

“You are there” paper- Letters from a British Magistrate in India to his friend in England.

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HIS236: Introduction to British History

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City Hall, 2nd Floor

Bharat Nagar Chowk,

Ludhiana, India.

My dear John,

I am glad to hear the news of your new-born daughter, Edith. I hope to see her soon when you visit my quarters in Ludhiana. I will show you my new office in the City Hall, and we'll chat like old times in our Cambridge Pembroke dormitory, staying up late with our notes, and conversing about our classes, professors, and the British Empire. You always argued against Colonial culture. Even Professor Neville disagreed with you. I did too.

John, in your last letter you wrote that you want Britain to grant its colonies independence. But do you really want British Empire to lose India, one of our most important colony? We are still recovering from the economic instability of the Great War. Losing India would be disastrous. Moreover, we are educating, and employing Indians in progressive fields like science. Our rule benefits India too. I don't know when you will realize the importance of British Empire's work in India. But as you asked in your letter, let me tell you the details I know about the Round Table Conference, and why I think Indians will not be able to form a majority to vote on Dominion Status for their country.

Liberal lawyer and politician, Sir John Simon, headed the Indian Statutory Commission, or Simon Commission, as it is commonly called, in February 1928 to check the progress of the 1918 Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms.¹ Chelmsford reforms proposed a system of dyarchy in provincial government where Indian politicians were accountable for reserved subjects like finance, law and order, public health, education, and agriculture. Indians were excited by Simon Commission. They knew it was their chance to uncover “the defects of the Reforms, and the practical enslavement of India,” which is utterly false.² But the Committee had only white members. Indians thought they could not convey their grievances to white politicians who were “profiting, indirectly, from the British control of Indian finances and trade.”³ Indians boycotted the Commission, suspended businesses, and waved black flags throughout the city “as a sign of mourning,” forcing the Commission to depart.⁴ The officials returned in October 1928. But the boycott continued. “These people really have no political sense.”⁵ They are protesting against the ones who are trying to help them!

Around the same time, the Indian National Congress, INC, together with the Responsive Co-operation, the Independent Congress, the Jinnah League, and the Khilafatists held their All-Parties Conference to produce a constitution for themselves, partly to increase their representation in politics, and partly because some of our politicians claimed that “Indians were incapable of devising a constitution for themselves.”⁶ The conference resulted in an All-Parties Conference Committee Report, or Nehru Report, as it was commonly called. This report demanded ““full dominion status”” of India.⁷ This idea of Dominion Status

¹ Andrew Muldoon, *Empire, Politics and the Creation of the 1935 India Act* (England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2009), 13.

² Will Durant, *The Case for India* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1930), 145.

³ *Ibid.*, 145.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*, 148.

⁶ Robin Moore, *The Crisis of Indian Unity, 1917-1940* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 35.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 43.

“called for popular control of all subjects, including defence, foreign affairs, and political relations with the states.”⁸

Nehru Report also created further oppositions between Hindus and Muslims. It alienated Jinnah’s league, formed by the activist Muhammad Ali Jinnah, by not considering their demands, including their proposal to expand reserved seats for Muslims in provinces beyond the Muslim-minority provinces.⁹

This weakened the bonds of national integrity. But the opposition, against Simon Commission and Britain’s unwillingness to adapt Nehru Report, was so explosive that Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald had to exclude Simon Report from the Conference. Simon Report does not contain a single word that represented the document “as supporting a “British as against an “Indian” case.”¹⁰ It increased “the franchise for the election of the provincial legislatures from the 3% of the population...to 10%,” but it did so by implementing certain education requirements, which will have “the disastrous effect of filling the legislatures with men devoted to freedom” of India, rather than following our orders.¹¹ It abolished dyarchy, but the protection that dyarchy granted to our government would be secured by the “Over-riding Powers of the Governor,” and the governors too, would be appointed by British authorities.¹² This enraged Indians. Irwin assured them that the Report would only be used by the “representatives of Indian political opinion” to voice their criticism about the British reforms in India, and address the required changes.¹³ This meant that the boycott won, and the Commission lost.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 36.

