

## X. GANDHIJI'S FAST AND AFTER

EXCEPT FOR A WHILE, WE WERE NOT SUBMERGED BY the August upsurge. But it subsided as spontaneously as it had risen. Only a few groups remained theorising about the past and speculating about the future. The mass of Congressmen outside felt confused, saw no way to end the country's humiliation.

It is in such a background that Gandhiji's fast began on February 9, 1943. It stirred Congressmen outside as deeply as the August arrests had done, but instead of a mass upsurge this time there was mass helplessness in the limbs and words of Congressmen. We contacted thousands of them during the period of his fast in our campaign for his immediate release. They felt that the country then had not even the strength to get him out and they talked like being personally humiliated. We felt tearful ourselves but we kept our legs and lungs working because our Party teaches us never to lose faith in our people, never to lose hope for our country.

If Linlithgow's insolent words—that he would risk Gandhiji's death rather than agree to his release—shocked the wits out of an average Congressman outside the prison-walls, Gandhiji's own words about the August Resolution and the aftermath made them and the whole country think things over. The Gandhi-Viceroy Correspondence played a great role in clarifying Congressmen's ideas.

As we have stated above, the controversy as yet was between us on the one hand and the Congress Socialists, Forward Blocists and their allied Congressmen on the other, and the mass of Congressmen did not know what was the *official* Congress stand on issues as they had risen and on events as they had taken place and which were acutely controversial. Slowly but surely Congressmen had come to say to themselves: What these people are saying and doing was not and could not be Congress policy. But they only talked this in whispers.

If one read your report against us, it would appear as though the Gandhi-Viceroy correspondence had never taken place. It would have been immaterial in our answer to you and on the

problems you have raised if you had yourself not made Gandhiji the Congress spokesman and leader to implement your own 8th August Resolution.

We are therefore taking the liberty of quoting him on the August movement and the points at issue between us and our opponents because they either directly or by implication are also the points you are using against us.

This is what we said and what Gandhiji said on responsibility for the August disturbances.

### WHO WAS RESPONSIBLE ?

#### COMMUNISTS :

P. C. Joshi in his Press statement of August 9, 1943—only a few hours after you all were arrested :

“The insolent imperialists have struck the first blow. The Congress kept the door for negotiations open. The bureaucratic Government has answered it with the arrest of the entire national leadership and more. The Government is the *provocateur*, it has let loose forces of anarchy and in its blindness seeks to create an anti-national anti-Congress front. . . .”

#### GANDHIJI :

Gandhiji, in his letter of August 14, 1942, written to the Viceroy only five days after his and your arrests :

“The Government of India were wrong in precipitating the crisis. . . . You would have found in them (his AICC speeches) that I would not hastily begin action. You should have taken advantage of the interval foreshadowed in them and explored every possibility of satisfying the Congress demand.”

### FREEDOM REVOLUTION OR NATIONAL CRISIS ?

“The way the Government is going means hell for our beloved country, bloody repression provoking spontaneous riots. Trampling our national demand underfoot will transform patriotic anti-British feeling into defeatist pro-Fascist sentiments. In the name of national defence, the Government is weakening the very forces on which successful national defence depends. The way the Government is going means another Burma in India.”

*P. C. Joshi's Press Statement, August 9, 1942.*

“I venture to suggest that it is a long draft upon the credulity of mankind to say that the acceptance of the (Congress) demand ‘would plunge India into confusion’. Anyway the summary rejection of the demand has plunged the nation and Government into confusion. The Congress was making every effort to identify India with the Allied cause.”

*Gandhiji's letter to the Viceroy, August 14, 1942.*

### WHY GOVERNMENT STRUCK ?

The Editorial of *People's War*, August 16, 1942 is a crucial one which defines Communist policy and practice. In it we answered the Government's allegations and wrote :

“Imperialist arrogance is driving them mad, they cannot give up the greed for our Motherland, as their possession. They are, therefore, out to destroy

Gandhiji in the above-quoted letter says :

“If notwithstanding the common cause, the Government's answer to the Congress demand is hasty repression, they will not wonder if I draw the inference that it was not so much the Allied cause that weighed with the British Government, as the unexpressed determination to cling to

our national strength. They are strangulating and not serving India, sabotaging and not strengthening the Allied cause."

