

XI. GANDHIJI'S RELEASE AND AFTER

THE LONG FAST AT HIS OLD AGE AND THE SUBSEQUENT loss of Kasturba led to a serious deterioration in Gandhiji's health. The alien bureaucrats had claimed that they could organise our national economy and only produced the Bengal Famine which killed 35 lacs ; they had boasted that the Japs were being cleared out of Burma and that they could not attack India, this too was proved a lie. They could no longer resist the popular demand in India and abroad for Gandhiji's release and they had to release him.

Great was his responsibility as the greatest leader of our country and all those who met him saw how much greater he felt it because he was charged personally with the responsibility of leading the country through to its immediate aim while you, all his life-long colleagues, were behind the bars.

His own accumulated experience of two decades as the national leader and his own responsibility, laid on him by the August resolution, impelled him to make *new* and *positive* moves towards all the three burning problems facing the country.

(1) Indo-British settlement.

(2) Internal Indian settlement between the Congress and the League.

(3) Unity of the Congress, review of the role of different Congress groups in the period following 1942.

Interview With Gelder

He made a move towards achieving Indo-British settlement through the interview with Stuart Gelder, correspondent of the *News Chronicle*.

He emphatically repudiated not only what had been done in the name of the Congress even more clearly than in his earlier Correspondence with the Viceroy but he repudiated also what was being planned in the name of the Congress in his absence.

Gandhiji wanted to meet the members of the Working Committee because :

"The whole situation has to be reviewed anew. The point therefore for me to discuss with the Working Committee is to know *how they react to the knowledge I have gained since my release.*

I have to take up the thread that was broken by the Government in 1942. I was first to negotiate and on failure, to offer civil resistance, if I thought it necessary."

Times of India, July 11, 1944.

Asked whether he would start civil disobedience if the Working Committee was released, in other words, whether he would start a struggle, Gandhiji said :

"I have no intention of offering civil disobedience today. I cannot take the country back to 1942. History can never be repeated. Even without the authority of the Congress, if I wanted to do it, I could start civil disobedience today on the strength of my supposed influence with the masses, but I would be doing so merely to embarrass the British Government. This cannot be my object."

Times of India, July 11, 1944.

He offered a concrete basis for immediate negotiations with the British Government.

Gandhiji said :

"There was a difference between what he would ask today and what he asked in 1942.

(1) Today India would be satisfied with a National Government in full control of the civil administration, chosen from elected members of Central Assembly. This would involve a declaration now, of Indian Independence after the war."

(2) It would give the military, all railway, post and other communication they required, although these are under National Government's control.

(3) The Viceroy and Commander-in-Chief would have complete control of the Armies.

(4) In Civil Affairs, the Viceroy would be like the King of England—guided by responsible Ministers.

(5) The National Government would offer 'advice and criticism on military matters' and through the portfolio of Defence in the hands of National Government 'which would be genuinely interested in the defence of the country and would be in a position of being able to give valuable help in shaping policies'.

(6) That he sought an interview with the Viceroy "with a view to helping and not to hindering the Allied effort."

Times of India, July 11, 1944.

We welcomed Gandhiji's moves as positive steps against deadlock.

"By his proposals made through Mr. Gelder as by his endorsement of Rajaji's formula of self-determination for Congress-League settlement, Gandhiji has seized the initiative in the battle against the political deadlock in India. He has delivered a final death blow to the conspiracy of the Amerys and Linlithgows, who slandered the Congress as pro-Japanese and defeatist."

People's War, Vol. III, No. 3, July 16, 1944.

But we also forecast their failure.

As early as May 21, 1944, within a fortnight of Gandhiji's release we had warned editorially that the primary emphasis was being placed on settlement with Wavell and that this would be to court failure. We said :

"The primary place is given to negotiations with Wavell and the secondary one to settlement with Jinnah. This, however, is the way only to get a knock on the head. . . . Deadlock has been imposed by the British rulers, settlement is desired by Indian patriots of all parties. To go to Wavell first is to suffer humiliation and court defeat. To go to

Jinnah first is to unite with our brother, thereby become stronger together and, what is patent enough, invincible. Wavell can be successfully dealt with only after settling with Jinnah, but not before."

People's War, Vol. II, No. 47, May 21, 1944.

