

The Civil Disobedience Movement

When in 1928, the Congress met at its annual session in Calcutta to discuss the Nehru Report, they urged that instead of Dominion Status for India, demand for complete independence be included in it. At that time, however, their proposal was defeated. Yet, it was decided that if Nehru Report was not accepted within a year, the Congress would choose the alternative course.

In October 1929, Lord Irwin, in consultation with the British government, declared that the attainment of Dominion Status by India was implicit in the Montagu's Declaration of 1917. But the Conservative Party in Britain completely opposed it and the Liberal Party also did not favour it.

Gandhiji wrote a letter to the Viceroy on March 2, 1930, narrating the evils of the British rule and demanded their removal. He also informed him of his decision to launch the Satyagraha campaign by making salt at Dandi, a village on the sea-coast of Gujrat in case his demand was turned down by the Government. Gandhiji, in

(a) to withdraw all ordinances and pending prosecutions; (b) to release all political prisoners except those who were guilty of violence; (c) to restore the confiscated property of the Satyagrahis; (d) to permit peaceful picketing of liquor, opium and foreign cloth shops, and (e) to permit the collection or making of salt, free of duty, by persons residing within a specific distance of the sea-shore. The Congress, on its part, agreed (a) not to press for investigation into police excesses; (b) to suspend the Civil Disobedience Movement; (c) to discontinue boycott; and (d) to participate in the Second Round Table Conference. The Pact was opposed by many young leaders of the Congress. The Congress suspended the Civil Disobedience Movement and deputed Gandhi to be the sole representative of the Congress to participate in the Second Round Table Conference. In the meanwhile, in Britain, the Conservative Party government came in power in November 1931. The Conservative Government was in no mood to grant any concession to India. Therefore, Gandhiji

his letter, urged the Government to —

- 1- Prohibit intoxications.
- 2- Change the ratio between the Rupee and the Sterling.
- 3- Reduce the rate of land revenue.
- 4- Abolish salt tax.
- 5- Reduce the military expenditure.
- 6- Reduce expenditure on civil administration.
- 7- Impose custom duty on foreign cloth.
- 8- Accept the Postal Reservation Bill.
- 9- Abolish the C.I.D. Department or give its control to the citizens.
- 10- Release all political prisoners.
- 11- Issue ~~license~~ licences of arms to citizens for self-protection.

Lord Irwin paid no attention to these demands of Gandhiji, warned him of the consequences of his impending action and refused to meet him. It led to the beginning of the beginning of the Civil disobedience movement. On March 12, 1930, Gandhiji left his Sabarmati Ashram on foot with his 78 followers and reached the sea at Dandi on April 5. There Gandhiji and his followers made salt in violation of the salt laws. The movement to break the laws of the government

spread rapidly. The Government, as usual, resorted to merciless repression even when, excepting a few incidents of violence, the movement adhered to complete nonviolence. The Congress was declared an illegal body. The British Government decided to call the First Round Table Conference to deliberate and discuss future constitutional reforms with the Indian leaders. The conference started its deliberations on November 12, 1930. But the Congress did not participate in it. Realising the futility of talks in absence of the representatives of the Congress, the Conference was adjourned sine die on January 19, 1931.

The Government finally felt the necessity to come to terms with the Congress. It released the members of the Working Committee of the Congress including Gandhi on January 26, 1931. Efforts for a compromise between the Congress and the Government were revived by Tej Bahadur Sapru, Dr. Jayakar and S.S. Shastri. The efforts proved successful this time and the Gandhi-Irwin Pact was signed. By this, the Government agreed

decided to revive the Civil Disobedience Movement and the Congress Working Committee approved it. The movement was again started in January 1932. The Government acted swiftly this time. All leaders of the Congress were taken into custody at once and repression was let loose with vengeance. In spite of this, the movement continued with all intensity for more than six months. In the meantime the Third Round Table Conference held and Congress boycotted it. But gradually, the movement passed into oblivion and was finally suspended by the Congress in April 1934. The brutal repression and uncompromising attitude of the Government were primarily responsible for the failure of the movement. But ~~the~~ it demonstrated the awakening of political consciousness among the Indian masses.