### *PATRIOTIC RAGE OR NON-VIOLENT REVOLUTION ?*

In the same editorial we wrote :

"The blitz of brutal repression let loose by the imperial bureaucracy has set the country aflame. It is an attempt to goad the accumulated anger and discontent of the people into unorganised and spontaneous outbursts and then meet them with lathis, bullets and tear-gas. It is a suicidal culmination of the imperialist policy of keeping our nation paralysed and powerless even on the eve of the Fascist aggressor's onslaught."

### *WHAT PEOPLE SHOULD DEMAND*

P. C. Joshi in his Press statement on August 9, said :

". . . Our united voice demands release of the Congress leaders and start-

the possession of India as an indispensable part of Imperial policy. This determination led to the rejection of the Congress demand and precipitated repression."

Gandhiji in his letter to the Home Secretary, Government of India, dated September 23, 1942 wrote :

"The wholesale arrests of Congress leaders seemed to have made the people wild with rage to the point of losing self-control. I feel that the Government, not the Congress, are responsible for the destruction that has taken place."

Gandhiji in the above letter writes :

"The only right course for the Government seems to me to be to release the Congress leaders, to with-

ing of negotiations to meet India's national demand. This is demanded in the common interests of the Indian people and of the peoples of the United Nations. Every day lost is a day gained by the Fascist aggressors."

draw all repressive measures and explore ways and means of conciliation. Surely the Government have ample resources to deal with any overt act of violence. Repression can only breed discontent and bitterness."

This is Gandhiji's own way. We were no liberals to say that you must be released or tried. To us the British Imperialists were the aggressors, not only against you as the leaders of the Congress, but against the just demand of India for alliance with the free world against the Fascist aggressors on the basis of Indian freedom. To us your cause was just and you were the accredited representatives of our common cause. We therefore demanded your release without any equivocation and immediate negotiations for Indo-British settlement not only in Indian and British interests but in the interests of the great cause of world freedom itself.

We hope it will be generally agreed that inside the Congress it is Gandhiji and the Communists who try to guide their course of action on the basis of fixed principles and stick to them at all costs and sometimes get reduced to the position of complete isolation from their fellow Congressmen.

We and Gandhiji had differed violently, not only in the remote but also in the immediate past.

## **Gandhiji - Principles And Practice**

Gandhiji guides his course of action by what he calls the principle of non-violence and formulates and reformulates it by the test of practice. His non-violence led him to the attitude of neutrality to war in the period between your release in December 1941 and the August Resolution of 1942, but when he found Pandit Nehru and world progressive opinion protesting against it that it

would *in practice* boil down to a pro-Jap attitude, he agreed to let Nehru draft the proper attitude towards the war.

But he insisted on incorporating the practice that emerged from his attitude of neutrality, *viz.*, threat of struggle, in case Nehru's attitude produced no practical results, i.e., if the British failed to agree to the establishment of National Government.

After August 9, when he saw that the practical results of his own stand turned out to be wholly *against* his conception of non-violence and were diametrically opposed to the plans and calculations he had in mind before August 8, he denied responsibility for them with a clean conscience.

He tests his principle by practice. It led him to an attitude of neutrality and to let Nehru and world progressives correct him in words. It led him to the threat of struggle but the evidence of the aftermath of August 8 led him to correct his conclusions again, repudiate imperialist slanders against his own *bona fides* and Congress responsibility for post-August happenings.

Dogged insistence on his own principle and honest examination of its practical results led him to formulate and reformulate his position in terms of the call of truth. His non-violence, abstractly applied to living forces of the world, led to wrong policies but re-examination of the results of his own policy in terms of his own principle of non-violence enabled him to correct himself by stages.

It is only the great who have such mental strength, such scrupulous regard for truth. It did not matter to us how Gandhiji came to the right conclusion, we admired him when he agreed to the first part of the August Resolution and we were troubled about the second to which he, in turn, had made Nehru agree. We admired him again for seeing clearly where the second part had led in practice and for repudiating his own and Congress responsibility for what was done in pursuance of the same.

