POLITICS AND THE
BENGAL LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
1912 - 1926
by
J.H. Broomfield

A Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy in the Australian National University.
This thesis is based on my original research and is all my own work.

J.H. Broomfield

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SUMMARY OF ARGUMENT

In nineteenth-century Bengal a small section of Hindu society, educated, of high-caste, and with an economy based upon landed rents and professional employment, evolved from its contact with the British a distinctive culture. This gave its members a sense of community and set them apart from the mass of Bengalis. They called themselves bhadralok: 'the respectable people'.

As an expression of their identity they produced a fine literature in the Bengali language. They also turned to politics, but here their opportunities for self-expression were restricted by British imperial rule. The British denied them access to the superior offices in the Government and excluded them from a share in the process of legislation. It became a question of honour for them to break down these barriers, and, in particular, they coveted parliamentary institutions. By acquiring these, they felt, they would prove that they were the Englishman's equal. Accepting the Whig interpretation of English history, they insisted that the British in India would be true to their principles only if they developed parliamentary government.

Their claim was rejected by the school of thought most influential in the Government of India, on the ground that Indians were not as capable as Englishmen of ruling themselves. By the turn of the century, this school was also convinced that the political aspirations of the
bhadralok were a danger to the maintenance of British rule, and the Government of India therefore struck at the unity of the bhadralok by partitioning Bengal.

This attack on their identity, shook the faith of the bhadralok in the beneficence of British intentions, and, from that time onwards, distrust and enmity for the Government characterised bhadralok politics. In protest against the partition of the province, the bhadralok leaders organised a violent agitation, but this was met with repression by the British and it also provoked a hostile counter-action from other sections of Bengali society, particularly from the Muslim majority. These reactions shook the bhadralok's confidence, and, when the British introduced Representative Government and reunited the province in 1912 in an attempt to allay the discontent of the bhadralok, an influential section of their politicians were willing to resume constitutional methods as a more secure course of action.

There remained, however, widespread scepticism among the bhadralok as to the value of participation in British-sponsored institutions, and this was heightened by the frustrations suffered by the elected members of the Legislative Council under a system which enabled them to criticise but not control the actions of the Government. The Council members saw that the bhadralok's faith in constitutional methods of political action would be destroyed unless there were a rapid advance to Responsible Government, but this was a step which the British were reluctant to take, for they were not convinced that their brown empire
was fit to follow the lead of their white colonies. They acted hesitantly, and what they finally gave was partial responsibility to a Legislative Council constructed to the *bhadralok*'s disadvantage. Nearly every detail of the settlement gave evidence of the British distrust of the *bhadralok*, and, in consequence, most of the community rejected the new constitution.

The *bhadralok* leaders were then faced with the problem of devising some other form of political action for their community. A lead was offered by Gandhi, who wanted the Congress to organise a mass agitation against the British, but this suggestion was unattractive to the *bhadralok* politicians. Their experience of the anti-partition agitation had left them apprehensive of the social repercussions of an appeal for wider support. The *bhadralok* were only five per cent of the total population of Bengal, and they were separated from the masses by creed and caste, and by a strong class consciousness, which was reinforced by exclusive historical and cultural traditions. They had little in common with either the urban labouring classes or the peasantry, and their politicians felt no confidence in their ability to lead a mass movement. They were reluctant to jeopardise their social and cultural superiority in what they regarded as a revolutionary adventure. Their apprehension of the consequences of mass agitation was reinforced by the evidence of a new political awareness among the lower classes of Bengali society, and the attempts made by Muslim politicians to take advantage of this for communal ends.
Gandhi's ideas of non-co-operation, however, appealed strongly to the poorer sections of the bhadralok, who were excited by the prospect of their direct involvement in politics for the first time. As a consequence, in 1921 the bhadralok leaders were forced, against their will, into the non-co-operation movement in an attempt to retain their hold over these lower sections of their community. Their fears that direct action would arouse the masses, were fully realised, and, after little more than a year, they abandoned non-co-operation in favour of re-entry to the legislative councils.

They had little difficulty in defeating the discredited moderate politicians who had refused in 1921 to join Gandhi's campaign, but they found it a hard task to control the reformed Legislative Council, divided as it was into communal blocs. The agitation of 1921 had disturbed communal relations in Bengal, and dissension between bhadralok and Muslim politicians was encouraged by the Government of Bengal in the hope of securing for itself a tactical advantage in the Legislative Council. The Government also assisted the Muslims to organise the peasantry, in order to give the Muslim politicians an electoral strength with which to attack the privileged position of the bhadralok. The immediate result was some months of bitter communal rioting throughout Bengal in 1926, and the long term result was the domination of the Legislative Council by a Muslim-British alliance, to the disadvantage of the bhadralok.
"History as High Adventure" was the title which Walter Prescott Webb gave to a delightful account of his years as an academic historian. History as High Adventure describes very aptly my experience in writing this thesis. I set out to study an institution - the Bengal Legislative Council - with the hope that I could put to some good purpose my experience of eighteenth-century English parliamentary history. As a good "Namierite" I was resolved to count heads and discount legends. I thought I had stolen a march on my former colleagues by moving into a century where I would be able to talk with my politicians in person, but I was in for a shock to which no eighteenth-century Namierite has ever been subjected, even by the most unfriendly Whig reviewer. I was told by some of my politicians that the legislature was unimportant; that I should look elsewhere if I wished to understand Bengali politics.

This was disturbing, but it was also perplexing, for all the documentary evidence that I had seen pointed in the opposite direction: to the importance of the Legislative Council in pre-Independence Bengal. How could I reconcile what I saw with what I was told? This started me on a chase which took me cross-country away from the Council through the unexplored tracts of Bengali social history and the slightly better-known paths of its cultural history. I arrived back weary but exhilarated, for I had found the answer to my problem. The Legislative Council was important, desperately important, to the most influential
section of Bengali society, and it was only because the institution had failed to fulfil the high hopes of these people that they had turned away from it in disgust. Far from wasting my time by looking in the wrong place, I had (I was convinced) made a discovery which helps to explain many other aspects of modern Bengali history apart from its legislative politics. I hope the reader of this thesis will be of the same opinion.

To give an idea of some of the thickets through which the hare was chased before being run to ground, I have appended to the thesis copies of three articles which I published during my period of research.

Like all good adventures, this one has left me with lots of interesting exploring to do in the future. There are, for instance, aspects of the present study at which I want to look in more detail, particularly at the emergence of the urban lower middle-class in Bengal and the effects of the 1905 partition on its political development.

A word about the use which I have made of my sources might be helpful. My interviews with former politicians and administrators in India and Pakistan were invaluable for the light which they threw on personalities, and for the ideas which they gave me of likely avenues of enquiry. Where possible, however, I did not rely upon them for facts. I always attempted to find documentary evidence to verify any details I was given; hence there are relatively few references in the footnotes to these interviews.
The collection of biographical data has been of fundamental importance to the research. Information on all public men in Bengal in the first three decades of this century was collected from a variety of sources and carded. Comments in the text based on this material have not been individually footnoted, as in most cases it has been impossible to "unscramble the egg". This explains why the analyses of election contests are often unaccompanied by particular documentation. The bibliography lists the memoirs, autobiographies, biographies, biographical dictionaries and personal interviews from which most of the information came.

In the transliteration of Indian words, I can claim nothing more than consistency. The spelling of personal names posed a special problem, for the owners themselves were often inconsistent in the form which they used. My solution was to select one spelling for each name and to force all my politicians to conform. Thus all Banerjeas, Banerjees, and Banarjis appear here as Banerjea.

As further aids to the reader, I have provided a glossary and a map of Bengal, and my bibliography is annotated.

I am indebted to the Australian National University for the Scholarship which made possible this study, and for financing two periods of field work in India and Pakistan. I am also indebted to those with whom I have worked in the Research School of Social Sciences of the University. In particular I wish to thank most sincerely my supervisors, Dr D.A. Low and Dr B.D. Graham, for their enthusiasm, guidance and
friendship, and for the hours of hard work which they put in on my behalf throughout my three and a half years in Canberra. To Mr P.D. Reeves, with whom I set out on this adventure, goes my gratitude for making easier my early days as a raw recruit to Indian studies, and for his cheerful companionship. My visits to India were made pleasant and profitable by the ever-ready assistance and friendly advice of Sri A.R. Mukherjea, Secretary of the West Bengal Legislative Assembly, to whom I am deeply indebted.

I should also like to thank the Librarians and staff of the Australian National University Library, the Commonwealth National Library of Australia, the National Library of India, and the Indian Association and British Indian Association, Calcutta; the Curator and staff of Rabindra-Sadana, Santiniketan; the Keeper of Records, West Bengal Government, Calcutta; the Keeper of Records, East Pakistan Government, Dacca; and the Director and staff of the National Archives of India, New Delhi.

My sincere thanks go to my typist, Mrs Margaret Hobbs, for her patience and painstaking attention to detail. Finally, for the help given me by my wife, Jenni, at every stage of my work, in Canberra and India, and for her loyalty and self-sacrifice, I am deeply grateful.
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<td>When appended to the title of a newspaper, indicates that the source of the reference is the Report on Native Papers in Bengal.</td>
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<td>Carmichael</td>
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<td>GI</td>
<td>Government of India.</td>
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<td>Nation in Making</td>
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<td>NP</td>
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<td>PP</td>
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<td>Pundits &amp; Elephants</td>
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Reading

Lord Reading: Rufus Isaacs, First Marquess of Reading.

Simon Commission Report


Standard Form of Reference to Government Files

Government of India: Department/Branch/Proceedings number/Date
e.g. GI, Home, Public, B64-66, Mar 1903.

