

## IV. BLIND ZIGZAG TOWARDS AUGUST

AMONGST YOU ACUTE DIFFERENCES AROSE, JUST AS in the first phase of the war ; it was but inevitable.

It is the same zigzag course again, to reconcile your own internal differences and win National Government. You miss the bus in this period too, for exactly the same reasons, though you seem to follow a contrary course in practice.

(1) Once again you have neither a unified nor a correct understanding of the character of the war ; therefore you cannot foresee its future course correctly, but instead you base your analysis on a purely eclectic piecing together of the immediate military events, and on wild speculations about the future.

(2) Once again the guiding thought of most of you remains that the more Britain gets into trouble, the more the British Government is likely to listen. But the crying reality was that the British Government had remained adamant and the Imperialist rulers were growing more and more intolerant in refusing power, and slanderous in giving their reasons.

The change in this period was that all of you become very bitter against the British. And the more the anti-British feeling grows among the people and takes the form of impotent pro-Jap sentiments, the more you react to it, for yours is the responsibility to lead.

The second change in this period is that you begin to threaten the British Government with mass struggle, a policy that you had religiously eschewed even in the imperialist war period. This is just beyond understanding on the plane of commonsense alone ; then, the war was far away from our border ; now, it was on our very doorstep.

The British bureaucrats understood and wanted the world to understand, your change of practical policy to mean that you wanted the Japs to come in :

“Were you not prepared,” they asked, “to co-operate with the war in the last period, and you said you were prepared in

this period too. The only change was that you did not start any mass struggle then and now you threatened mass struggle."

"Therefore," their argument ran, "from being pro-British you were becoming pro-Jap, just because the British were losing for the time being."

They thought that because they did not strike a deal with you in the past, you were now out for a deal with the Japs. In their calculations, when India was in danger, power could not be transferred to such persons as you for they were convinced that you would become quislings any day.

This is how the Amerys, Linlithgows and Maxwells argued.

Your threat thus led to exactly the opposite result to what it was designed to achieve in the mind of the British rulers. Your threat provided them with their moral armour to hide their selfish Imperialist aim of refusing to settle with you, the most trusted, influential and undeniably anti-fascist leaders of our country.

Japan entered the war on December 7, 1941. All of you were released by the end of December and at Bardoli you passed the first resolution on the new situation. Hong Kong fell on December 25, Burma was attacked in February 1942. Singapore fell on February 15, Rangoon on March 8, Cripps came to India on March 23. Lashio fell on April 30 and the whole of Burma was occupied by the second week of May, the British withdrawing from the Chindwin Valley. You were re-arrested on August 8.

You will thus see how wrong your calculations proved; the more the British lost, the more they slandered you, the more intolerant and aggressive they became. They were selfish but you were blind.

We shall show later that you neither meant nor were planning to launch mass struggle. That only makes the issue more tragic.

## Outlook Of Bourgeois Liberalism

What was it that was basically wrong with your own policy of the period? It sounded modern and militant but it was neither.

(1) It was not a policy based on a modern revolutionary outlook but on the traditional outlook of the Indian Liberals,

that the British Government would listen one day. We call this the policy of nurturing illusions about British Imperialism.

(2) It was not a policy based on faith in our people as the makers of our country's destiny, but on using them as pawns for achieving an end you thought was right. We call this the policy that arises out of a bourgeois outlook towards the people.

Therefore it became a dilemma to you: how were you to defend the country if the British refused to grant National Government? You thought and functioned like an animal at bay,—by instinct.

You began grandly with wanting to defend the country, you ended with threatening to do what would blow up the same defence. This is neither logic nor commonsense.

The idea that the people could be roused to take defence as their own job, to intervene in defence measures and force popular co-operation on the bureaucratic machine never came to you. That this was the way to save our people and make defence measures more democratic and relatively more effective never occurred to you. It came to us, but we were a young minority party and we could only *demonstrate* that it works and that the people get self-confidence through themselves acting to safeguard their own interests and through seeing the bureaucrats bend in practice.

The idea of people's unity, of trying even to get the support of the second most influential political organisation of our country was not seriously countenanced by most of you. It came to us, we saw in it the real alternative to imperialist intransigence.