Most of the Congressmen felt that the adamant attitude of the British Government only proved their greater strength through victories in war and our greater weakness through failure of the August movement.

We explained to Congressmen that through victories against Hitler, not Churchill, but the peoples of Europe were becoming stronger and making their own history. Very few believed us because in their defeatism they thought Anglo-American Imperialism was becoming stronger through the war and Churchill and Amery were permanent fixtures for the immediate future of Indo-British settlement. And hence they argued that if Wavell had spurned Gandhiji like Linlithgow before, it only proved how right they were and how wrong we were.

We argued that Wavell was not in a stronger position than Gandhiji if Gandhiji faced him not alone but together with Mr. Jinnah. The British Viceroy would continue to sit on top of a divided India and dare insult its leaders only on the basis of the firm Imperialist belief that Indian leaders could never unite. Not National Government but national humiliation was in store for India as long as Congress and League did not unite. This was our reading of the situation.

Gandhi-Jinnah Meeting

After Wavell's refusal to negotiate Gandhiji wrote to Mr. Jinnah. The urge for it had already been created by living experience and Wavell's refusal. We alone were campaigning for it and getting some response but such a meeting was considered by the mass of Congressmen as "out of question." But when the Gandhi-Jinnah talks did come about and as the negotiations proceeded, hopes of its success leapt as high as there

were of struggle on the eve of August 8 and still later of the success of the Simla Conference.

We alone saw through the mood of wishful thinking which expressed the right urge but took no stock of difficulties.

In an article entitled, *They Must Not Fail*, P. C. Joshi warned against blind optimism and wrote :

"Just because we realise that through Congress-League Unity alone lies the salvation of our country, we are also acutely conscious of the difficulties to be surmounted and the hurdles to be crossed before such a united national front can become an established fact. . . .

"Gandhiji will press for a plebiscite on the ground that a sovereign and separate state cannot be constituted without ascertaining the freely expressed will of the people of the region. Mr. Jinnah may object that it is the birthright of the Muslims to be free and independent in their homelands where they are in a majority. . . .

"If the two stick to their specific points of view, . . . there is no hope of any agreement."

People's War, August 20, 1944.

And this is what actually happened, how the talks failed.

After failure despite the appeal of both the leaders, the press created a foul partisan atmosphere rather than clear the ground for fair and frank discussion of the issues involved. Only our criticism was non-partisan and constructive.

In an article entitled, *They Must Meet Again*, by P. C. Joshi, written on the breakdown of the Gandhi-Jinnah talks, we wrote about the blind spot of each of the two leaders. We said :

"What Gandhiji does not see at all is this :

(1) that it is the freedom urge of the Muslims that expressed itself in the Pakistan demand ;

(2) that the mass movement led and organised by the League is the national movement of the Muslims for unfettered freedom in their own homelands ;

(3) that it is not so much a question of what Mr. Jinnah says or does not say but the real problem is one of *winning over one-fourth of our peoples for a joint freedom struggle.*"

"What Mr. Jinnah on his part does not see is this :

(1) that Pakistan will never be willingly conceded by the British Imperialists, but has to be won through a joint struggle for Indian freedom as a whole ;

(2) that the Congress movement is not a movement for Hindu domination, but for Indian freedom ;

(3) that the natural allies of Pakistan are his brother Hindus and that there is no hope for Pakistan unless he can win over his brothers, their organisation and their leader. . . .

"The tragedy of the Gandhi-Jinnah negotiation was that Gandhiji failed to see freedom behind Mr. Jinnah's demand and the latter failed to see democracy behind Gandhiji's conditions. And both stand by the principles of freedom and democracy."

The followers of both put the blame on the leader of the other side and saw no hope for the future unless the other side would bend. We alone made constructive proposals based on whatever advance had been registered in the negotiations and with the commonly agreed as the starting point and with a view to bridge the gulf and not widen it further.

Our Concrete Proposals

In the same article "*They Must Meet Again*" we put forward the common platform on which unity could be forged by the two leaders. The concrete proposals we made were :—

"(1) *A United Front* of Congress and League to realise the *basic aims* of both the organisations. *No unilateral settlement by either party with the British Government.*

"(2) Unqualified recognition of the right of Muslim

nationalities to establish independent sovereign states in Muslim homelands in terms of the Lahore Resolution of the League.