Government of Bengal: Department/File number/Proceedings number/Date
e.g. GB, Police, 6P-18(1-10), A10-19, Apr 1919.
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<td><strong>Anjuman</strong></td>
<td>A communal assembly or association. In Bengal applied only to Muslim organisations.</td>
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<td><strong>Babu</strong></td>
<td>In nineteenth and early twentieth-century Bengali society, a title of respect for an English-speaking Hindu. Applied derogatorily by the British to semi-educated <em>bhadralok</em> clerks, and, by extension, to any member of the <em>bhadralok</em>. Now usually used only in reference to a clerk who can write English.</td>
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<td><strong>Bania</strong></td>
<td>The name of a caste, or an individual of that caste, which is numerous in Gujerat. Divided into two main groups, <em>Vaisnavas</em> and <em>Jains</em>, the members of both of which are engaged chiefly in trade and banking.</td>
</tr>
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<td><strong>Baqr-Id</strong></td>
<td>A festival observed by Muslims on the 10th of the month <em>Zulhaja</em> - the feast of the ox, in commemoration of the offering of Ismail (according to Muslim tradition) by Abraham.</td>
</tr>
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<td><strong>Brahmo</strong></td>
<td>A member of the <em>Brahmo Samaj</em>, a monotheistic religious body founded in Calcutta by Raja Rammohun Roy in 1828.</td>
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<td><strong>Bustee</strong></td>
<td>A slum in an Indian industrial city, consisting of a chaotic jumble of huts to which narrow winding lanes provide the only approach.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Chaukidar</strong></td>
<td>A watchman. A <em>chaukidari</em> tax is a tax levied to defray the cost of a town or village watch.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Crore</strong></td>
<td>Ten millions.</td>
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<td><strong>Dacoity</strong></td>
<td>Gang robbery. A <em>dacoit</em> is a member of a robber gang.</td>
</tr>
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<td><strong>Durbar</strong></td>
<td>A court, audience or levee of a king or man of rank.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Durga Puja</strong></td>
<td>The worship of the goddess Durga, celebrated for ten days in the month of <em>Aswin</em> (October). The main Hindu festival in Bengal.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Durwan</td>
<td>A gate-keeper.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Goonda</td>
<td>The Indian equivalent of a gangster.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hartal</td>
<td>Suspension of work or business as a mark of indignation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joatdar</td>
<td>A farmer or cultivator.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khadi</td>
<td>Cloth hand-woven from hand-spun thread.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakh</td>
<td>One hundred thousand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lascar</td>
<td>A sailor.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lathi</td>
<td>A stick, sometimes tipped with metal, used as a weapon.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mofussil</td>
<td>The country, or towns in the country, as opposed to the Sadar, the principal town. Its usual application in Bengal is to the country in general, as distinct from Calcutta.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mohunt</td>
<td>The head of a temple.</td>
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<td>Mullah</td>
<td>A Muslim lawyer or learned man, who, in the absence of a priesthood in Islam, customarily expounds the teachings of the Koran to the faithful.</td>
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<td>Pandal</td>
<td>A temporary structure of cloth or basket-work supported on posts, to give shelter to an assembly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purdah</td>
<td>A veil, screen or curtain which excludes the women of a Muslim family from the gaze of the men. The purdah quarters are the area of the house from which the men are excluded.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raiyat</td>
<td>A peasant.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Raj</td>
<td>Rule or dominion. Ruling power. Ruling family. Kingdom or principality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sabha</td>
<td>An assembly or a place of assembly.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sadar</td>
<td>Also Sadr or Sudder. The highest or foremost of anything. Hence the chief seat of government or the Government itself.</td>
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<td>Samiti</td>
<td>An association.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Satyagraha</td>
<td>Passive resistance. A coinage of Gandhi's from: [Sat = truth] [Agraha = firmness]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swadeshi</td>
<td>Of one's own country. The swadeshi movement was the encouragement of indigenous manufactures to the exclusion of imported articles.</td>
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<td>Swami</td>
<td>A Hindu holy man.</td>
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<td>Taluqdar</td>
<td>In Bengal a small landed proprietor, usually inferior to a zamindar. In Oudh, however, the term is applied to members of the great landed aristocracy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thana</td>
<td>A police station, or the area under its authority.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vaisnavism</td>
<td>The worship of Vishnu, the second of the three principle deities of the Hindus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vakil</td>
<td>An authorised public pleader in a court of justice.</td>
</tr>
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CHAPTER I

THE BHADRALOK AND THE BRITISH

The Thesis

This thesis tells of the search by a culture group in a colonial society for a satisfying means of political self-expression. It traces the group's attempt to find this in an institution provided by the imperial rulers. It is a tragic story for the search was unsuccessful. The culture group with which it is concerned was a section of Bengali society in the India of the British, but the story has a universal significance for India and for the whole colonial world, which has been involved in this century in the same struggle for political self-expression. The institution with which it deals is the provincial Legislative Council and its story is part of the wider story of the introduction by the British of parliamentary institutions throughout their empire. The tragedy of the group's failure in its quest is a tragedy which lives on in India today in the frustration of the educated Bengali. 'To the memory of Bengal that was by one who has the misfortune to live in Bengal that is'. This dedication to a recent book of essays on nineteenth-century Bengal\(^1\) is a true reflection

\(^1\) R.C. Majumdar: *Glimpses of Bengal in the Nineteenth Century*. 
of the sadness in the hearts of Bengali intellectuals for a time that has gone and a land that is lost. This thesis offers an explanation of the causes of that despondency.

The argument of the work has been given in the précis which precedes the text and the reader is referred to this as his guide through the narrative. That narrative begins in 1912 with the reunification of Bengal, but as an introduction we must look briefly at the historical geography of Bengal; at the origins of the bhadralok, the culture group with which we are primarily concerned; at the British reception of their demands for political rights, and its corollary the partition of Bengal; and, finally, at the reforms of 1907-11.

**Historical Geography**

Bengal lies astride the tropic of Cancer. It has a monsoonal climate, with an adequate and reliable rainfall. Bounded in the south by the Bay of Bengal and in the north by the Himalaya, it encompasses the linked deltas of the great Ganges and Brahmaputra rivers - a rich land of 'new mud, old mud, and marsh'\(^1\) in which paddy and other agricultural crops thrive. With an area of 85,000 square miles (slightly smaller than the United Kingdom) it had a population at the beginning of this century of 40 millions.\(^2\) Its people shared a common

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language, Bengali, but were divided into two major religious communities: Hindus and Muslims. The Hindus, who had a numerical majority in West Bengal, were in a slight overall minority to the Muslims (Hindus 18\(\frac{2}{3}\) millions, Muslims 21 millions),\(^1\) who were most numerous in the eastern districts.

It appears that this preponderance of Muslims in Eastern Bengal resulted from the isolation of that area during the Hindu period of ancient Indian history. Whereas West Bengal was included in most of the great Hindu empires based on the Indo-Gangetic plain and was therefore in the main stream of the Hindu tradition, Eastern Bengal was isolated behind its immense river barriers and its people retained much of their primitive culture until the Muslims penetrated the region.

Muslim armies from the north-west first entered Bengal in the thirteenth century of the Christian era and for the following five hundred years the region had Islamic rulers. Few of the princes reigning at Delhi had the power to control this distant and difficult land, and, until Bengal became a province of the Mughal empire in the sixteenth century, it was the sport of military adventurers who rode in at the head of an army across the easier rivers in Northern Bihar, established a kingdom for a time, and then retreated into the wilds of Eastern Bengal when a new and more powerful soldier appeared from the north.

The Mughals put an end to this period of disorder and for the first time brought the whole of Bengal into a north Indian empire. The peace which accompanied their rule facilitated travel and trade, and in the seventeenth century European companies established factories along the rivers of West Bengal to secure silk stuffs, indigo and fine cotton goods which were being produced in increasing quantities. For the first time in centuries Bengal was open to the influence of the cultural life of north-western India and at the same time through her ports she came into contact with the expanding maritime peoples of Europe. In exchange for goods the Europeans brought silver, which the Mughals minted to give their empire a monetary economy. This development, combined with the expanding opportunities in trade and in the new Mughal administration, facilitated social mobility in Bengal. At the same time the Hindu religion in the area was transformed by the spread of Vaisnavism as a result of the teachings of Chaitanya (1486-1533) and there was a revival in Bengali Islam.\footnote{R.C. Majumdar & J. Sarkar eds.: The History of Bengal, vol. II, chpt. XII.}

As the power of the Mughal emperors declined in the early eighteenth century under the dual pressures of Maratha and Afghan attack, Bengal shared the fate of the other outlying areas of the empire. Her governors set themselves up as autonomous rulers and then found that they lacked sufficient force to resist the ravages of the marauding Maratha and Afghan cavalrmen. By the middle of the
eighteenth century they were faced with another threat: from the British and French who had graduated from trade to conquest.

The British and the Permanent Settlement

In 1757 at Plassey and 1764 at Buxar the army of the British East India Company inflicted convincing defeats on the troops of the Mughal Nawab of Bengal. British suzerainty over the area was recognised in 1765 with the emperor's grant of the Diwani, the right to collect the land revenue. This financial gain was very welcome to the British but they were reluctant to undertake the burdensome tasks of organising the collection of the revenue and providing government for the region. It was seven years before they assumed direct control of Bengal and their main concern then was to reduce the complexity of the revenue system which they had inherited from the Mughals. After a number of unsuccessful experiments, it was decided in 1793 to fix the land revenue at a permanent sum and to recognise the Mughal tax farmers (the zamindars) as proprietors of the land with responsibility for revenue payment. The Permanent Settlement was of profound importance for it was the determining factor in the development of modern Bengali society. We must therefore look in some detail at its effects.

The British had hoped by this measure to relieve the Government of the burden of periodic resettlements of the revenue and of the staff required for its collection. They also hoped that the new arrangement would restore order to rural society which, to their eyes,
appeared to be in chaotic disarray. The recognition of the zamindars as proprietors would surely facilitate the establishment of a firm nexus between landholder and tenant. The British realised that future increments in land values would benefit the zamindars instead of the State but they thought that this margin of profit would encourage land improvement and that the State would gain in the long run from a rise in general prosperity.¹

Nearly every expectation proved false. Certainly the Permanent Settlement lightened the administrative load but the absence of survey and settlement work, which in other areas of India gave employment to a large cadre of subordinate officers and took them into the heart of village life, denied to the Bengal administration an intimate knowledge of its province and severed its contacts with the people.² Far from bringing an era of stability, the Permanent Settlement shook rural society to its roots. Many areas had been heavily over-assessed and, as a result, in the first 20 years almost half the original zamindars were dispossessed for failure to pay their revenue dues promptly. The

See S. Gopal: The Permanent Settlement in Bengal and its Results.