We go on now to give the tragic story of how you fumbled for a correct lead and ultimately played straight into the hands of the British Imperialists, a story told in bold incontrovertible facts and in your very own words.

## Fumbling For A Policy

When you were all released from jail, all of you saw the peril to India and wanted to defend the country against aggression.

But all of you were faced with a dilemma: how was it possible to do this, so long as the British Government was on

top? The limited Satyagraha which had gone on for a whole year had brought no change in the imperialist attitude. Some of you argued: 'Why should we change when they have not changed?'!

Maulana Azad in an interview to the *Associated Press of India* on December 14, 1941 said that he saw no likely change in Congress policy, for during the period of the past fifteen months "not a single incident reflects the slightest change in the attitude of the British Government. Under these circumstances I am unable to visualise a change."

*Bombay Chronicle*, December 15, 1941.

On the other hand the same restricted, symbolic Satyagraha had created a mood in the people that their job was to do nothing but wait for the Imperialists to concede the demand. When this did not come off, anti-British bitterness became intense and impotent, and they turned to cursing the Imperialists; and the slavish gloating over Axis victories had already begun.

You yourselves were surprised at this intensely bitter feeling, which was after all the direct result not only of British policy but also of the policy you followed in the first phase of the war. Pandit Nehru at a Press Conference in Bombay on December 17, 1941 said:

"When people talk of any kind of co-operation between India and British Government they seem to forget two factors, one is the enormous bitterness of people today, greater than ever, against British policy. . . . During my past 25 years or so of political experience, I have never known feelings so strained and bitter."

*Bombay Chronicle*, December 18, 1941.

At Bardoli, you cleared the decks not for action but for a political settlement. For over a year Congressmen had symbolically opposed the war from the non-violent angle. This had given the Imperialists the chance to say that it was dangerous to transfer power to people who did not believe in armed defence.

Gandhiji who had led this struggle, was himself embittered

by the British refusal to settle and as time went on he went more and more into airy speculations:

"But I have said in my talk for the past twelve months and more that this war is not likely to end in a decisive victory for any party. There will be peace when the exhaustion point is reached. This is mere speculation."

*Harijan*, June 7, 1942.

He saw nothing to choose between the two camps, he advocated neutrality and the continuance of symbolic opposition to the war.

## Two Groups, Two Paths

Sardar Patel, Rajendra Babu, Acharya Kripalani, Dr. Profulla Ghosh and some others agreed with Gandhiji on his attitude of neutrality towards the two camps. This in fact formed the *neutrality* group in the Working Committee.

It boiled down to: "Line up with neither; non-co-operate with both. No change is necessary."

Pandit Nehru led the other group, which included Maulana Azad, Pandit Pant and Mr. Asaf Ali;—the *non-belligerency* group. It said: "The camp of the Soviet Union and China is the progressive camp; our cause is common, our sympathies must be with them; but we adopt an attitude of non-belligerency till we get our freedom."

This boiled down to: "We want to fight but we will fight only if we get freedom."

At Bardoli, the neutrality group after long discussions finally agreed to let the non-belligerency group try out its policy of working for a settlement with the British in order to line up in the world battle against fascism. They also agreed to give unconditional moral support to the progressive camp. A resolution of greetings to the Soviet and Chinese peoples was passed.

Thus in your main resolution, you declared that even if the British Government had not changed, the new world situation and the peril to India needed a change on your part. You declared that "the sympathies of the Congress must inevitably

lie with the peoples who are the subject of aggression and who are fighting for their freedom." You thus gave unconditional moral support to the progressive camp but declared that "only a free and independent India can be in a position to undertake the defence of the country on a national basis." This was a promise of co-belligerency, if the demand for freedom was conceded.

But what was to happen between now and the formation of a National Government? The resolution said that the whole background in India is "one of hostility and distrust of the British Government" that mere promises will not do and a subject India cannot offer "voluntary or willing help to an arrogant Imperialism which is indistinguishable from fascist authoritarianism." The Bardoli Resolution therefore declared the peril to be *ours*, the war to be *theirs*, and that our people could not be roused till power was transferred.