Our principle is Communism. From its basic tenets we educate ourselves to get the scientific outlook to understand the laws of life and formulate the methods of changing life by the actions of men, in the interests of our own and all peoples. The understanding it gave us for the period was that the *defence* of the country was the prime duty of the hour, anything that went

against it went against *our* life and liberty and of all peoples; everything that enabled our people to take it in their hands (i.e., through National Government) took us to our own liberation and enabled us to play our role for world liberation.

Thus, applying the test of defence to the August Resolution, we saw its contradiction and where the second part would lead the country.

Again, applying the same test to post-August happenings enabled us to keep our heads cool and go on doing our duty to our country, helping Congressmen to see how what was being *done* could not lead to what was being *demande*d and *desired*.

Thus it is that though we and Gandhiji started from entirely different principles, since the aim was common and both have scrupulous regard for truth, we could come to common conclusions and there was such remarkable coincidence in what Gandhiji was writing from jail to the Viceroy and what we were telling on our own the people outside.

If the immediate aim is one, and one has the courage and the strength to examine living reality truthfully, the practical conclusions emerge common despite different ideological principles.

## Gandhi-ites And Congress Socialists Split

The mass of Congressmen who had read our literature or heard our speakers, spontaneously said: Gandhiji has said what the Communists alone were saying so far.

He had repudiated Congress responsibility for struggle but, in his own generous way, not those who had organised it. But his clear-cut stand was enough to isolate and disintegrate them. The only thing that had kept them together was the name of the Congress and the honest conviction that they were *rightly* carrying out the Congress resolution. Gandhiji's Correspondence scattered all their claims to the winds.

They could not use the Congress name.

The first to split away were groups of Gandhi-ites who had gone underground and they banded themselves separately into Satyagraha Councils that repudiated sabotage and violence but

stuck to symbolic Satyagraha, whenever possible, to keep the flag flying as their defiance to Imperialist insolence.

The Congress Socialists lost mass sympathy, they could no more claim that they were carrying the Congress banner forward. With Gandhiji's repudiation of Congress responsibility for "struggle", their main capital with the masses—the use of Congress name—was gone, and they had to take a stand on their own—a job they had never learnt to do.

Among Congressmen however their line was different :

"Gandhiji has repudiated us ; will you also repudiate us ? It means throwing us to the wolves, handing us over to the police," they argued and pleaded. "Whatever we did—was it not in good faith, against the British and in pursuance of the Congress resolution itself ?

"Gandhiji would not deviate from non-violence but what about Imperialist violence ? We gave the people's answer ; we may have gone beyond non-violence but who believes in non-violence besides Gandhiji ?

"We did all we could, must we be kicked aside because we failed ?"

They got the emotional sympathy of Congressmen for their sufferings but lost their respect for their political understanding and capacity to lead the country. What had been proved in life had been finally settled by Gandhiji's words, which repudiated what they had said and done, but did not repudiate them personally. Their *bona fides* had not been attacked, their motive recognised and admired.

While Gandhiji thought of individual fasting, we intensified mass campaigning.

With Gandhiji's Correspondence as the basis we ran a campaign to popularise its significance and work out its implications. Gandhiji had left the initiative with the Viceroy. We went to the masses with the message about what patriots must now do. We showed the way out and popularised it.

## Deadlock Or Settlement ?

The political battle then was :

1) AGAINST deadlock as the Imperialist way to ruin our country but preserve it as their colony ; or FOR deadlock as "the breathing time to organise for the next round of revolution."

2) FOR settlement to get the destiny of our country in our hands and play our role in the camp of the United Nations as destroyers of the Jap Fascist dream and the chief liberators of South-East Asia, or AGAINST settlement as a "surrender to British Imperialism, preserving its rule over our own country and allowing it to reconquer South-East Asia."