'In Bengal ... there is no ... organization effectively linking the District Officer and the Sub-divisional Officer to the villages in their charge. The only functionary in the Bengal village is the village chowkidar who carries out police duties. He is poorly paid, usually illiterate, and in no way comparable with the village officers of the ryotwari areas who are persons of established standing with considerable local influence.' (Report of Famine Enquiry Commission, 1945, quoted R.L. Park: The Rise of Militant Nationalism in Bengal, p. 70.)
pressure was eased as large areas of waste were brought under cultivation but by then many of the old landed families had been ruined and their places taken by nouveaux riches.

The raiyats also suffered. When the floodgates of change were opened most of their traditional privileges and occupancy rights were swept away in the deluge, and, with the increased demand for land in the nineteenth century, they were at the mercy of their landlords and moneylenders. The Government had to come to their rescue with a series of Tenancy Acts which were to occupy an important position in the subsequent legislative history of the province.

The hope of creating a firm relationship between proprietor and tenant was perhaps the saddest delusion of all. As the original zamindars fell into debt, they were forced to auction portions of their rents. At the same time British trade and British government were providing new means to acquire wealth and most of those who prospered invested in rents, for there were few other opportunities in a non-industrial colonial society, and traditionally the possession of land carried status and security. The result was an extraordinary multiplication of intermediate estates between the zamindar and the actual cultivator. There is no more important factor in the history of Bengal than this process of subinfeudation. Economically its effect was to swallow that margin of profit which the advocates of a permanent settlement expected to be used for improving the land. Socially subinfeudation broke any personal bond between landlord and cultivator,
and was accompanied by all the evils of absenteeism. As a Bengal I.C.S. officer remarked: 'Zamindari in fact has become more of a profession and less of a position.'\(^1\) For an administration already out of touch with its people, it heaped confusion upon confusion, for it became impossible to gauge the real effect of legal or administrative measures.\(^2\) The Government was not alone in its perplexity. Reporting on his settlement work in the Bakarganj District at the beginning of this century, J.C. Jack observed:

... it was found that the system was too complicated for the people who lived under it. Those who owned land very often did not know what land it was they owned and those who cultivated very often did not know the title or estate of their landlords. The settlement camps were indeed regarded somewhat as lost property offices. Landlords came to find their lands and tenants came to find their landlords.

He was surely justified in describing this as 'the most amazing caricature of an ordered system of land tenure in the world.'\(^3\)

For the political historian the most important result of the subinfeudation was the landed middle-class which it created. Given the degree of fragmentation, it can readily be appreciated that this class became extraordinarily large. By the late nineteenth century there

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\(^2\) A similar difficulty was experienced in Ireland as a result of British colonisation in the seventeenth century. See E. Strauss: Irish Nationalism and British Democracy, pp. 9-10.

were indeed few middle-class families (the family, not the individual, being the economic unit) without an interest in landed rents.\(^1\) The pie was big enough for many fingers, but the more fingers there were the smaller the pieces became, and members of the middle-class had to turn to the learned professions, to clerical work and, less frequently, to trade in order to supplement their income. In Bengal, however, there was never the dichotomy which existed in other parts of India between the landholding classes and the professional middle-class, for the great bulk of the Bengal middle-class were rent receivers and the class as a whole never ceased to regard itself as 'landed'. Here is a social and political phenomenon of first importance.

The Sinhas of Raipur

In order to gain an understanding of the development and the nature of this class, we may follow the fortunes of five generations of one representative, though distinguished, family: the Sinhas of Raipur.

Raipur is a village in West Bengal on the Ajay River close to the present university of Visva-Bharati at Santiniketan. The Ajay, now a modest stream, was once navigable to sea-going vessels and its banks were lined with prosperous trading and religious centres. Attracted by this activity, Lalchand Sinha, by caste a Kayastha, migrated from his native village of Chandrakona in the District of Midnapore,

accompanied (so the legend goes) by a thousand weavers. His son, Shyamkishore, amassed a fortune as an East India Company agent, supplying textiles for export to Europe. He became the creditor of the ruling Muslim family of the District, whose fortunes, like so many of the great landed families of the time, were declining rapidly. To meet their debts they were forced to transfer their zamindari to Shyamkishore and thus the Sinhas became landholders.

Shyamkishore had four sons, the eldest taking charge of the zamindari while the third managed his father's office. The youngest, Manomohan, was fond of music and literature and devoted most of his time to these arts. One of his four sons, Sitikantha, however, had a commercial bent. In the early nineteenth century a number of silk and indigo factories had been established in the area by enterprising Englishmen, and in about 1840 Sitikantha went into partnership with a Henry Erskine who owned an indigo factory near the family zamindari at Raipur. Following in the footsteps of his grandfather and father, Sitikantha became a considerable Persian scholar but he broke new ground by learning English as well. He had his sons, Narendra and Satyendra, educated at the local Anglo-vernacular school and then at Presidency College, Calcutta. With the help of his partner, Erskine, he arranged for them to go to England and there Satyendra, in particular, distinguished himself. He was called to the Bar in 1886 and returned to Calcutta to establish himself as one of India's leading barristers. In 1903 he was appointed as Standing-Counsel to the Government of
Bengal and later as provincial Advocate-General. From that point his career was a succession of triumphs: first Indian member of the Governor-General's Executive Council; member of the Imperial War Conference; British Parliamentary Under-Secretary for India; first and only Indian member of the British House of Lords; and finally Lieutenant-Governor of Bihar and Orissa.

The house of the Sinhas at Raipur is in ruins. Most members of the family are now to be found in the learned professions in Calcutta and other cities of northern India, for the rivers of West Bengal have dried up and with them has gone the prosperity of the countryside.¹

The story of the Sinhas is the story of the Bengal landed and professional middle-class. Largely as a result of those liberalising influences of the Mughal period which we have already noted, members of the educated high-castes (particularly the Brahmins - priests; the Baidyas - physicians; and the Kayasthas - writers and accountants) were prepared to seek advancement outside their hereditary professions and were thus able to take advantage of the new opportunities for trade and service with the advent of the British East India Company. They prospered as the landed aristocracy declined and hence were able to gain a share in land. With each generation the demands upon the family business and the family zamindari became greater - the

¹ The story of the Sinhas is told by N.K. Bose in his stimulating essays on Modern Bengal, pp. 20-3.
four sons of Shyamkishore were followed by the 15 grandsons - and the young men had to look elsewhere for a livelihood. British trade had provided the grandfather's chance; British government was to provide theirs. As the Imperial armies marched triumphantly westward through northern India they were followed by administrators and judges. Indian assistants and clerks were needed. As courts, hospitals and schools were established there were openings for lawyers, doctors and teachers. The Bengali middle-class was quick to grasp these opportunities. The road from Raipur and from the thousands of other villages throughout Bengal ran to all parts of India.

To set foot on that road, however, the young Bengali had first to learn English and, if he wished to go far, he had to have an advanced English-language education. Lal Behari Dey, recalling his father's reasons for taking him from their village in Burdwan in 1834 to find a place in a Calcutta school, wrote: 'A knowledge of English education, he said, was necessary to enable a man to earn a competence in life. People ignorant of English no doubt got berths, but berths to which only paltry salaries were attached. He felt his want of English every day, and was therefore resolved to remedy that defect in the education of his son.'¹ There were many fathers in Bengal equally ambitious for their sons, and English-language schools sprang up like

¹ Quoted, B.T. McCully: English Education and the Origins of Indian Nationalism, p. 44. McCully pp. 20-166 is also the source for what follows.
mushrooms, first in Calcutta and then in every District of the province. The General Committee of Public Instruction, which had been established in 1823 and which had given Bengal a head start in the educational race, found no difficulty in obtaining financial support for schools in the mofussil. Many institutions were also privately endowed. This eager response from the landed and professional classes was in marked contrast to what occurred in the other provinces of northern India, for there the landholders, in particular, set no store by English-language education as they were not attracted to the occupations to which it gave admittance. The field was left clear for the Bengalis.

The District school gave a grounding but for higher education it was to Calcutta that the young man must go. The famous Hindu College opened in 1816 was the forerunner of dozens of Calcutta colleges founded in the nineteenth century and there were always more candidates crowding to their doors than there were places available. With the foundation of the University in Calcutta in 1857, provision was made for affiliated colleges outside the city but relatively few were established. In education, as in politics, law, commerce and social intercourse, Calcutta was a great magnet to which all Bengal was drawn. We must pause to consider this phenomenon for it has profoundly influenced Bengali society and politics.

The Metropolis

The leading cities of Bengal in Mughal times were Murshidabad and Dacca, political and commercial outposts of a land empire. The
British came by sea to trade and they built a port on the Hooghly to give them access to the resources of the hinterland. They stayed to rule and Calcutta became the capital of their Indian empire. Mushidabad and Dacca had lost their raison d'être and they dwindled to the insignificance of District towns, while Calcutta became a colossus second in the British Empire only to London. Bengal and the provinces flanking it offered the extraordinary prospect of a fertile and densely populated territory more than 250,000 miles square with only one major city.¹

The economic reason is obvious enough. Once the Bengal textile industry, which flourished under the Mughals, had been ruined by unrestricted competition from the power looms of Europe, no industrial centres remained outside the capital. The British initially wanted produce for export: first textiles, then indigo, opium, tea, jute and minerals, and they saw to it that canals and railways were constructed to draw these goods to Calcutta. When it became convenient to process some articles in India, Calcutta was the obvious place for there the raw materials and the fuel could most easily be brought together.²

But why, it may well be asked, did considerable cities not spring up at the Divisional administrative headquarters? Why was there such

¹ The 1911 census revealed that 41% of Bengal's urban population was in Calcutta. (Census of India, 1911, vol. I, p. 31.)
a contrast with the United Provinces which could boast half-a-dozen cities of this kind? One answer, it seems, was the nature of the Bengal Administration: it was extraordinarily centralised, with an overgrown secretariat in Calcutta instructing the District officers on their everyday duties. The Permanent Settlement made unnecessary the army of clerks and accountants which was employed at the Divisional and District headquarters of the non-regulation provinces to keep track of the revenue settlement. Moreover, those Bengalis who did gain a post at a mofussil headquarters rarely took their families with them, preferring to leave them in the ancestral village to which they would themselves return for holidays and in their years of retirement. This, incidentally, explains both the demand for local elementary schools and, in part, the absence of sizeable towns outside Calcutta which might support university colleges.