But Bardoli also relieved Gandhiji of the responsibility he had undertaken at the Bombay AICC and assured him that he could continue Civil Disobedience for freedom of speech if he so chose. Four Gandhiji-members including Sardar Patel and Rajendra Babu were opposed to the Bardoli Resolution.

They in fact issued a Press Statement asking Congressmen to reject the Bardoli Resolution. Sardar Patel himself tried to rally Congressmen behind his view. He called a meeting of the Gujerat Provincial Congress Committee and invited Gandhiji to address them. Gandhiji explained the resolution and said:

"The resolution means that, if the Government gave a guarantee that full freedom would be given after the war, the Congress would help in keeping this Empire alive. It was not that the bargain had been actually made, but the terms had been agreed upon, whereas if I did not want to enter into the bargain at all, I should plainly say so."

*Harijan*, January 18, 1942.

Thirty-six members of the Gujerat Provincial Congress Committee voted for the Bardoli Resolution, twenty-seven voted against it.

At the Wardha AICC (January 1942) this split was healed

by Gandhiji's direct intervention and Rajendra Babu expressed his group's 'adherence' to the Bardoli Resolution thus:

*"It is politically wrong, in our opinion to involve the country in war at this time. We consider that this resolution provides for armed resistance in this war, which is not in the best interests of the country. . . . we realise, at the same time, that by merely passing the resolution we are not called upon to take up arms today. That can happen only if the British Government makes a declaration in favour of the independence of India, and transfers the responsibility of the administration to our people. There appears to be no chance of that happening today."*

*Times of India*, January 17, 1942.

Rajendra Babu made it clear that the objection of himself, Sardar Patel and the rest of the 'neutrality' group to the Bardoli Resolution was *political*, and that they held back their objection only in order to help a settlement with the British.

Finally, however, the two trends decided to present a united front and force a settlement from the British Imperialists.

And then the period of waiting for a settlement began.

## Misreading Cripps' Visit

During December 1941 to March 1942, when Cripps came to India, events moved with lightning rapidity. Malaya and Singapore fell, and the Japs smashed through their way into Burma, Rangoon fell in the first half of March, and Cripps came at the end of the month.

All these developments brought the peril nearer to India. The old idea—that the Imperialists would climb down, because they were getting into a tight corner—still remained. But while the leadership was expecting a settlement with the British, the people were openly gloating over Jap successes and expecting the defeat of the British.

Pandit Nehru said on July 16, 1942, that

"During the last three or four months we have been

fighting a definite pro-Japanese feeling in the country which is not pro-Japanese essentially, but is so anti-British that it leans over to the Japanese side. We do not wish India to lapse into a feeling of passivity. It is fantastic to talk of peace with Japan."

*Gandhi Against Fascism*, p. 93.

It is in such circumstances that Cripps comes to India. Why did he come? Your own powerful anti-fascist speeches, your expressed readiness to rouse millions of Indians to fight back the Jap peril, the Imperialist fiasco in Malaya and Burma, roused the democratic peoples in Britain and America. It was their mighty arm that compelled Churchill to send Cripps.

Once again, you saw only one half of this reality. You only saw that Churchill sent Cripps. From this you concluded that he was in a tight corner, had no escape, and was anxious to have India's support and help. Cripps was an old friend of many of you and you felt that a settlement was certain.

We however knew that though the rising criticism among the British people had brought Cripps here, yet his chief was still Churchill. As Communists we remembered Lenin's warning that "there is always a way out" for a ruling class in a crisis unless the people seal it up. We knew that the British Imperialist ruling class had behind them three centuries of experience in the art of statecraft, of diplomacy and duplicity.

We therefore said at the time that the two major patriotic organisations, the Congress and the League, should come to an agreement. Both faced a common danger, both desired to take power from the British. We wanted the Congress and the League to face Cripps unitedly.

But you were confident of a unilateral settlement.

You decided to be extremely reasonable with Cripps and do everything to pull off a settlement. But you cast aside all thought of uniting with your own brother. The simple question is: if in this common danger facing us, we cannot unite with our Muslim brothers whose interests are the same as ours, why should the British rulers whose interests are opposed to ours agree to give us power?