¹⁰ “The Simon Report and the Conference,” *Times* (London), July 2, 1930.

¹¹ Durant, *The Case for India*, 147-148.

¹² Ibid., 148.

¹³ Moore, *The Crisis of Indian Unity*, 45.

Before the Conference started, majority of the British governors agreed to let India advance from the position of “subordination” to “partnership” by entrusting Indian leaders with the responsibility over all decisions excluding major fields like “defence, foreign relations, internal security, financial obligations,” to name a few.¹⁴ Interestingly, these regulations aligned with the Simon Report. Sir Samuel Hoare, Secretary of State for India, assured Irwin that the Conference’s results would not conflict with the Simon Report.¹⁵ British delegates were optimistic about their plan as the Hindu and Muslim representatives were not supporting each other’s claim for a Dominion Status. Hindu politicians were unwilling to negotiate unless the Muslims agreed to fully cooperate with their Dominion Status demand. But the Muslims would not support any Dominion Status demand unless the Hindus promised the fulfilment of their demands of reserved seats.

To increase the communal tensions, Gandhi threatened the peace of the country with his Salt March. Our government made it mandatory for all Indians to buy salt from our traders, and not local businesses. For his Salt March, Gandhi, on March 12 of this year, marched from his ashram in Sabarmati to the coastal city of Dandi, about 240 miles away.¹⁶ Gandhi’s followers had already made up dunes of crystalized salt after a high tide, which the police initially crushed into mud. Regardless, on April 16, Gandhi grabbed a handful of locally manufactured salt from the mud, thus defying our law. His march was a clear act of rebellion.¹⁷ Irwin did not give immediate orders to arrest Gandhi as it would create a moral divide between the INC, and our government. With the Conference approaching, a further divide between us and INC was the last problem our government needed. But after a

¹⁴ Ibid., 117.

¹⁵ Ibid., 208.

¹⁶ Judith Brown, *Gandhi and Civil Disobedience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 100.

¹⁷ Michael Edwards, *The Last Years of British India* (London: Cassell and Company Limited, 1963), 53.

widespread illegal manufacture of salt, Gandhi was arrested on May 5, along with his followers.¹⁸ Salt Satyagraha failed to gather people and generate force against us in Punjab. I was worried Ludhiana would be under curfew. But everything is still under control.¹⁹

Moreover, Gandhi and his INC boycotted the Conference when Jinnah refused to support Dominion Status. Jinnah wanted separate electorates, and wanted to carve separate states from Muslim majority provinces.²⁰ But the Hindu dominated INC wanted “unconditional joint electorates,” and opposed Jinnah’s demands as it would “forfeit Hindu support.”²¹ This will make negotiations harder for our government as Muslim delegates will not fight for INC’s issues. And here, in India, INC will want to get back at our government for not cooperating with their demands while half of them decided to skip the Conference. Who knows what will happen during this Conference.

Pay my regards to your wife, Christie, and to your daughter, Irene.

Sincerely,

W. Douglas.

March 5, 1931.

City Hall, 2nd Floor

Bharat Nagar Chowk,

¹⁸ Brown, *Gandhi and Civil Disobedience*, 110.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 115.

²⁰ Moore, *The Crisis of Indian Unity, 1917-1940*, 21.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 101.

Ludhiana, India.

My dear John,

You were right, the British imperialist government is looting India. I realised this after reading about the partial success of the First Round Table Conference. The Conference failed to process laws like army and civil service salaries under the jurisdiction of Indians, and “transfer of power to reactionary princes and landlords.”²² Yesterday, Gandhi signed a pact with Irwin. India is undergoing some major political changes and I am nervous about the future.