Calcutta's attraction can be readily understood. Here was the locus of commercial and political power for the whole of northern India. In Calcutta fortunes were to be won or lost. This was the fountainhead of patronage, whence flowed contracts, appointments, honours and the local concessions which could make a man great in his district. The law courts of Calcutta exercised superior jurisdiction over the whole of northern India and its councils legislated for all the

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2 J.C. Jack: The Economic Life of a Bengal District, pp. 76-8.
Empire. Calcutta was the centre of social life and of fashion for here was a court – the court of the Viceroy. British planters and traders, great zamindars and wealthy middle-class professional men, merchants and lawyers flocked to the city 'to be at the heart of politics' (as Professor Neale wrote of Elizabethan London) 'and listen to famous men speaking in the House; to gather news from all quarters of the kingdom and the world. Such a one stood a tip-toe among his neighbours on his return home.'

For the idle and the curious Calcutta presented fascinating glimpses of a strange and powerful civilisation half a world away, but for the intellectual and the seeker-after-knowledge it had something far more exciting and challenging to offer. A door had been thrown open through which came men bearing a vital new culture, as disturbing as it was attractive. If you joined the crowd clustered around that doorway, you could hear startling ideas on the rights and duties of man; on the organisation of society; on the attributes of god; and you could meet men who were glad to talk of these things and willing to teach.

The three Presidency cities – Calcutta, Madras and Bombay – were all points of early and intensive culture contact, but it was the Bengali middle-class above all others who grasped the new ideas most

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1 J.E. Neale: The Elizabethan House of Commons, p. 150.
2 It was no coincidence that in 1911 Calcutta had 25% of all Bengal's literates in English. (Census of India, 1911, vol. V, pt. i, p. 361.)
enthusiastically and who exerted themselves to produce a synthesis. From the schools and colleges of Calcutta came a small but growing group of intellectuals who, whether attracted or repelled by European values, felt a compulsion to reexamine the philosophic basis of their society. An intellectual ferment spread through educated Bengal. English studies flourished; Bengali was refashioned as a rich literary language; the rational philosophy of the West was weighed against Indian traditionalism; under the influence of Christianity and often in protest against it reform movements were attempted in Hinduism. From the second quarter of the nineteenth century the small English-speaking élite in Calcutta was afire with a revival of learning.¹

One important aspect of this new learning was a growth of historical consciousness. This is directly attributable to contact with the historicism of European culture for such historicism was absent from the Hindu tradition. The Bengali intellectual in search of a new identity turned to the past of his people and tried to construct a history which he might set against that of Europe. The manner of approach was important for, going with the European example in mind, the enquirer looked particularly at political activity and even for the concept of nationalism. Moreover his quest was as much a reaction against the richness of European history as it was a response to it and so he was determined to discover an Indian past, or if necessary

¹ See A. Gupta ed.: Studies in the Bengal Renaissance.
to create the myth of such a past, which might compare with that of Europe. There were significant consequences from both the response and the reaction. From the acquaintance with European history flowed a stream of political thinking and political aspiration which grew to full spate in the secular nationalism of the Indian National Congress. The reaction, on the other hand, brought a heightened awareness of the Hindu identity, and, when reinforced by movements for religious reform, was a matrix of Hindu revivalism.

What must be emphasised (and this is a point which is frequently overlooked) is that the search for a Hindu past was as much the outcome of the new learning as was the growth of political awareness and secular nationalism. The historical consciousness which underlay both was part of the new synthetic culture. The practical importance of this is that the English-educated Bengali could draw inspiration from both streams; and he could move from one stream to the other without a serious intellectual wrench. The history of Bengali politics and

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1 'There is no Hindu history. Who will praise our noble qualities if we do not praise them ourselves? It is a rule of life that a man who does not let it be known that he is great is considered of no account by his fellows. When has the glory of any nation ever been proclaimed by another nation? The proof of the warlike prowess of the Romans is to be found in Roman histories. The story of the heroism of the Greeks is contained in Greek writings. The case for Mussulman valour in battle rests only on their own records. The Hindus have no such glorious qualities simply because there is no written evidence.' (Bankim Chandra Chatterjea, quoted, T.W. Clark: "The Role of Bankimchandra in the Development of Nationalism", Historians of India, Pakistan and Ceylon, (ed. C.H. Philips), p. 436.)
literature (these two activities were closely related) in the second half of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries reveals many examples of such easy transition; examples which would be inexplicable had the Hindu revival been rooted in traditionalism.¹ The importance of this will be evident when we discuss the relationship of terrorism and constitutional nationalism.

The Bhadralok

It will have been observed that all references have been to Hinduism and this underlines the exclusiveness of the new learning. It was the product of one section of Bengali society and it became both a bond of unity and the distinguishing characteristic of a self-conscious culture group: the bhadralok - 'the respectable people', as they called themselves.

The reader has already been given clues as to the origins of the bhadralok: they were that landed and professional middle-class, drawn chiefly from the three upper-castes of Bengal Hinduism which, under the impetus of the European contact, had moved so rapidly and so far from their traditional ways. We have observed that this class at its upper levels merged with the larger landholders. Except for those few families, such as the Burdwan raj, descended from the princely Rajputs, and the aristocratic remnants of Muslim rule like the

¹ For information on the growth of historical consciousness I am indebted to Warren M. Gunderson, University of Chicago.
Murshidabad Nawabs, it was extraordinarily difficult to distinguish landholders pure-and-simple from the bhadralok. At the other end of the scale, however, the dividing line was clearly marked. The criterion was not wealth - many bhadralok were desperately poor - it was caste and culture.¹

For many centuries there appears to have been an unusually large gap between the high and low castes in Bengal, for there were few of the respectable intermediate castes which existed in other areas to act as a bridge. Unlike the high castes of some parts of India, those of Bengal did not till the soil. If they were engaged in agriculture they employed others to work their fields, for manual labour was considered degrading.²

Amongst the Hindus wrote J.C. Jack³ landowners, clerks, professional men such as doctors, lawyers and priests, form a class apart. They are of the three higher castes in the Hindu caste system and have for centuries lived in a different manner from the ordinary population. They have more wants and more ways of spending their money; they eat less but better food with greater variety; their houses are built on a different plan and are better furnished; their clothes although the same in cut display more variety in quality and colour.³

With the great social changes of the nineteenth century caste barriers became less formidable and it was possible in Bengal for a man

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¹ For a discussion of where the bhadralok drew the line between the 'respectable people' and the others see N.C. Chaudhuri: The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian, pp. 38-40.
³ J.C. Jack: The Economic Life of a Bengal District, p. 69.
of low caste to rise provided he had the right education. As a Government committee once remarked: 'We must remember that in Bengal the social order is a despotism of caste, tempered by matriculation'. ¹ To obtain the necessary education was not easy, however, because of the educational policy which the British applied in Bengal from the early nineteenth century. This was the principle of the downward filtration of knowledge. Its application was described by the General Committee of Public Instruction as follows:

... our efforts should be at first concentrated to the chief towns and Sudder Stations of districts, and to the improvement of education among the higher and middling classes of the population; in the expectation that through the agency of these scholars an educational reform will descend to the rural vernacular schools, and its benefits be rapidly transfused among all those excluded in the first instance by abject want from participation in its advantages.²

As we have seen, the initial stage of the scheme was a startling success, and it was the bhadralok who benefited, but the filtration downwards did not take place. English education became a jealously-guarded bhadralok possession. It took the Government a long while to recognise its error and the efforts which it then made to encourage mass education met with vehement opposition from the educated men. Their logic was clear enough: why educate rivals?³ Without mass education, the mass

¹ Bengal District Administration Committee, 1913-1914, Report, p. 176.
² B.T. McCully: English Education and the Origins of Indian Nationalism, p. 76.
could not rise. A few could struggle over the barriers which had been erected against them, but not many.

It was this need for an English-language education which kept most Muslims out of the middle-class. The overwhelming majority of the Muslim community in Bengal were cultivators, scarcely distinguishable in their ways of life from lower-caste Hindus, and regarded no more favourably by the upper castes nor enjoying any better chance of gaining an education. Of the Muslim landholders, who had enjoyed great wealth and power under Mughal rule, few survived the difficult years following the Permanent Settlement. The significant factor, however, was the reaction of educated Muslims to the new learning. Unlike their Hindu counterparts, they were not attracted to English-language education. They clung tenaciously to their traditional studies in Persian and Arabic. Many, no doubt, were at first unconvinced that Persian could be replaced by English as the language of administration but, even when the hard fact could no longer be disputed, they were reluctant to forsake the learning which was so intimately associated with both their religion and their past temporal glory. For the Muslims, as a dispossessed ruling race, English culture was a much more bitter pill to swallow than it was for the twice-conquered Hindus.

This initial inability to adapt severely handicapped the Muslims and they found themselves outdistanced by the Hindus in every profitable

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1 J.C. Jack: The Economic Life of a Bengal District, chpt. I.
endeavour. In the professions, in Government and private service, in trade, commerce and industry, and even in landholding the Muslims were forced into a secondary position.¹ Calcutta, the centre of power, became an overwhelmingly Hindu city, and even Dacca - 'city of mosques' - in the heart of one of the most densely populated Muslim areas in the world, had a dominant Hindu majority.