Instead you bargained with Cripps. London pulled him back. And Cripps broke the negotiations.

Cripps openly gloated over the results of the talks.

In his statements he emphasised that British sincerity was proved—and at the same time patronisingly said that even though the different Indian leaders had all come to see him on a number of occasions, they would not cross the road to see each other and come to an agreement.

He once more threw in your faces the old slander that Congress wanted a dictatorship of the majority.

And he ended by patting himself on the back because even though the talks had broken down, the Indian leaders would do all in their power to help the defence of India, even unofficially.

"Although these leaders are not prepared at the present moment to partake of responsibilities of sharing in the Government of India, yet they will extend themselves in order to do anything they can to assist in an unofficial capacity in the defence of India."

*Bombay Chronicle*, April 23, 1942.

Cripps surprised Nehru in this period even as Linlithgow had surprised Gandhiji in the last phase. You couldn't believe that the British Imperialists who were in such a tight corner would really break the talks in the manner in which they actually did break them. Many of you argued that they could not afford to take such a suicidal step, particularly when the Axis powers were advancing so rapidly. Many of you privately said that Cripps would be back from Karachi and that even if he does leave India, he would have to return from Cairo.

Pandit Nehru, the leader of the non-belligerency section of the Working Committee which from December to April spoke for the Congress as a whole was annoyed and puzzled by the role of Cripps and it was his puzzled state of mind that led him to a dim realisation that the Imperialist policy was to provoke the Indian people. He warned against falling into the trap. In a Press Conference held on April 12, 1942, he said:

"The issues before the country are so grave that no

responsible person can talk lightly about them in terms of bitter reaction to events. We cannot afford to be bitter, because bitterness clouds the mind and affects judgment at a grave crisis."

*Bombay Chronicle*, April 13, 1942.

## Your Two Voices Again

The apparent unity between the two groups in the Working Committee—the non-belligerency group which had till then spoken for the Congress and the neutrality group, which had remained silent,—now began to disintegrate under the impact of the failure of the Cripps negotiations. The Working Committee once again began to speak with two voices.

Pandit Nehru talked of organising independent resistance to the Japs, of "how to organise our own war effort on our own basis of a free and independent India."

He said :

"It is our duty, the Congressmen's duty and the duty of other persons to carry out the programme of self-protection and self-sufficiency to the utmost. *It may be we would have to take up guerilla warfare.* I don't know what the Congress may decide. But it is this foundation, and this organisation that we are building up that will ultimately help us to meet the present situation. My general advice is : Do not submit or surrender, do not give supplies, non-co-operate with the aggressor, embarrass him in every way. Fighting will be done by the armed forces."

*Bombay Chronicle*, April 13, 1942.

If Pandit Nehru argued in favour of independent measures against the external Jap peril, Rajaji attempted to solve the internal problem of unity. He came out openly in support of Pakistan and wanted Congress to accept it as a "necessary evil" and forge unity with the League. He said someone would have to swallow this poison and only the Congress was strong enough to do it.

The neutrality group whose ideological leader was Gandhiji fought against this line of independent activity. Gandhiji wrote :

"I am, therefore, not perturbed by the 'apostasy' either of Jawaharlal or Rajaji. *They will return to non-violence with renewed zest, strengthened by the failure of their effort.*"

*Harijan* p. 136, April 26, 1942.

Stripped of the moral-ethical form in which it is put, this only meant that the non-belligerency group having failed to bring about a settlement, they would ultimately have to agree to neutrality, because, as Gandhiji himself said :

"To aid the British effort in the violent way without any official connection and after the failure of the recent negotiations appears to me to court national disgrace."

*Harijan*, p. 136, April 26, 1942.

The Working Committee thus spoke with two voices. Two outlooks came face to face in the Allahabad AICC (April 1942). But once again you, the Working Committee, wanted to present a united front and came to a compromise, which found its expression in the official resolution on the war :

"If India were free she would have determined her own policy and *might have kept out of the war*, though her sympathies would in any event, have been with the victims of aggression."

Pandit Nehru openly admitted it was a compromise resolution. He said :

"We have to strike a course between two sentiments. One side is our difference with Britain. On the other side *some of us, have the fear of the Japanese and of the consequences of an Axis victory.*"

*Bombay Chronicle*, May 2, 1942.