In short, deadlock gave them the chance to organise their next revolution, when the Japs came. Settlement gave us the chance, *not* to surrender to the British, but to take our destiny in our hands. Gandhiji had taken the first step in his Correspondence, the Working Committee would take the others when it came out. These were their own most widely known calculations and arguments. You can see their clear blue-print in their printed words we have quoted earlier.

We did not matter to them, for they thought and said that we had already sold ourselves to the British Imperialists and yoked ourselves to the chariot of the Imperialist war.

They were bothered about the possibility of your getting out of jail and blowing up their "revolutionary" plans. Gandhiji had done enough damage already. They had, of course, the dream of liberating you, after they had made the "revolution" through the entry of Jap bayonets from without and through their own sabotage activities within our country.

Had it been normal times we would have ignored them ; but with famine within and Fascism without, all of you in jail and political life in the country at a dead end, we did our best to rouse the people for a way out by popularising the following slogans :

1) Deadlock means death for our people, the continued domination of British Imperialists and the menace of Jap aggression.

2) For immediate Indo-British settlement on the basis of National Government.

For India's rightful part in the camp of the United Nations.

3) For immediate internal settlement on the basis of self-determination in the form of Congress-League joint front.

4) To achieve the above, immediate release of you all and legalisation of the Congress.

## Response Among Leaguers Too

We got a wide response for these slogans. The mass of people who saw us work and agitate said that we had revived political life again. Most popular, naturally enough, was the exposure of deadlock and the demand for release. But we found that we got response from a larger section of Congressmen than we had ever won since August 1942.

Among the Leaguers we found that their earlier suspicions that we were Fifth Column of the Congress began to disappear, they were thunderstruck to hear non-Muslims explain Pakistan, as they said, "better than was done from the League platform itself." All that we did was to express solidarity with their just demand, because the principle on which it was based was of freedom itself—self-determination. We explained how we saw the relation between the freedom of their homelands with the freedom of India as a whole.

And when we pleaded with them to join the campaign for the Congress leaders' release as their elementary patriotic duty and as the best investment for a dispassionate consideration of their demands by non-Muslims we found them not only listening to us keenly but responding enthusiastically to the call for Congress-League unity to break the deadlock. Months before the Congress-League united front in the Assembly took place, long before the Gandhi-Jinnah meeting, we began popularising the need for our political life to flow that way.

After the Gandhi-Viceroy correspondence had cleared the

Congress mind we could bring Congress and League leaders on to the same platform against deadlock and for suggesting ways-out.

Several Congress leaders began accepting self-determination, e.g., Syts. Bardoloi, Sri Prakasa and Gopinath Srivastava, all of them leaders of provincial rank.

Several League leaders began demanding the release of Congress leaders though the Central League leadership had remained silent.

In Bengal, the entire League Assembly Party supported the resolution demanding Gandhiji's unconditional release and Khwaja Sir Nazimuddin, the Leader of the Provincial League and of the Assembly Party, expressed his hope that Gandhiji would be out and Hindu-Muslim unity would be achieved.

In Cawnpore a joint meeting of the League and non-Muslims was held presided over by Maulana Hasrat Mohani demanding Gandhiji's release.

The Hon. Haji Mahomed Hussain of Allahabad, a Muslim Leaguer in the Council of State, and several district and town League leaders from Maharashtra, Bengal and Behar demanded Gandhiji's unconditional release such as Murza Abbas Baig of Dhulia (Maharashtra), Maulvi Abdul Gani of Berhampore (Bengal), local League leaders of Chhapra (Behar) etc.

In Orissa the Provincial Muslim League co-operated in the *Release Gandhiji* campaign and Mr. M. A. Anim, the Provincial League Organiser clearly stated :

"National unity is the only way to achieve National Government and so in the interests of the Mussalmans of India we demand the release of Mahatma Gandhi for without his release no unity is possible."

*People's War*, March 7, 1943.

We could multiply examples.

When the general mood was "nothing can be done", we agitated that to acquiesce in deadlock was to acquiesce in slavery and thus roused large numbers of Congressmen and Leaguers to consider the way out.

If deadlock was the policy of British Imperialism, as was patent enough, how could the campaign against it be the work of the friends of British Government, as you paint the role of our Party in those days in all your speeches today?