There was one important and, at first sight, apparently anomalous characteristic of bhadralok attitudes which resulted, in part, from the dominance which they held. This was their lack of emphasis upon caste. Within the middle-class as a group, caste differences had relatively little importance. There was never, for example, that antagonism which existed in Madras between Brahmins and high-caste non-Brahmins. Nor was there in Bengal the same explicit hostility between high castes and low castes, although, as we have already shown, they were sharply divided. This may be attributed in some degree to the acceptance by the bhadralok of European social values but that is not in itself a sufficient explanation. More important was the distinctive and proudly cherished bhadralok culture which, as a common possession, subsumed differences of caste and occupation within the group, and which gave the bhadralok a sense of corporate unity in its relations with other sections of society. As a result they thought of themselves as a single status group rather than as a collection of castes. Their

use of the term bhadralok is in itself evidence of this. This distinctiveness, when combined with their distance from the lower orders and their dominance over those orders, gave them a sense of security which enabled them to forget (or at least to appear to forget) the caste foundation on which their position rested. Once let a challenge to that dominance appear, however, and casteism would reassert itself.¹

The Bhadralok and Politics

Let us try to bring together these various aspects to give us a composite picture of the bhadralok in, shall we say, 1880. By an initial adventure into trade, the group had secured money to invest in land and by making the most of its educational opportunities it had gained a commanding position in government service and the learned professions. With the improvement of its economic position and its social status, it had transmuted its achievement into a code of social propriety. The 'respectable people' did not indulge in manual labour and they no longer engaged in trade. They should have a portion of landed rents, an English-language education, and their ambition should be a professional post in Calcutta.

¹ Every witness before the parliamentary Joint Select Committee in 1919 could assert with justification that caste played little part in Bengali politics. (PP, 1919, (203), vol. IV.) Yet within a decade, as a result of Muslim and low-caste Hindu assertiveness, Bengali high-caste men were leaders of the Hindu Mahasabha.
The bhadralok were no more than five per cent of the total population of Bengal. They were a proud, exclusive little group which derived its sense of community and separateness from its distinctive culture. In the development of that culture, Calcutta had played a vital role, for it was there that the bhadralok intellectuals had been brought into contact with European philosophy and history, and it was there that they had evolved a synthesis. Yet the culture they produced had not remained an exclusively urban phenomenon, for the bhadralok had their roots deep in the soil of rural Bengal and the man who went to the city customarily returned to his village to share his experiences with his community. Thus their culture was a common bond for the bhadralok, whether rural or urban, and it provided them with a bridge between their two worlds: Calcutta and the mofussil.

The bhadralok were proud but they were not self-assured. They were a new group with a young culture and they were still establishing their identity. Their chief means of self-expression were literature and politics, and in both of these activities they manifested their lack of self-confidence. It was most marked in their ambivalence towards Europeans — an ambivalence which was the result of their cultural debt to Europe and their colonial situation. At one and the same time they desired to reject Europeans and things European, and

1 The author's estimate based on the population figures of Brahmans, Baidyas and Kayasthas at the 1911 census. (Census of India, 1911, vol. V, pt. i, p. 521.)
yet desperately needed European recognition of their achievements. For instance, the father of Bengali prose, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, stirred his bhadrak readers with his dramatised appeals for a reappraisal of their Hindu heritage. Yet those same readers delighted in the praise which Bankim Chandra's works drew from the British and it was their proudest boast that Bengali had, as a consequence, been described as a literary medium fit to be compared with English.

In politics the effect of this ambivalence - this love-hate relationship - was to make possible violent swings in attitudes, even within a single individual, from a ready acceptance of British political forms and a willingness to work with the British, to an out-and-out repudiation of the British contact.

In the 1880s the bhadrak as a group were eager to have a share in the administration of British India and to acquire British political institutions. A visiting Russian observer remarked in 1885: 'young reformers of India believe, just as their comrades-at-arms in Europe do, that the salvation and success lie in the acquisition of political rights. Grant a man his rights and everything thereafter will go on excellently well.' The reference to 'their comrades-at-arms in Europe' is significant for at this time the bhadrak consciously looked to Europe for models for their political action. They were attracted particularly by the story of the Risorgimento and Mazzini's passionate

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1 I.P. Minayeff: Travels in and Diaries of India and Burma, p. 111.
teachings on patriotism provided their leaders with an example. 'Upon my mind the writings of Mazzini had created a profound impression,' wrote Surendranath Banerjea, the first of the great bhadralok political figures.

It was Mazzini, the incarnation of the highest moral forces in the political arena - Mazzini, the apostle of Italian unity, the friend of the human race, that I presented to the youth of Bengal. Mazzini had taught Italian unity. We wanted Indian unity. Mazzini had worked through the young. I wanted the young men of Bengal to realize their potentialities and to qualify themselves to work for the salvation of their country, but upon lines instinct with the spirit of constitutionalism.

A movement for national unity would be the vehicle of bhadralok self-expression - 'the young men' would 'realize their potentialities'. This phrase is crucial. So too is Banerjea's concluding phrase: 'but upon lines instinct with the spirit of constitutionalism'. This reflects the other great influence upon bhadralok political thinking: the British Whig tradition. Steeped in the writings of Burke, Macaulay, James Mill and John Stuart Mill, the bhadralok of Banerjea's generation firmly believed that true progress would come only through the acquisition of parliamentary institutions. 'Grant a man his rights and everything thereafter will go excellently well.' Constitutional advance was not only the best way forward, it was the proper way. 'I discarded his [Mazzini's] revolutionary teachings,' observed Banerjea, 'as unsuited to the circumstances of India and as fatal to its normal

1 Nation in Making, p. 43.
development, along the lines of peaceful and orderly progress'. For India to develop 'normally', it should follow the course of Britain and the 'white' colonies through the process of constitutional advance.

Pursuing this train of thought, it can be seen why the acquisition of parliamentary institutions was so important to the bhadralok. They wished to be masters of their own destiny, but, at the same time, it was essential to the growth of their self-confidence that they should be recognised as the political equals of their mentors, the English. If they gained for India the parliamentary self-government that had been secured by Britain's white colonies, then their status and their identity would be established.

The Australian politician, Alfred Deakin, who toured India in 1890-91, has left invaluable evidence of this viewpoint in an account of a conversation which he had with 'a Brahman, a wearer of the sacred thread, engaged as a railway clerk, speaking English fluently, and whose liberal tendencies were indicated by the very fact that he was taking his son, an interesting and handsome lad, to see the wonders of Jaipur.'

Politically, he was a warm supporter of the demands of the Native Congress for the introduction of representative institutions throughout India, but was prepared to accept the boon by degrees. After earnestly enquiring into the powers of self-government enjoyed by Australians, he remarked with a sigh that it would probably be a century before his countrymen would be fit to enjoy such privileges. That they

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1 Emphasis added. Nation in Making, p. 43.
would hereafter be enabled to exercise the fullest rights of the franchise and maintain responsible government he had no doubt, his assumption being that what was good for the white man must be equally good in time for the brown. The power was coveted, and so also was the equality with the white, which its possession would ultimately secure.¹

For this reason, British parliamentary institutions assumed an extraordinary importance in bhadralok thinking. As a potential means of the group's self-realisation they became the focus of a powerful emotional attachment. Given this attachment and given also the group's lack of certainty in its attitude towards Europeans, it is evident that the British would wound the bhadralok deeply if they refused to admit them to the process of constitutional advance or even if they simply exhibited an insensitivity to their involvement with parliamentary institutions. In either case the result was bound to be a violent reaction against British political forms and, very likely, this would be manifested in racial and cultural extremism.

The British and the Bhadralok

Considering the difficulties faced by foreigners who attempt to rule an alien people, James Stuart Mill wrote: 'Their danger is of despising the natives; that of the natives is of disbelieving that anything the strangers do can be intended for their good.'² This is

¹ A. Deakin: Irrigated India, p. 43.
² J.S. Mill: Considerations on Representative Government, p. 259.
an apt text for a discussion of the attitude of the British in India to the bhadralok in the three decades after 1880.

In the opening years of that period a small group of Liberals in the I.C.S., most notably Henry Cotton, A.O. Hume, George Yule and William Wedderburn, recognised the importance of the political aspirations of the bhadralok and similar English-educated groups in other parts of India. They assisted their leaders with the formation of regional political associations and in the organisation of an annual all-India convention, the Indian National Congress, which from 1885 was the main platform for the advocacy of constitutional advance.

The movement had received a great fillip from the viceroyalty of the Liberal Marquess of Ripon, who had been sent out by Gladstone after his electoral victory in 1880 to reverse the Earl of Lytton’s policy of aggressive imperialism. Ripon was convinced of 'the hourly increasing importance, nay I will say the necessity, of making the educated natives the friends, instead of the enemies, of our rule'. To this end they should be given a share in administration and provided with an opportunity to influence legislation. Ripon argued that it was 'not only bad policy, but sheer waste of power, to fail to utilize' the new 'intelligent class of public spirited men'. In the preceding

1. S. Gopal: The Viceroyalty of Lord Ripon, 1880-1884, pp. 1-5.
2. Ripon to W.E. Forster, 19 May 1883, quoted, ibid, p. 84.
3. PP, 1883, vol. LI, p. 27.
quarter century there had been a spectacular extension in the activities of government in India, accompanied by an equally profound change in the general notions of the proper spheres of governmental responsibility. The regular agencies of administration were already over-taxed and to Ripon it seemed no more than common sense to take advantage of the able non-official assistance that was now offering from English-educated Indians. 'We have made them, let us use them for their good and our own.'

With this in mind he urged the provincial Governments to transfer a large share of the work of local government to elected non-official committees. In his now famous resolution of 18 May 1882 he emphasised that his aim was not primarily to improve the administration but to foster 'the small beginnings of independent political life'. Earlier he had also suggested the inclusion of a few elected Indian members in the legislative councils as a development in 'extended freedom and cautious confidence', but his proposal was not favoured in either Calcutta or London and it was left to his successor, Lord Dufferin, to frame a scheme for the reform of these institutions.