"(3) The Pakistan State to be framed through a separate Constituent Assembly based on adult franchise of all the inhabitants, Muslim and non-Muslim alike in the Pakitsan zone.

(This we showed would solve the two seemingly conflicting demands, firstly of *People's Sovereignty* of Mr. Jinnah and secondly the Plebiscite or *People's Will* demand of Gandhiji.)

"(4) The principles on which the boundaries of Pakistan have to be fixed to be clearly defined, that the exercise of the right of Muslim sovereignty does not give a licence to trample underfoot the rights of non-Muslims nor be made the starting point for claiming their lands."

We outlined the principles thus :

"(a) In areas with a clear Muslim majority the Muslims have the right to form their State through their own Constituent Assembly.

"(b) Major territorial adjustments cannot be claimed as of right but can only be made through mutual agreement with brother peoples with whom the common homeland is shared.

"(5) The independent States of Pakistan and Hindustan agree to mutual assistance in defence against all aggressors, and for economic reconstruction to end poverty and famine left by the British, and to build an era of co-prosperity for all our peoples through their own mutual help. To inspire mutual trust the Congress and the League may pledge themselves to draft treaties now, to be ratified through proper State organs at the appropriate time."

People's War, Vol. III, No. 15, October 8, 1944.

While others indulged in fault-finding and mud-slinging we

alone did our best not to be partisan nor did we go defeatist, but rather we strove to work out proposals that could not be refused on the plane of justice, which repudiated all unjust claims and whose urgency lay in the interest of common freedom itself. The claims of justice and the urge of freedom inspired us to constructive thinking while the rest first indulged in wishful thinking, next trusted the leaders to do the job for them and when negotiations failed, began abusing the other leader.

This warned us how great had become the gulf between the freedom urge of our patriots and their understanding of their own problems.

Forged Jinnah-Amery Letters

We will just give you one example.

After the failure of Gandhi-Jinnah negotiations the following letter was printed in a number of newspapers, including *Mathrubhumi* of Bombay and *Nationalist* of Calcutta and it was supposed to be one of a series :

INDIA OFFICE
WHITEHALL

LONDON,
20th August, 1944.

Dear Mr. Jinnah,

I thank you for your letter dated 24th July from Srinagar.

His Majesty's Government cannot but be keenly interested in your forthcoming talks with Mr. Gandhi. I have information from other sources (before your letter actually reached me), that Mr. Gandhi might accept your demand for separation without any major reservations. I should think such a move on the part of Mr. Gandhi is likely to put a different complexion on the whole problem.

I am supremely happy to have your assurance of total Muslim support in the war against Japan and the fact is noted that Congress influence on Muslims is insignificant.

The second point requires further consideration and I

would rather defer discussion on this question till a latter date.

I would be thankful to you if, in the meanwhile, you could possibly answer the following questions :

1. Leaving aside the question of Muslim States federating with autonomous Muslim provinces for future consideration, do you believe that autonomous Muslim provinces will be able to face the grave post-war problems of economic reconstruction and rehabilitation without a strong unified Government at the centre ?

2. If the answer is in the positive, would you enlighten me with relevant statistical information and the method of an alternative approach ?

If the answer is in the negative, how many years would you stipulate for the post-war reconstruction period ? If you suggest, say 10 years, would you ask His Majesty's Government to commit themselves to any definite declaration of policy, before this period is over, about the question of Muslim separation ?

3. Would it do, for example, if this Government, in appreciation of the total and spontaneous support of Indian Muslims declare, at the end of the war with Japan, that in provinces where the Muslims are in absolute majority they must have absolute autonomy, each province, however, being responsible to the Central unified Government ?

4. Before the war against Japan on a total scale begins, however, Mr. Gandhi changes his policy and vows unconditional cooperation with His Majesty in war efforts, what would be your reactions ? Would you, for instance, agree to speedy interim arrangements at the centre and provinces, leaving aside the question of absolute autonomy to Muslim provinces to be considered 'de novo' after peace is signed with Japan ?

M. A. Jinnah, Esq.,
Bombay.

Yours sincerely,
LEOPOLD S. AMERY.

By the internal evidence of the language of the letter and typographical examination of the fascimile by our own typists we came to the immediate conclusion that it was a forgery and in the *People's War*, we proved it to be so to the satisfaction of all our readers and in fact, of any man in his senses.

