

## The August Offer and the Individual Satyagraha

Britain declared war against Germany on September 3, 1939 and, only after a few hours, the Viceroy, Lord Linlithgow declared war against Germany on behalf of India without consulting Indian representatives. The Indian leaders severely criticised this action. The Congress insisted on establishing democratic institutions and procedures in India during the war itself and therefore, asked for forming a responsible government at the centre. But the government refused and on ~~the~~ October 17, declared that the demand of the Congress was impractical. The Congress then decided to withdraw its members from administration and the Congress ministers resigned. It decided to cooperate with the government on two conditions. One, that India would be given complete independence after the war and, the other, that a government consisting of all major political parties of India should be established at the centre which should be responsible to the Central Legislature. But the Government

again refused to compromise. Yet, the Government was feeling the necessity of getting the cooperation of the Indians. It led to a declaration by the Viceroy on August 8, 1940 which was called the 'August Offer'. The 'Offer' included the following terms:

- (a) The aim of the British government was to provide dominion status to India.
- (b) A representative committee consisting of all important political parties of India would be constituted after the war and that would frame the future constitution of India. However, the Government would protect the rights of the minorities.
- (c) The Executive at the Centre would be extended by appointing some Indian representatives immediately.
- (d) A War Advisory Committee would be formed immediately which would include the representatives of native states and other important elements of Indian life.
- (e) The government would not hand over power to any such political group which was opposed by other strong elements in national life.
- (f) All political parties should cooperate with the Government in its war effort on the basis of the above conditions.

and, thus, help India in getting equal status in the British dominions.

The Congress had asked for establishing an interim government at the Centre with powers to manage the defence of India. It was not granted. The Congress, rejected the 'Offer'. The Muslim League also rejected the 'Offer'. Gandhi chose the path of non-cooperation again but only in a limited way. That resulted in the beginning of the 'Individual Satyagraha'. He made it clear that the Satyagraha will not be converted into a mass movement, every Satyagrahi would be chosen by him and it would be completely nonviolent. The individual Satyagraha failed to gain anything substantial from the Government at that time, yet, it had its importance. It kept alive the the issue of constitutional reform in India.