Prior to 1857 there had been a single legislative council in Calcutta legislating for all of British India and it was composed

1 Ripon to Lord Kimberley, 10 Jul 1883, quoted, S. Gopal, op.cit., p. 84.
2 Quoted, S. Gopal, ibid, p. 92.
3 Ripon to J. Bright, 19 Jul 1882, quoted, ibid, p. 84.
wholly of official British members. As a result of the shock of the Mutiny, the system had been reformed to provide the Government with a means of consultation with leading Indians, so that it might avoid 'the perilous experiment of continuing to legislate for millions of people, with few means of knowing, except by rebellion, whether the laws suit them or not'. In 1861 separate legislative councils were set up in the three Presidencies - Bombay, Madras and Bengal - and a few nominated Indian members were included in these bodies and in the Imperial Legislative Council.

In 1886 Dufferin suggested the extension of this consultative system to give the new class of educated Indians a greater opportunity to influence policy formation. He recommended to the Home Government that the councils be enlarged to include representatives chosen by local bodies and public organisations, and that their members be given wider powers of discussion. The result was the reforming Act of 1892.

Liberals such as Cotton, Ripon and Dufferin were not, however, representative of the main body of British administrators in India in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and their ideal of Indian political development was not generally accepted. The main

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1 P. Sharan: The Imperial Legislative Council of India, pp. 17-8.
2 Sir Bartle Frere, minute, 16 Mar 1860, quoted, ibid, p. 24.
3 P. Sharan, ibid, pp. 24-31.
trends were towards authoritarianism and centralisation. This can be understood if we appreciate the nature of the British sense of imperial mission.

Of all the traditions of the Indian Civil Service, none was stronger than its paternalism. It saw itself as a wise and benevolent body of rulers, keeping the peace between the irreconcilable races, religions and castes of a huge sub-continent; a corps of dedicated men, giving their knowledge and their energies to improve, however slowly, the material well-being of an ignorant but warm-hearted and grateful people; protecting the weak and the down-trodden against the strong, minorities against majorities - a faction of order (as one officer wrote) in a factious society.¹ This was a tradition which newcomers to the Service inherited from their predecessors and upon which their years in their first districts - healthy, exciting and impressionable years of youth - put the stamp of personal conviction. They learnt of the hardships of Indian village life; the sufferings which followed natural calamities, so often made worse for the poor by the oppression of landlord, money-lender or priest. They saw the misery which could be inflicted in a traditional society with the sharp weapon of social boycott. They enjoyed the gratitude which rewarded their efforts to free a peasant from an illegal cess, or to provide good drinking water for a village. They believed that they were meant to rule and they were confident that

¹ Carstairs, p. 162.
they ruled wisely, for they knew India and Indians 'at least as well as any body of men in the country'.

Paternalism was an admirable tradition for an all-powerful service of foreign autocrats, but it fitted them ill to receive the suggestion that they should forego some of their power, so that Indians might learn a few basic lessons in self-government. At its most extreme, their reaction was a flat denial that Indians were capable of exercising any power properly. If the British did not wish to see just government give way to 'government by social ostacism'; if they were unwilling to have India relapse into the frightful disorder from which their rule had rescued it, then their statesmen should realise that the powers of the I.C.S. had to be kept intact. Fitzjames Stephen, a former Law Member of the Government of India, wrote in 1883:

No country in the world is more orderly, more quiet, or more peaceful than British India as it is, but if the vigour of the government should ever be relaxed, if it should lose its essential unity of purpose, and fall into hands either weak or unfaithful, chaos would come again like a flood. No road is so smooth, hard, uniform and level as a frozen river, but nothing so hopelessly unmanageable as a thaw complicated with a flood.

Writing later at the time of the Morley-Minto reforms, when the thaw had begun, Sir Bampfylde Fuller, a former Lieutenant-Governor of Eastern

1 Sir Andrew Fraser to a District Officer, 12 Dec 1907, A. Fraser: Among Indian Rajahs and Ryots, p. 29.
2 H.H. Risley: The People of India, p. 274.
Bengal & Assam, asked:

British interests apart, will this change be for the general good? It will undoubtedly stimulate what is called "political activity" amongst the educated classes of India. But its effects will invariably be to the disadvantage of the poor. However distasteful the idea may be to the many kind-hearted men who in politics take the Liberal side, we are sacrificing, in this case, philanthropy to politics.\(^1\)

The distaste among I.C.S. officers for politics and politicians, which this reflects, was a corollary of their paternalistic outlook. As so often to the administrator, to many of them politics seemed a sordid affair of petty faction and personal aggrandisement. Politicians in Britain did harm enough, in their opinion, but to hand India over to the local breed - the sharp Western-educated lawyers, journalists and landholders, who were already a thorn in the side of the District Officer - would be to undo generations of painstaking work. Explaining the reluctance of his fellow officers to develop local self-government as Ripon had urged, a Bengal Civilian wrote: 'Considering ... that the Government had now for twenty years been endeavouring, so far in vain, to untwist the fingers of the landlord from the tenant's throat, it was not unnatural to suspect that he might use any local body we appointed as an instrument of oppression.'\(^2\)

The I.C.S. officer's attitude to the bhadrarok and similar groups was strongly coloured by this belief that they belonged to the exploiting

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\(^2\) Carstairs, p. 172.
classes. What they meant by self-government, the Civilian asserted, was freedom to exploit the peasant. Moreover, he asked, why should these few unrepresentative cultural hybrids - these babus of the coastal cities - be given power over the mass of their fellows? They were not 'true Indians' like the brave, loyal martial races of the north-west or the simple, honest peasants. 'Such are the town Bengalis, of whom disparaging opinions are expressed,' wrote Deakin on his tour of India. 'The Baboo produces nothing but words. The country people, though debased by the tyranny of iniquitous landlords under an iniquitous law, are of a better type; they are the cultivators, the irrigators, and the producers, and they are cared for as much as possible by European officials, who protect them as far as lies in their power.'

To the majority of Civilians, the bhadralok seemed a noisy, effete and contemptible people, who were scarcely relevant to the 'important' work of administering India. The prevailing ideal in the I.C.S. was efficient centralised bureaucracy and the stronghold of this mentality was Calcutta, the chief centre of British Indian commerce, the seat of the Government of India, and the headquarters of the secretariat for the huge tract of permanently-settled territory which was administered under the name of Bengal. The bhadralok's city was also the 'Anglo-Indian's' city. The significance of this will be immediately apparent. The most politically advanced group in India was hereby forced to

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1 A. Deakin: Irrigated India, p. 85.
experience directly the constrictions imposed upon Indian political self-expression by British imperialism. It was frustrated by the lack of room for expansion. It was humiliated by the haughty indifference displayed towards its aspirations. It was mortified by the contemptuous dismissal of its achievements. The potential danger in this situation was recognised by the Aga Khan when he went to Calcutta in 1903 to serve on the Imperial Legislative Council. He wrote:

I ... saw how remote the Government had become from the people of India, not the masses only, but the increasing and ever more articulate and active intelligentsia. I saw at close quarters how foreign the Government was in spirit and in atmosphere. On the other side, I saw that India's political leaders, dissatisfied at not having succeeded in obtaining their earlier moderate demands, began to seek not merely administrative reforms but the full control of their own political destiny.¹

Lord Curzon and the Partition of Bengal

The smouldering fire of bhadralok discontent was fanned to a blaze by the provocative actions of Lord Curzon, Viceroy from 1898 to 1905. In the decade preceding his appointment routine had taken hold of the bureaucracy and the machine had become steadily more ponderous and less adaptable. Curzon came with a passionate belief in Britain's imperial mission and he made an heroic personal effort to place the administration once more on the offensive. His creed: 'If I were asked to sum it up in a single word, I would say "Efficiency". That has been our gospel, the keynote of our administration.'²

¹ Aga Khan: The Memoirs, pp. 74-5.
² Curzon, quoted, E. Stokes: The English Utilitarians and India, p. 311.
When he arrived in India he saw inefficiency all about him. He set out to remedy this and Bengal, his headquarters province, received his immediate attention. A Bill to reconstitute the Corporation of Calcutta, which was under consideration by the Bengal Legislative Council, seemed to him inadequate. So he brushed aside the provincial Government and drafted a new measure, under which the elected element on the Corporation was reduced and executive functions were entrusted to a committee with a European majority. These reforms, he declared, were essential for efficient local-government.

He also believed that the Indian university system was in need of an overhaul and in 1902 he appointed a commission to frame a scheme of reforms. As a result of its report official control of all higher education was tightened and the governing bodies of the three universities, Calcutta, Bombay and Madras, were reorganised, with a large proportion of Government nominated members.

These measures greatly perturbed the bhadralok for their effect was to restrict still further the group's means of political self-expression. In the absence of other institutions in which to act, the bhadralok had come to attach an extraordinary importance to their participation in civic and educational affairs. What wounded them

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2 Ibid, pp. 28-30 & 73-5.
most deeply was Curzon's contemptuous dismissal of their opposition as ill-founded and factious.¹ He had no sympathy for their aspirations, nor did he conceal his dislike for them as a class. He was bitterly attacked in the bhadralok press and Surendranath Banerjea led 28 Indian members out of the Corporation, swearing never to return until nonofficial control was restored.²

The real storm, however, burst over Curzon's decision to partition Bengal, for this was a direct and calculated attack on bhadralok unity. The size of Bengal had been a problem for the British throughout most of the nineteenth century.³ At one time the whole of northern India from Assam in the east to the river Sutlej in the west had been under a single administration in Calcutta, but by 1874 its charge had been reduced to Bengal proper, Bihar and Orissa. It was generally agreed that this area was still too large for efficient administration but the Government of India could not decide on how to divide these old permanently-settled provinces.

The question was still undecided when Curzon arrived and it came to his notice incidentally in 1902 because of the impending incorporation

² Nation in Making, pp. 129-32 & 177-83.
of Berar in British India. He considered that the occasion was opportune for a general readjustment of the boundaries of Assam, Bengal, Madras, the Central Provinces, Bombay and the Punjab, and he instructed his subordinates to consider the matter. The first suggestion that was submitted to him was for the transfer of Berar to Bombay province, but he rejected this on political grounds. He wrote on 6 March 1903:

I cannot contemplate any proposal which would add to the strength or solidarity of the Maratha community with anything but dismay .... Now there are already over two millions of Marathas in the Central Provinces; but so far as I have always heard they are neither in close sympathy nor in close communication with the Marathas of the Bombay Deccan - the most able and the most dangerous of the opponents of our rule in India.