But the nationalist press splashed it on an all-India scale, most took its authenticity for granted and you can imagine the sort of editorial comments that must have been made. After denials from Mr. Jinnah and Amery came, a few continued to doubt the denials but most did not even ask themselves the question : how is it that we all fell victims to a big political hoax by a third-rate uneducated forger and could not see through it ourselves ? It was a sad reflection on the state of the national mind, of our own political morals. India had been reduced to a state that good normal people had come to a stage that they could believe anything to be possible.

Gandhi-Joshi Correspondence

We sought normal contact with Gandhiji as any political group inside the Congress would to tell him what had happened in the years of his absence—what we had done and what we expected him to do which would help the people and save the country. Instead he gave us some questions which were nothing more than the traditional slanders of anti-Communism, by the reactionaries the world over and which the Congress Socialist and Forward Bloc groups had been uttering in whispers against us to hide their own bankruptcy.

We answered them as best as we could. We thought they were natural enough questions for Gandhiji to ask if persons whom he respected and were responsible men in the Congress told him and still more so because of his own moral-ethical principles. We kept political issues apart deliberately and took up issues of our moral bonafides.

We thought Gandhiji would ask himself what about the political worth of those who can manufacture the worst type of slanders that could be imagined in our country against a whole Party, against a young but quite big brotherhood of patriots, and

put them to him even without a twinge of their own conscience ? We failed and through our failure in this we have come to realise how tough is the battle ahead for our Party and rough the future of our people.

The anti-Communists ran a whole campaign of sending anti-Communist reports to Gandhiji. We kept our distance and preserved our self-respect. Gandhiji took eleven months, only to come to no conclusions.

They ran a whole lying press campaign that Gandhiji had gone against the Communists and the Communists should not be kept inside the Congress. We knew from our own end that they were all lies.

We will give you Gandhiji's own opinion at the time this anti-Communist propaganda was being run among recently released Congressmen and when our own correspondence with him was still continuing.

Here is its full text as it came to us ; it is a note written by Swami Ramanand Tirth, after a discussion with Gandhiji about work with the Communists. The note at the end was added by Gandhiji himself.

“The attitude towards the Communists has been a cause of great mental trouble for me as it has taken a very serious turn in Andhra parts of Nizam's State. Statements and counter-statements have been issued by various Congressmen. This has made the confusion worse confounded. I, therefore, tried to approach Mahatma Gandhi and sought his view. I discussed with him this problem in the presence of Dr. Syed Mahmud. He expressed his views in the following words :

“Communists cannot be excluded from the membership of the Congress. Those who subscribe to the aim and pay the membership fee can be members. The constitution says so. Many protested against this statement of mine. But I have to say what seems to me to be just. As regards elective bodies, it is for those who elect members to decide. If people want them, they will be elected. Communists as such cannot be dealt with nor can any action be taken against the Party as such. Individuals who have acted against the

discipline of the Congress can be liable for action. Communists are after all patriots. And why should Congressmen be afraid of them? This fear arises out of a sense of inferiority and inaptitude. When you mutely work your constructive programme, you should welcome them if they come and work honestly."

"BAPU'S NOTE

This is not for publication. It is only for you. You can act upto it, if you understand this and assimilate it. I am not even advising. But it is my opinion. I have published in part, when necessary, I shall give the public my opinion.

4-2-45.

Sd. (Bapu)."

Swami Ram Tirth is a Hyderabad State Congress leader. We had it in our hand a week after it was written.

We ask you: Is there any group inside the Congress that would not have used such a document from Gandhiji in its own favour?

We, however, did not. This is how we stand on our own legs. This is how we showed our love and respect for Gandhiji and waited for a full democratic discussion inside the Congress itself when the time came.

We had nothing to hide and everything to gain by having to defend our own past role and to play our part in reformulating Congress policy for crying immediate tasks. We alone had not only done constructive practical work, done unity propoganda, but made serious studies of the problems of life, food, production, profiteering and the Hindu-Muslim question. Some of these had already been published by our Publishing House and more were on hand. All of our studies had not only record sales but were highly spoken of by all those who care for facts of life, objective analysis of problems in terms of the welfare of the people.

Congress Workers' Assemblies

Gandhiji had tackled all the three problems facing the country but succeeded in solving none.