At the Allahabad AICC blood and thunder speeches were made against the British Government : "We will not make any more moves for a settlement" ; and the big stick was wielded against Mr. Jinnah and the League. The attitude was one of

supreme self-confidence: the British must come down, Jinnah must come round, because we have the people behind us.

But the spirit was diffidence itself. Pandit Pant moved the main resolution. It was pathetic to hear him say:

"In a war the country is defended differently. I believe that if we had been given the opportunity consistent with our dignity for sacrifice then we would have defended our country. And if we are being prevented from doing so the blame for this lies with the British. *They neither allow us to live honourably nor to die honourably.*"

*Notes of the session taken by our stenographer.*

## Our Consistent Stand

We Communist members of the AICC were pained to hear the nation's leaders speak thus. We asked: Which is that power on earth that can prevent us from rousing the patriotism of our people, to fight the Japs in defence of our homes, the honour of our women and the freedom of our Motherland?

Dr. Ashraf said at the AICC:

"The language of the leaders is a strange one of defeatism. Maulana talks of the narrow path where on either side there is a precipice and death faces us. He talks of the British Government not allowing us to call India our home. This is not the way of giving a lead. Congress must stand for life and not death. We say: unite the people and force a settlement."

*Notes by our stenographer.*

On the question of unity with the Muslim League, Rajaji's line was opposed by everyone including Pandit Nehru.

Pandit Nehru, as has become usual with him in recent years when faced with a difficult problem, lost his temper instead of finding a way and declared that:

"the whole idea of Pakistan hurt anyone who had grown up and worked in India. The thing was becoming intolerable. He doubted if any reasonable or sensible person

thought of Pakistan reasonably and sensibly, unless that person was also at the same time opposed to the whole idea of Indian independence."

*Bombay Chronicle, May 3, 1942.*

In spite of ours being an illegal party, we put our view before the AICC members through our Draft Resolution entitled "All-in National Unity For All-out People's Resistance to the Jap Fascist Aggressors" and through the Appeal to the AICC members, printed illegally and distributed at the session. Here is what we said on the immediate needs:

"The immediate task, dictated by our patriotism, is to adopt and work out a practical line of action which rises above past prejudices and abstract principles, and enables the Congress to take the initiative for an all-out national resistance against the aggressor, unifying and co-ordinating all efforts, which hit the enemy and which defend and protect the people, whether made by the people, Government or the army."

*Communist Draft Resolution for AICC.*

We hope you will see that ours was a clear consistent and realistic stand that overcame past prejudices against the League, abstract principles of non-violence, and the old habit of non-cooperation. We placed before the AICC a concrete definition of the principle of self-determination and wanted the Congress to accept the right of every nationality in India to form an autonomous State and the right of Muslim nationality States to secede from the Indian Union if they so chose. We could arrive at this concrete plan because we alone saw that Indian defence was the way to Indian freedom, that the more we united our people and came forward to defend India as our country the less the British would be able to retain it as their colony.

Our view did not find favour with either group, the non-belligerency group of Pandit Nehru and the neutrality group of Gandhiji, Sardar Patel and others. These two groups themselves had already come to a head-on conflict at the Working Committee meeting.

## Neutrality Versus Non-Belligerency

In fact it was at this Allahabad meeting of the Working Committee in April-May 1942 that Gandhiji's neutrality stand worked out its logical expression in *Quit India*.

We have to rely for the purpose of this section on the minutes of the meeting published in the Government pamphlet, *Congress Responsibility for Disturbances*. Much as we hate this Tottenham pamphlet we have to do so because no other record is available to us and you yourselves have not contradicted it.

In the draft resolution for the AICC sent by Gandhiji the main points were :

(1) "Japan's quarrel is not with India. She is warring against the British Empire."

(2) "If India were freed her first step would probably be to negotiate with Japan."

(3) If the British withdrew, India would be able to defend herself in the event of the Japanese or any aggressor attacking India.

(4) "The AICC is therefore of opinion that the British should withdraw from India."

(5) If Japan attacks we must non-violently non-co-operate with her and not bend our knee to the aggressor.