John, you were right in pointing out that Gandhi and other members of his party were released from prison “to continue the positive atmosphere following the successful conclusion” of the conference to allow the INC take part in further discussions.²³ I cannot believe our own people consider the conference had any positive results. At least not for the Indians.

British delegates had to devise appropriate constitutional arrangements for recognizing British India as one political entity and “the place which it was to occupy in the scheme for All-India” Federation.²⁴ But majority of them disagreed with the proposed All-

²² Ibid., 183.

²³ Francis Lane-Fox to Lord Irwin, January 28, 1931 in *Conservative Politics in National and Imperial Crisis: Letters from Britain to the Viceroy of India 1926-31*, ed. Stuart Bill (England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2014), 397.

²⁴ John Coatman, *Years of Destiny* (London: John Dickinson and Co. Ltd., 1932), 306.

India Federation as it meant a responsible form of “self-government, and, ultimately, dominion status.”²⁵

INC’s absence exacerbated the problems further. Muslim leaders like Jinnah repeatedly mocked Gandhi’s non-cooperation movement by pointing out that majority of ethnically diverse Indians oppose his movements.²⁶ This behaviour is sickening. Indians need to unite, but they are tearing each other apart. These tensions assure that radical reforms, like Dominion Status, never get approved. These tensions would terminate the current fragility of our rule over India.²⁷ British government created a network of alliances with the Indian leaders that forced Indians to accept “the political structure of the Raj.”²⁸ These tensions would destroy the work of Gandhi, and likeminded people, who declared the objective of *Swaraj*.

Oblivious to the situation in India, to the failure of the Simon Commission, and undermining Gandhi’s importance and education, both Winston Churchill, and Prime Minister MacDonald thought that India will be grateful to Simon Commission for helping both the Indians to voice out their opinion, and the British to recognize the problems.²⁹ The all-white Commission proclaimed itself the master of Indian culture, “able to shape a harmony the Indians, divided by caste and community, could not themselves achieve.”³⁰ The

²⁵ Ibid., 309.

²⁶ Muhammad Ali Jinnah, 1931, in *Indian Round Table Conference, 1930-1932: Proceedings* (London, 1932), 147.

²⁷ Donald Low, *Eclipse of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 61.

²⁸ Ibid., 65.

²⁹ Ramsay MacDonald, 1931, in *Indian Round Table Conference, 1930-1932: Proceedings* (London, 1932), 499, “The Conference Goes On,” *Times* (London), December 13, 1930.

³⁰ Thomas Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 158.

Commission members knew nothing about India. Like us, they made assumptions about India from reports of previous British delegates, rather than asking Indians about their problems.

Gandhi was right all along. You, John, were right all along. Jinnah focused on the Muslim community, and Tej Bahadur Sapru with other elite Hindu delegates who acted as “mediators between Irwin and the Congress leadership,” focused on their own problems.³¹

Gandhi met Irwin to discuss the topics that should have been covered in the Conference, but weren't. Gandhi promised that INC would discontinue the Civil-Disobedience Movement, and stop the boycott of British goods.³² Irwin promised the release of civil disobedience prisoners, and the withdrawal of Ordinances which marked organizations unlawful under the Criminal Law Amendment Act.³³ While Irwin refused to abolish the Salt Law, he allowed domestic production, and consumption of salt by people living in a “salt-producing area.”³⁴

Gandhi knows that neither Indian nor British delegates scored victory at the Round Table Conference. But he has high hopes about his pact with Lord Irwin. I don't know how the Gandhi-Irwin pact will structure the future, but I hope it gives justice to Indians.

Take care, my friend. Thank you for allowing me to take my time to realize the harsh reality of my work. And the truth about the British Empire that I work for.

Sincerely,

W. Douglas.

³¹ Muldoon, *Politics and the Creation of the 1935 India Act*, 43.

³² Edwards, *The Last Years of British India*, 58.

³³ Brown, *Gandhi and Civil Disobedience*, 185.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 186.

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