I believe the Marathas of Berar in general to reproduce the attitude of their fellow-countrymen in the Central Provinces, not of those in Bombay. Why then should we go and gratuitously make a present to Poona of this enormous accretion of political strength ... ¹

In the same month Sir Andrew Fraser, the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, suggested that the Chittagong and Dacca Divisions of his province should be transferred to Assam, primarily to weaken the bhadralok. Curzon accepted his proposal:

He has represented to me that the advantage of severing these Eastern districts of Bengal, which are a hotbed of the purely Bengali movement, unfriendly if not seditious in character, and dominating the whole tone of Bengal administration, will immeasurably outweigh any possible drawbacks, and not only does he urge the severance of these tracts from Bengal because of the character of the educated section of their inhabitants, but he has also returned from his enquiries in those parts in connection with the Police Commission with the conviction that nowhere in India are the officers of Government more ignorant of, or more

¹ Minute, GI, Home Public, A149-160, Dec 1903.
divorced from, the people. He has acquainted me with details which testify to this divorce in a remarkable degree. He thinks that it would be an unqualified advantage to Bengal to lose these elements of weakness and dissension, and he opines that they would be more easily reduced to their proper level of importance if transferred to another administration.\(^1\)

It was decided towards the end of 1903 to make public this proposal but Curzon was careful to conceal his real motive, both from the Indian public and the British Government. 'What I could safely say in the privacy of the Council Chamber is not necessarily suitable for proclamation on the house-tops.'\(^2\) The bhadralok, however, were under no illusion as to the Government’s purpose and they protested vehemently. This did them no good for their opposition merely confirmed the official opinion that they were growing too strong. Reviewing the grounds of their complaints, H.H. Risley, Home Member of the Government of India, wrote on 7 February 1904: 'Loss of national unity. — This is the Congress point. Bengal united is a power; Bengal divided will pull several different ways. That is perfectly true and is one of the great merits of the scheme'.\(^3\)

Later in the year, again at Fraser’s suggestion, it was decided to extend the scheme to include the whole of Eastern Bengal, which, with Assam, would then form a Muslim-majority province. It was hoped in

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\(^1\) Minute, 1 Jun 1903, GI, Home Public, A149-160, Dec 1903.  
\(^2\) Minute, 10 Nov 1903, GI, Home Public, A149-160, Dec 1903.  
\(^3\) Minute, GI, Home Public, A155-167, Feb 1905.
this way to prevent the 'clique of Congress wire-pullers' in Calcutta from sowing disaffection among the Eastern Bengal Muslims. 'Their constant effort, hitherto defeated mainly by the influence of the Dacca Nawab, has been to induce the leading Muhammadans to submit to their influence. If Dacca is made the capital of the new province, these chances of capturing the Bengal Muhammadans will become still more remote.'

By December 1904 the scheme was finalised and the Government of India's only remaining concern was to disguise its political purpose. Risley complained of the difficulty of concealing the truth from the public: 'It is not altogether easy to reply in a despatch which is sure to be published without disclosing the fact that in this scheme as in the matter of the amalgamation of Behar to the Central Provinces one of our main objects is to split up and thereby weaken a solid body of opponents to our rule.' Bengal was partitioned on 16 October 1905.

The Bhadralok Reaction

For the bhadralok this was the ultimate betrayal. They had been stabbed in the back by the very people whom they had been striving to emulate. Their attempts to realise their liberal aspirations, to gain a legitimate outlet for their political energies, were treated as

1 Risley, minute, 6 Dec 1904, CI, Home Public, A155-167, Feb 1905.
2 Ibid.
subversive and a danger to British rule. They had hoped to win British recognition as an able and advanced community worthy of the grant of political rights. Instead they were regarded as traitors, to be divided and broken in the interests of British imperialism. Worst of all Curzon's Government had neither the courage nor the honesty to admit its real purpose in dividing Bengal. It had lied and it had used that lie against the bhadralok. The measure, it had said, was designed merely to facilitate administrative efficiency. Obviously those who opposed it must be factious and self-interested.¹

'I think,' said Fitzjames Stephen in 1872, 'that one distinct act of injustice, one clear instance of unfaithfulness to the principles upon which our government of India depends, one positive proof that we cannot or will not do justice to all classes, races, creeds, or no-creeds, in British India would in the long run shake our power more deeply than even financial or military disaster.'² The partition of Bengal was a distinct act of injustice and it destroyed for all time the bhadralok's faith in the beneficence of British intentions. From this point, distrust and enmity for the Government characterised bhadralok politics.

¹ GI to Secretary of State, 2 Feb 1905, PP, 1906, [Cd. 2746], vol. LXXXI, p. 647. A. Fraser: Among Indian Rajahs and Ryots, pp. 322-5.
² Quoted, S. Gopal: The Viceroyalty of Lord Ripon, 1880-1884, p. 136.
Curzon's reconstruction of the Calcutta Corporation and University had affected directly only limited sections of *bhadralok* society — the Calcutta professional men and the university graduates — but the partition of the province was an issue of importance for every *bhadralok* family, for it divided their two cultural worlds: Calcutta and the mofussil. The small group of *bhadralok* politicians, struggling manfully against Curzon's policies, suddenly found that they had the support of almost the whole of their community throughout Bengal.\(^1\) The intense feeling aroused by the question and the desire to make some active protest displayed by sections of the *bhadralok* which had no previous involvement in politics, surprised the *bhadralok* leaders and dismayed the British.\(^2\)

It is fairly certain that there were economic as well as political reasons for this outburst of anger. The partition coincided with a sharp rise in the price of rice, Bengal's staple, due mainly to the failure of the crops in 1905. The harvests in the following three years

\(^1\) The new interest in politics generated by the partition can be illustrated by a comparison of the circulation figures for 1904 and 1905 of the newspapers which opposed the measure:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>1904</th>
<th>1905</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amrita Bazar Patrika</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>7,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bengalee</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td>11,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Epiphany</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>5,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hitavadi</td>
<td>16,000</td>
<td>20,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sandhya</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>7,000</td>
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(GI, Home Public, B200, Jun 1906.)

\(^2\) GI, Home Public, A137-138, Sep 1907.
were all poorer than normal and by 1907 the cost of rice had risen by 58 per cent. The agricultural classes benefited, if anything, from this, and urban labourers were compensated by increased wages, but the bhadralok were severely hit.¹

As has been shown, most bhadralok families derived their incomes partly from land rents and partly from professional salaries and fees. Neither of these sources was sufficiently flexible to meet such an abnormally sharp rise in the basic cost of living as occurred in 1905-6. Already the economic pressure on the bhadralok was considerable for the learned professions were becoming over-crowded and the competition for appointments in government and private service intense. Whereas many of the older generation had been able to find employment outside Bengal, the young men at the beginning of the twentieth century discovered that the advancement of education in other parts of India was producing local candidates for clerical and professional jobs. There could be no question of turning for relief to any form of manual labour or even trade. So many bhadralok families were forced deeper and deeper into debt as they struggled to maintain the outward style of living appropriate to their station and to provide the socially-indispensable English-language education for their sons.² At the time

² J.C. Jack: The Economic Life of a Bengal District, pp. 89-95.
there was widespread belief in the theory that wealth was being
drained from India by the Imperial rulers, and very naturally the
impoverished bhadralok blamed their plight upon their British
'exploiters'.

Economic hardship was compounded with injured pride and the
frustrations of a vital colonial people who had inadequate opportunities
for constructive political activity. The situation was ripe for
violence and it was not long in coming. The agitation against the
partition had been launched by Surendranath Banerjea, with a limited
campaign of meetings, public protest marches, the withdrawal of
bhadralok members from Government institutions, the boycott of British
manufactures, and the encouragement of a programme of 'national
education' and swadeshi, as a demonstration of Bengal's determination
to stand apart from the British.¹ Banerjea had, however, started
something which he could not control and within a matter of weeks he
had lost his audience to the advocates of violence.

Bepin Chandra Pal toured the province calling upon the young
bhadralok to prove their manhood by pitting themselves against the
British. '... we should now return lathi for lathi,' he told them.²
Barin and Aurobindo Ghose distributed pamphlets glorifying terrorism
as a religious duty for the bhadralok. They reminded their readers

¹ Nation in Making, chpts. XVIII-XXII.
² CI, Home Public, A1240, Jul 1906.
that Kali, the Goddess of Destruction, the Mother of Strength, was created by the gods to destroy the demons who had usurped their kingdom. Kali, the avenger whose many hands dripped with blood, was not a symbol of savagery but of selflessness, they taught. As Kali drove out the demons so should the bhadralok, strengthened by the worship of Kali, drive out the British. 'Are not ten thousand sons of Bengal prepared to embrace death to avenge the humiliation of their motherland? The number of Englishmen in the entire country is not more than a lac and half, and what is the number of English officials in each district? With a firm resolve you can bring English rule to an end in a single day.'

This teaching evoked an enthusiastic response from the young bhadralok and there was no shortage of volunteers for the terrorist samitis which the Ghose brothers and their associates founded to organise political assassinations. The swing from liberal constitutionalism to racial and cultural extremism had been rapid and complete.