(6) Nor may we assist the British in any active manner.

(7) They desire our help only as slaves—a position we can never accept.

(8) The scorched earth policy should not be applied to anything except war material if under certain circumstances it becomes a military necessity.

(9) Foreign soldiers in India are harmful to India's interests and must be withdrawn.

Pages 46-47.

The fight against this was led by Pandit Nehru who categorically declared :

"Japan is an imperialist country. Conquest of India is their plan. If Babu's approach is accepted we become

passive partners of the Axis Powers. This approach is contrary to the Congress policy for the last two years and a half. The Allied countries will have a feeling that we are their enemies. . . . It is Gandhiji's feeling that Japan and Germany will win. This feeling unconsciously governs this decision. The approach in the draft is different from mine."

Pages 42-43.

Discussion revealed two outlooks, basically different. Pandit Nehru tried his utmost to emphasise the points of agreement and narrow down the differences. He said :

"There is no difference among us about (1) our reactions to Government and (2) our total inability to co-operate with the Government. Our programme of self-sufficiency and self-protection helps the Government but that cannot be helped. (3) *We do not embarrass the British war effort because that in itself would mean aid to the invader*. We agree on these points but we have different ways of getting at them. *It is true that since my approach is different my emphasis too would be different.*"

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It was Sardar Patel on the other hand who emphasised the differences and said that :

"We have ever since the outbreak of the war tried to pull together. But it may not be possible on this occasion. Gandhiji has taken a definite stand. If his background is unsuitable to some members of the Committee there is the other background which is unsuitable to us. . . . I have placed myself in the hands of Gandhiji. *I feel that he is instinctively right, the lead he gives in all critical situations.* In Bombay at the time of the AICC meeting there was a difference in approach but the door to negotiations was closed. In Bardoli it was made clear that the door was open and our sympathies were with the Allies. *It is time the door is finally closed after the repeated insults heaped upon us. I agree with the draft before us. If there is any pro-fascist hint in the draft let it be removed.*"

It was a national calamity. At the time of the gravest crisis that faced us in our long history, the national leadership was itself confused, divided in its counsels. So much so that the Congress President Maulana Azad himself had to ask :

“What is our position? Shall we tell the British Government to go and allow the Japanese and Germans to come or do we want the British Government to stay and stem the new aggression?”

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There was widespread confusion in the minds of all the leaders. We quote only a few characteristic ones.

Syt. Biswanath Das of Orissa said: “This division of opinion is fatal at this juncture.”

Syt. Bardoloi of Assam: “We are already in the danger zone. There is no time for ideological discussion. Let us concentrate on the present action which cannot be anything other than non-violent non-co-operation.”

Mr. Asaf Ali: “The draft will not make any effective appeal to the Axis powers. Telling the British to withdraw will do nobody any good.”

Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya: “It is a comprehensive and appropriate draft. A time has come when we must realise ourselves.” And so on.

Only the two CSP leaders in the Working Committee were happy with Gandhiji's draft but both made it clear how they understood the stand of neutrality.

Syt. Achyut Patwardhan said: “I would consider the position if the Allies could defeat the Axis. But I see clearly that Britain is going towards the deep. We want to create neutrality. Do not look to Japan or Britain.”

Acharya Narendra Deo: “I am not interested in defeating Hitlerite Germany.”

## Patch Work Unity

One has only to look at this picture to know how the nation was already on the brink of a tragedy. Bitterness, confusion, failure to see the reality, lack of faith in our people and helplessness in the face of our problems, this was the dominating theme.

The issues were not thrashed out. No solution could be found for the differences. Rajendra Babu amended Gandhiji's draft, Pandit Nehru amended his own to accommodate the other but the differences and outlooks remained. Seven Working Committee members and five invitees voted for Rajendra Babu's draft. Four Working Committee members and two invitees voted for Pandit Nehru's draft. Rajendra Babu's draft was passed by the Committee.

It is well-known that Pandit Nehru violently disagreed with the policy proposed by the majority and threatened to do to them what he does to us today. A crisis had occurred in the leadership.

So in the evening the President, Maulana Azad, reopened the subject.

