs.

We accepted that, although it was a thing which would have made the functioning of the National Government very difficult. At no stage, did we discuss the number of any groups in the Council. It was important, but we did not discuss it because we, speaking on behalf of the Congress, never laid stress on the Congress having this or that. We wanted no power for the Congress. We always talked in terms of what the National Government would have, whoever may be there and whatever numbers it may consist of. We talked of it as a group and of what power that group should have. The communal issue in any form was never discussed except that Sir Stafford Cripps often repeated one formula, that he was only concerned with agreement between three groups in India, the British Government, the Congress and the Muslim League. He did not care whether others agreed or not, but if any of these three did not agree the scheme fell through.

"For the first time," he went on, "this question was definitely emphasised by Sir Stafford Cripps in his letter dated April 10 in which he used the phrase 'tyrannical rule of the majority.' Now, for an eminent lawyer and constitutionalist like Sir Stafford to use these phrases in this manner is extraordinary. We were thinking in terms really not even of a legislature but of a Cabinet consisting of 15 persons. What the proportions in that Cabinet may be we never discussed. Suppose there was the so-called Congress majority in it, though the Congress was not thinking on those lines. But Sir Stafford's mind was continually functioning, balancing the different communal factors. Suppose, then, in a Cabinet of 15 there was a Congress majority of eight or nine. Now cabinets, if they are to function at all, cannot function and do not function, especially in war-time, by majority. You must have a certain homogeneity or common outlook; otherwise the Cabinet may break

up. Sir Stafford has been continuously reminding us of the ultimate sanction of resignation. If we had that ultimate sanction, so also every group in that Cabinet had that ultimate sanction. So, the talk of the tyranny of the majority is amazing and fantastic nonsense."

Pandit Nehru referred to the mention of the "Hindu Press" in one of Sir Stafford's letters. When further questioned, he said he meant the *Hindustan Times*. That in itself showed how he was continually thinking in regard to every matter in terms of Hindu and Muslim.

Pandit Nehru observed he could not conceive of Mr. Jinnah or Dr. Savarkar really disagreeing with anything that the Congress had put to Sir Stafford in regard to the proposals for the immediate present.

Earlier at the conference, Pandit Nehru declared: "Today the dominant factor is the imminent peril to India, and I want you to appreciate what I say. We agreed to things which in the last 22 years we would never have dreamt of agreeing to or coming near. In these 22 years we have stood for something. Not only the Congress but vast numbers of people outside the formal fold of the Congress, even communal organizations have demanded independence. For the first time in these 22 years, I swallowed many a bitter pill, when I said I was prepared to agree to many things so as somehow to come to an agreement. I did want to throw all my sympathy and all the energy I possess in the organization of the defence of India."

STATEMENT BY CONGRESS PRESIDENT

Sir Stafford Cripps is reported to have said in the course of an interview at Karachi before leaving India that Congress leaders first went to see Col. L. Johnson, who acted as a mediator in his personal capacity.

This is likely to create an impression that his mediation was sought by us. Facts, however, are otherwise. On or about April 1, a common friend informed Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru that Col. L. Johnson was anxious to meet him and would be glad if a meeting could be arranged at his residence. Accordingly, Pandit Nehru met him. Again it was by a pure accident that on April 3, while I was on my way to a meeting of the Working Committee, I went to Pandit Nehru's residence, which was on my way, to pick him up, and there I found Col. Johnson. Naturally we met and had a brief talk. At the end of this talk, Col. Johnson expressed a desire that in the event of the Working Committee coming to an adverse decision, he should be allowed a chance to see if he could be helpful, before the committee's final verdict was formally communicated to Sir Stafford Cripps. His wish was so obviously in the interest of the common object, namely, the successful conclusion of Sir Stafford Cripps' mission, that I saw no objection in complying with it. It is hardly necessary to narrate the rest of the story. But I must make it perfectly clear that nobody on behalf of the Congress sought either Col. Johnson's or President Roosevelt's intervention, although in the very nature of things, Col. Johnson's friendly interest was appreciated.

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU'S STATEMENT TO THE PRESS

Sir Stafford Cripps' statement made in Karachi about Congress leaders going to Colonel Louis Johnson and his acting as mediator is not correct and is liable to be misunderstood. Sir Stafford has not been fair either to Colonel Johnson or to the Congress leaders. There was never any question, as I have stated previously, of our asking for mediation or arbitration from any one and President Roosevelt's name has been needlessly dragged into this matter. We dealt with Sir Stafford alone though others were naturally interested in the developments that were taking place. Colonel Johnson did not interfere in any way, though of course he expressed his desire that a satisfactory settlement should be reached. We are grateful to Colonel Johnson for his friendly approach to our problems, though in the nature of things he could not interfere in what was taking place.

Sir Stafford has told us that the British Government is not going to take any further initiative to solve the Indian problem. We expect no initiative from them as they have managed to get completely stuck in ruts of their own making. We do not rely on the British Government for anything except to obstruct political and economic advance in India. The initiative lies with others who do not live in the ruts. The dominating factor of the situation is the fact that India can only be defended effectively as a free country by the people themselves acting through their National Government. I notice that parts of what I have said torn from their context, have been given publicity by some sections of the press and by the radio. This is not fair. I think it is every Indian's duty to refuse submission to every aggression, old and new, and to resist it. We cannot and must not submit for that way lies a surrender of the soul

and spirit of the nation. But it must be realised that effective resistance is not an individual matter and no one can deliver the goods except a free national Government with power and responsibility, which can enthuse and organize the masses. This patent fact cannot be ignored and this is the crux of the question in India.