(1) Wavell's refusal to Gandhiji even after the Gelder interview only intensified the anti-British feeling among younger Congressmen and the sense of helplessness among the older. Feeling of frustration against the British insolence sought the channel of being insolent and intolerant among ourselves and later became widespread as anti-League and anti-Communist sentiment.

(2) Gandhiji's failure with Mr. Jinnah instead of leading to fresh thinking led to disruptive fault-finding because neither leader took the initiative to explain the failure or suggest lines for constructive thought. We alone did and commanded respect among the serious but the nationalist press was running a campaign with Jinnah as the arch-villain as the main theme, with a fervour it did not even show in popularising the Quit India slogan. The League press on the other hand was attacking Gandhiji and the Congress as wily Hindus who wanted to trap the Muslims.

(3) Gandhiji was attacked as having gone over to the Communists. It was seriously suggested that we had wangled the Gelder interview and tricked him into meeting Mr. Jinnah.

But after both these moves had failed, he who was then accused by them of being pro-Communist, had now become the anti-Communist Gandhiji in the whisper campaign of our opponents.

We considered it too laughable for words and it took us some time to understand that the national mind had been reduced to a stage that such arrant nonsense was seriously popularised.

After Gandhiji's release Congressmen began being released in groups. They themselves, many of them, believed that the August struggle was a Congress struggle in pursuance of the August Resolution and that Gandhiji was being diplomatic in repudiating Congress responsibility for it. Thus they fell easy victims of those who had been so far misusing the Congress name.

The slogans pumped into them were: Gandhiji has

repudiated us and the August martyrs, we have a right to expect your support at least, we kept the banner flying in your absence, British terror proved too much but we also did things which had never been done before : established Congress Raj in some areas for some days at least, while Communists stabbed us in the back and came in the way.

From this, the slogans reorganise the Congress and keep the Communists out, naturally followed. Jailed Congressmen came out with iron in their souls against the British, a vacant mind about happenings outside and they easily lapped up the glorified picture of the past and their anti-British hatred was sought to be turned into anti-Communist hatred by the use of the argument that the "Communists betrayed."

This was the background of Congress Workers' Assemblies. Communist Congressmen were kept out under the plea that it was not a Congress meeting but a private assembly of a section of Congressmen only. But among the people its stand was popularised as Congress decisions. So for the Communists, it *was not* Congress and we could not legitimately claim to get in, be heard etc. But for the people it *was* the Congress that had repudiated the Communists !

Our own respect for the Congress constitution, tradition and sense of democratic discipline kept us out of these Assemblies.

In the Punjab, a Congress Workers' Conference was called at Ludhiana, on 15th December 1944. Over 700 Congress workers went there. But no less than 370 were excluded as Communists or Communist sympathisers. Sardar Sohan Singh Josh, the Chief Whip of the Congress Assembly Party, Sardar Teja Singh Swatantra, also an M.L.A. and a veteran fighter for freedom in the Akali movement, venerable Congressmen who had put in long years of patriotic service as Congressmen, were excluded.

But the excluded Communists did not allow their pain at such a treatment to cloud their patriotic vision. In a resolution, passed by them at a special meeting of the 370, they said :

"In the present difficult situation when the Congress organisation is yet banned, when Congress leaders are yet in

jail, it is the duty of all Congressmen to stand and work together under a single leadership, that of Gandhiji, to work for building unity for the solution of the food crisis, and for the revival of popular activity by which alone the present deadlock can be broken and we can march towards freedom."

People's War, Vol. III, No. 27, December 31, 1944.

Finally they pledged themselves to work under the leadership of the committee set up by the Ludhiana Conference. But their appeal was not heeded. The anti-Communists did not want this at all.

How Anti-Communism Grows

What happened inside these Assemblies will not read a glorious chapter in Congress history.

Most of the resolutions were either formal or negative. Generally, confidence was voted in Gandhiji, but the speeches concentrated fire against Mr. Jinnah. No meeting seriously reviewed in terms of the Gandhi-Viceroy correspondence what had happened in its own province in the post-August period. Only U.P. Congressmen tried to discuss the issue of self-determination on the plane of principle and that too only to go back on Gandhiji's own stand.