“He pleaded with those who supported Rajendra Babu's draft to accept Jawaharlalji's draft and make it a unanimous resolution. *It was the President's opinion that there was practically no difference between the two drafts though the protagonists of both the drafts held that a vital difference in approach persisted.* Supporters of Rajendra Babu's draft yielded to the wish of the President and accepted Jawaharlalji's draft. The draft resolution for the AICC..... was finally passed by the Committee.....”

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This was clearly a patch-work unity. The compromise resolution of Pandit Nehru dropped the entire neutrality part of the other resolution, the Quit India demand, the call to withhold active support from the Allies. The only concession it made, while affirming its “antipathy to Nazism and Fascism as to Im-

perialism," was to say that a free India *might decide to keep out of the war.*

Nevertheless the majority group in the Working Committee voted for this resolution so as to put a unanimous resolution **before** the AICC. But it did not solve any problem.

## Differing Interpretations

Each group interpreted it as it liked. Gandhiji, who had been the most considerate towards Britain in distress during the first phase of the war, had become enormously embittered. In the columns of the *Harijan*, he gave vent to this bitterness. Instead of waiting for the Working Committee to decide the policy as he usually did, he put forth his demand of "Quit India" in the *Harijan*. He saw thousands of foreign soldiers pouring into India, millions of his own people not being able to play their part and said :

"I see no Indian freedom peeping through all this preparation for the so-called defence of India. It is a preparation pure and simple for the defence of the British Empire, whatever may be asserted to the contrary. If the British left India to her fate, as they had to leave Singapore, non-violent India would not lose anything. Probably the Japanese would leave India alone."

*Harijan*, p. 128, April 26, 1942.

And in extreme bitterness he wrote :

"The Nazi power has risen as a nemesis to punish Britain for her sins of exploitation and enslavement of the Asiatic and African races."

How tragic a picture it was. Here was Gandhiji, the undisputed leader of the Congress, echoing only the blind bitterness, the ignorance and prejudice of the *bazar*.

All this roused a big howl in the world press. Friends of India were puzzled and pained. Our enemies both Fascist and Imperialist were happy ; at last, they thought, the Congress leadership was saying things which would go to strengthen them

morally in their preparations to beat down the Congress.

On the other hand Pandit Nehru was himself puzzled and annoyed. As early as April 18, he complained :

"I do not know what to do, but am moving about impelled by a sense of restlessness, feeling oppressed with the idea that while India is being attacked by an enemy and America and Britain and other nations are taking part, I myself feel helpless."

*Gandhi Against Fascism*, p. 129.

But he kept up his anti-Jap spirit :

"We do not want the Germans or the Japanese to come to India. We will fight them with or without arms."

*Times of India*, July 3, 1942.

The Government knew that as long as such a voice rose from the Congress leadership it was difficult for them to suppress the Congress and stave off the Indian demand. It launched a policy of provocation. Significantly enough in Pandit Nehru's own province, several prominent members of the UPPCC were arrested, like Rafi Ahmed Kidwai and Srikrishna Dutt Paliwal. Pandit Nehru's paper, *National Herald* was gagged. The AICC Office was raided.

The bureaucracy had its own carefully thought-out plan : Create blind anti-British sentiment among Pandit Nehru's followers, provoke Pandit Nehru himself to join up with the other group, and thus brand the Congress before the world as defeatist and unreliable so far as defence was concerned.

## Duality Of August Stand

At the Wardha meeting of the Working Committee (July, 1942) came the compromise ; Pandit Nehru on his part was finally prevailed upon to agree to give up his opposition to a threat of struggle. On the other hand, Gandhiji was prevailed upon to agree to put his case for British withdrawal not as the freedom demand of a neutral India but as the urgent need of anti-fascist India and to agree to the "stationing of the armed forces of the Allies in India, should they so desire, in order to

ward off and resist Japanese or other aggression and to protect and help China."

The Wardha resolution of the Working Committee of July 14, 1942, was the beginning of the fatal duality in the August resolution.

It said that frustration due to the failure of Cripps proposals and the clear evidence of British desire to hold on to India had "resulted in a rapid and widespread increase of ill-will against Britain and a growing satisfaction at the success of Japanese arms." "The Working Committee" it went on, "views this development with grave apprehension as this, unless checked, will inevitably lead to a passive acceptance of aggression."

But faith in the Imperialists had not vanished entirely :

"The Congress would be pleased with the British power if it accepts the very reasonable and just proposal herein made not only in the interest of India but also that of Britain and of the cause of freedom to which the United Nations proclaim their adherence."

If this appeal failed to produce a settlement, then the Congress would be compelled reluctantly to launch a widespread non-violent struggle.

The question arises : how could Pandit Nehru who had repeatedly declared that a "struggle" under present circumstances would be suicidal, agree to this ? It can only be explained on the basis that he agreed with others that a mere threat of doing something very big would bring the Imperialists down.

That is why the resolution said that "while the Congress is impatient to achieve its final purpose, *it wishes to take no hasty step* and would like to avoid, in so far as it is possible any course of action that would embarrass the United Nations."

Gandhiji, in pursuance of this tactic of using the *threat* of struggle, clarified his attitude in an interview to the *United Press of India* on July 14, 1942 at Wardha :

"Gandhiji declared that he would not oppose a free India giving military help against violence. That will not

be proper. Once Indian freedom is recognised, ill-will against Britain will turn into good-will and it will be a feather in the British cap."

The Wardha Resolution raised a big howl in the foreign press. Even friends of India were confused by this threat of mass struggle.

In obedience to this pressure the August Resolution changed the Wardha resolution. It opens by saying that the AICC had considered carefully the Working Committee resolution of July 14, and the subsequent events "including the development of the war situation, the *utterances of responsible spokesmen of the British Government, and the comments and criticisms made in India and abroad.*"

Elsewhere in this reply, we give the August Resolution in full. Greater emphasis was put on India's identity with the progressive cause and the whole question of National Government was placed primarily as an urgent need of the Allied cause, in view of India's becoming less and less capable of defending herself and the deterioration in the Russian and Chinese war fronts. A categorical declaration was made about the Provisional National Government :

"Its primary functions must be to defend India and resist aggression with all the armed as well as the non-violent forces at its command, together with its Allied Powers. . . ."

It said :

"The Committee is anxious not to embarrass in any way the defence of China or Russia, whose freedom is precious and must be preserved, or *to jeopardise the defensive capacity of the United Nations.*

Last came the threat of "a mass struggle on the widest possible scale, so that the country might utilise all the non-violent strength it has gathered. . . ."

The fatal duality of the resolution was clear for all the world to see. It was Pandit Nehru's anti-fascist policy and Gandhiji's practice of neutrality just tacked together without any attempt at trying to make them square with each other.

The first part dictated a different course of action than the second. The first was welcomed by the many millions of world democracy. The second was welcomed by the Axis gangsters and the Imperialist plotters.

## No Faith In The People

The threat of struggle was based upon illusions about the conscience of Imperialism and ignorance of its policy.

Why should the Imperialist Churchill listen to Gandhiji and give up the "brightest jewel in the British crown" in exchange for a moral feather in his cap?

To this question, there was no answer, except that the British had lost all their Eastern possessions.

Was it not clear that the Imperialists having already lost all the rest of their Empire in Asia, if anything, would cling more tenaciously to India? Would they not far rather see India in Jap hands with chances of retaking it than give India to Indian hands and lose it altogether?

How was it then that you the foremost leaders of the greatest organisation of our people did not see this? Because you lacked faith in your own people and had illusions about the imperialist rulers.

You were old leaders who did not understand the new reality. Even such of you like Pandit Nehru who had a glimmer of the new reality could not hammer out a new policy for it.

You were too much in the deadly grip of old ideas, old policies, old habits of thought and action. You followed traditional modes of action in a new situation. And you passed a resolution whose duality gave the Imperialists the chance to throw the country into a crisis and cost the people dear.

We Communists were a new, though weak, and vital force in our national movement. We warned against the consequences, we sharply drew attention to the duality. But you treated us with disdain. You felt that the way we were going, we were cutting our own throats, and losing popularity,—committing suicide, as Pandit Nehru himself told one of us.

It is not you who were leading the nation. You were being led into bitterness and desperation by the enslavers of our nation.