No province made any political proposals that would have helped to have broken the deadlock. The general mood was that there is no hope till the war was over and the only thing to do was to reorganise for the next struggle. This was the legal version with a broad "genuine Congress" approach of what *Ninth August* was writing illegally in socialist and revolutionary jargon for the youth.

The real concern was not the political fate of the country, that was taken for granted to be doomed for the time being (unless the Japs came, which could not be said in a Congress meeting). Emphasis was on getting organisational control of the Congress (in case the Japs did not come and Gandhiji went on with "surrendering" to the British and "appeasing" the reactionary Jinnah and managed to get some sort of a settlement,

thus suddenly making the Congress legal). From capturing power it had come down to capturing the Congress.

It was in this background that the Congressmen's Assemblies met, consisting of released Congressmen or even those who had not been to jail, provided all of them supported the August resolution and the movement which followed it.

Factional groupings were made with some established Congress leaders with only one condition that they agreed to take a firm line against the Communists and support of the "August Cadre" was pledged to them in turn. Each thought it was using the other.

Honest Gandhi-ites were morally terrorised into silence by an appeal not to betray those who had died fighting for the country and were being hunted.

They were made to swallow their conscience by requests made in the name of 'freedom' and in the 'interests' of the victims of terror.

Most of the non-factional serious-minded old Congressmen were scandalised to witness what happened. They were both of Gandhi-ite and of a liberal bent of mind. We printed accounts of these Conferences in *People's War*.

Kerala Congress Samity report in *People's War* (P.W.)
Vol. III, No. 25.

Delhi Congressmen's meeting in P.W. Vol. III, No. 26.

Bengal Congress Workers' Conference in P.W. Vol. III,
No. 27.

Punjab Congress Workers' Conference in P.W. Vol. III,
No. 27.

Tamilnad Congress Sangham at Ariyalur, P.W. Vol. III,
No. 33.

Bihar Congressmen's Conference, P.W. Vol. III, No. 33.

The acceptance of "Gandhiji's leadership" for the next struggle was only a cover to glorify the "August Revolution" and wipe off all that Gandhiji had spoken on the past. The glorification of August was the starting point for demanding or

carrying out on their own the expulsion of the Communists from the Congress. Some even went so far as to ban joint work with the Communists and even the League. Thus co-operation with the Communists even for the common service of the people, was frowned upon if one wanted to be anybody in the Congress.

A resolution on constructive work used to be passed as a ritual to satisfy the conscience of the Gandhi-ites but in fact nothing was done in practice.

The total result of these meetings was that anti-Communism could now be passed off as official, and if not, at least as the opinion of the majority of Congressmen and nothing more was sought. The damage done to their cause by the Gandhi-Viceroy correspondence was thus sought to be undone.

Our Work In This Period

We ourselves under-estimated the danger of this development at that time. We had seen their policies standing self-condemned. We took it for granted that after Gandhiji's correspondence, no Congressman could be misled by their demagogy. We did not calculate that after the failure of Gandhiji both with Lord Wavell and Mr. Jinnah and his own continued silence, instead of a lead forward, it would leave a political vacuum which demagogy could fill for the time by glorifying what the British sought to suppress. We did not think that the slogans which only embodied bitterness and frustration could be potent enough to last long.

We went on with our constructive practical work and anti-deadlock political campaign as our way to clean up and not further soil the common pool.

Any number of local Congressmen, district and provincial leaders who knew us or had worked with us expressed their disgust over what was being said and done against us and what could not be defended on any principles and went directly against the Congress tradition and even against what Gandhiji had written about the August resolution, post-August happenings etc., and what he had himself done after release—to seek settlement with Britain and unity with the League.

But they themselves kept quiet, neither opposed them nor supported us. All waited for you to come out and solve problems which were only getting multiplied and more complicated. We carried on with a clean conscience but a heavy heart.

We not only waited but worked for your release and hoped that you of the Working Committee would certainly go far ahead from where Gandhiji had brought and left the country.

We expected you to clear the post-August mess and confusion in Congressmen's minds. We expected that Nehru's modern outlook would help him to fight old world prejudices.

We expected your collective wisdom to go far beyond Gandhiji's attempts at solving what was essentially a problem of development inside our national camp where unguided and suppressed national sentiments were acquiring various disruptive forms and which needed an understanding of the modern world for their solution.

We were pained to see that our expectations did not come true.