Banerjea and his fellow moderates were horrified by these developments which were deeply offensive to their liberal ideals. They could see nothing but political and social disaster resulting from this resort to violence. Point was given to their fears by the repressive measures, imprisonment without trial and a strict censorship of the press, with which the Government hit back at the terrorists, and by the

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Jugantar, Mar 1907, quoted, C. Tegart: Terrorism in India, p. 8.
hostile reaction against the bhadralok which the anti-partition agitation provoked from the Muslims and low-caste Hindu groups. They did not share the bhadralok's concern over the partition and were determined not to be dragged into the agitation by them.¹

The moderates' greatest fear was that this extremism would alienate the sympathy of the British Liberals for the Indian nationalist movement, and, by delaying constitutional advance for an indefinite period, contribute to the frustration of the bhadralok. This was a matter of immediate significance, for the Liberal party had defeated the Conservatives at a British General election in January 1906 and formed a Government. It was ten years since the Liberals had last held power and it would be a tragedy if this opportunity for advance were lost because of the outbreak of terrorism. 'Now is the time for work, - now or never,' wrote R.C. Dutt, one of the leading Bengali moderates, on 24 May 1906. 'If this Liberal Govt fails to give a more representative character to the Indian Administration, we shall never get anything by peaceful methods, and England will be teaching us to pursue Irish methods in a country which has more than fifty times the population of Ireland.'²

A New Era

Curzon had resigned the Viceroyalty in August 1905 following a difference of opinion with his Commander-in-Chief and the Secretary of

¹ GI, Home Police, A140-148, May 1906.
² Dutt to G.K. Gokhale, 24 May 1906, Gokhale papers.
State. His successor, Lord Minto, although also a Conservative, did not agree with all that Curzon had done nor did he consider that his predecessor had been wise in riding roughshod over Indian opposition. He saw that the trend towards authoritarianism and centralisation had been carried so far that the Government of India had been burdened with an immense load of detailed administrative work which prevented it from taking a broad view of events. It had lost touch with Indian opinion, and, as a consequence, the governmental structure of British India was dangerously isolated and top-heavy.

Minto believed that there was an urgent need to reduce the vulnerability of the Government of India by decentralising power and opening new channels for the expression of Indian opinion. He was fully supported in this view by the new Liberal Secretary of State, John Morley, who was convinced that there had to be a fundamental change in the nature of British government in India. 'Cast-iron bureaucracy won't go on for ever, we may be quite sure of that,' he remarked to Minto.¹

Morley saw the danger of failing to satisfy the aspirations of the moderate Indian nationalists for a greater share in the government of their country, and he proposed reforms of the executive and legislative councils to provide new opportunities for this group. He placed particular importance upon the admission of Indians to the executive

councils, for these were the bastions of autocracy. For that very reason the proposal scandalised the I.C.S. Morley, however, insisted that if the British were to regain the confidence of the moderate nationalists, they must give an earnest of their good faith by opening these jealously-guarded doors to them. In August 1907 he appointed K.G. Gupta and Saiyid Husain Bilgrami to his Council in London, and, two years later after a hard struggle with the officials, he got S.P. Sinha into the Viceroy's Council as law member. The Governments of Bengal, Bombay and Madras were instructed to follow suit with their Executives.

The nature of the legislative council reforms was worked out between Morley and Minto in a long correspondence extending over four years from 1906 to 1909. The two men were agreed that the purpose should be to rally support for a Government which had become dangerously isolated; to associate non-officials with an over-taxed Administration; and to provide that Administration with a means of feeling the pulse of public opinion, thereby enabling it to avoid another misjudgment such as had occurred over the partition of Bengal. They also agreed that while the elective principle should be introduced, the legislatures should not have power over the Government. They were to be responsive not responsible.

2 J. Morley, ibid, p. 190.
Where the two men disagreed was over the relative political importance of various Indian communities and the manner in which they should be represented in the councils. Morley maintained that the essential purpose of the reforms must be to satisfy groups such as the bhadralok - the new western-educated Indians - and to provide their leaders with opportunities for worthwhile political service. "We must 'do our best to make English rulers friends with Indian leaders,' he wrote to Minto, 'and at the same time ... to train them in habits of political responsibility.' He also realised that the form of the constitutional concessions had an intrinsic importance for the Indian nationalists. They wanted to follow the same path as Britain and the white colonies. With this in mind, Morley urged that the basis of representation in the new councils should be territorial, not communal.

Minto did not agree with this. He insisted that there were other communities quite as important as the westernised urban intelligentsia and that the legislatures would be truly representative only if all these communities were included. 'Personally my object has been in the proposed reforms to secure the representation of landed proprietors, and of those who have a stake in the country, and of communities,' he explained. Supported by his subordinates in the Government of India,

2 GI, Home Public, A205-244, Feb 1909.
he emphasised that the great landholders and the Muslims should be
given special consideration because of their importance as conservative
and loyal groups on which the British in India could rely for support.
Morley was told that these groups would be swamped unless they were
provided with separate communal representation.\(^1\) He finally gave in
on this point, to the disgust of the nationalists who considered that
communal representation was a calculated attempt to keep the Indian
nation divided.\(^2\)

The legislative councils as reconstituted under the Indian Councils
Act of 1909 had non-official majorities, with a large proportion of
elected members returned from communal and sectional constituencies.
In recognition of its political maturity, Bengal alone was given
Representative Government. The councillors were now empowered to
discuss 'any matter of general public interest' and to move resolutions
on the budget.\(^3\)

To guide them in their work of reform, Morley and Minto had
appointed a Royal Commission in 1907 to advise upon decentralisation.

\(^1\) GI, Home Public, A205-44, Feb 1909.
\(^2\) 'The Moslems have sung to the tune which has been played to them, and
think a separation from their own countrymen will raise them in power
and dignity .... When the history of this cleavage will come to be
written, the responsibility of those who fomented it, and the folly of
those who accepted it, will be recorded.' (R.C. Dutt to G.K. Gokhale,
28 Jun 1909, Gokhale papers.)
\(^3\) Indian Councils Act, 1909. PP, 1910, 49877, vol. LXVII,
pp. 617-1101.
Its report was presented in the following year. As a result of its recommendations, the institutions of local self-government were refashioned. It was also severely critical of the concentration of power in the hands of the Government of India, and it insisted upon a devolution to the provinces. The larger of these should all have non-I.C.S. Governors assisted by executive councils. Acting upon its advice, Morley in 1909 provided an Executive Council for Bengal, which previously had been ruled by a lone Lieutenant-Governor.

Because of the trouble over the partition, Bengal occupied a disproportionate amount of Morley and Minto's time. They both regarded the partition as a mistake. '... from start to finish the thing has been badly managed,' complained Minto in March 1906. In an attempt to smooth things over, he removed from office Curzon's protege, the impulsive Lieutenant-Governor of Eastern Bengal & Assam, Bampfylde Fuller. Morley heartily approved of this action. 'Partition is a disagreeable pill,' he wrote. 'Well, that is all the more reason why we should take any chance of gilding it. Fuller and his like seem to think that the best plan is to gild the pill with wormwood.' This policy of appeasement

1 H. Tinker: The Foundations of Local Self-Government in India, Pakistan and Burma, p. 64ff.
2 PP, 1908, [Cd. 4360], vol. XLIV, pp. 157-60.
3 PP, 1908, [Cd. 4426], vol. LXXXVI, pt. i, p. 52.
5 Same to same, 3 May 1906, ibid, p. 399.
was a failure. The anti-partition agitation grew in strength and
violence, and Minto finally resorted to imprisonment without trial
and to press censorship. This at least restored an appearance of order
but it was no permanent solution. '... nobody will be more ready
than you to agree that the forces with which we are contending are far
too subtle, deep, and diversified, to be abated by making seditious
leading articles expensive,' remarked Morley to Minto.¹ Both men
favoured the reunification of Bengal,² but it was left to their
successors, Lord Crewe and Lord Hardinge, to effect it.

Crewe succeeded Morley as Secretary of State in October 1910 and
Hardinge took over from Minto a month later. Together they prepared a
bold plan to complete the work of reform begun by their predecessors.
Their purpose was the same: to decentralise power and to offer to
political India new scope for influence in affairs of state. Again
Bengal loomed large in their arrangements. The Government of India
would be shifted away from troublesome Calcutta to Delhi. At the same
time, Bengal would be reunited under a Governor-in-Council, with Bihar
& Orissa forming a separate province on one side and Assam on the
other. These rearrangements, it was to be made clear, were to enable
the Government of India to detach itself from the provinces, which

² M.N. Das, op.cit., pp. 393-400.
might then gain a greater measure of autonomy and enjoy increasing non-official influence in their administration.¹

King George V visited India in 1911 and at a spectacular durbar at Delhi on 12 December he announced the scheme to an incredulous India. 1 April 1912 was chosen as the date for the reunification of Bengal and Crewe was careful to select as the first Governor a man of liberal sympathies. His choice was Lord Carmichael of Skirling, who had succeeded Gladstone as Liberal member of Parliament for Midlothian and who had later been a popular Governor of both Victoria and Madras. Crewe sent him to Bengal with a special charge to exercise 'fine tact' in an effort to convince his subjects and, no less important, his subordinates that a new era had opened.²

² Crewe to Carmichael, 15 Jan 1912, Carmichael, pp. 150-2.
CHAPTER II

A MAN WITH A MISSION

The Governor's Task

In the opening weeks of 1912, the Bengal newspapers were busy with that time-honoured British Indian sport: picking the new Governor. Their innumerable editorial tips were delivered with the usual air of authority but for once all were wrong. 'Lord Carmichael is the steed we did not fancy for the Governorship,' remarked one paper. 'He had just won the Madras Cup, and it is very rare for such horses to run twice in one month.' Carmichael had been appointed Governor of Madras in November 1911, after three successful years in Victoria. By his friendly informality and his liberal speeches, he had achieved rapid popularity in his new post, and it was obvious that his premature transfer to Bengal was intended as a public demonstration of the British Government's determination to pursue a new policy there.

He went to Bengal with a mission: to appease the anger of that unsettled province. By his liberal influence on the Administration, he

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1 Indian Daily News, quoted Statesman, 24 Jan 1912.
was to prove that the reunification betokened a change of heart, not merely a modification of institutions, and he was to seek a similar change of heart in Bengal politics. It was hoped in this way to reconcile the dissensious communities and to put an end to terrorism.

The Secretary of State, Lord Crewe, wrote to Carmichael on 15 January 1912 outlining his task and suggesting possible courses of action.¹ The letter revealed a sophisticated and sympathetic understanding of Bengal politics. In the first place, Crewe emphasised that the situation in Bengal had distinctive features which marked the province out from the rest of India and which made unusual demands on its Government for the exercise of political finesse. Comparing Carmichael's new post with the office he had just left in Madras, Crewe wrote:

There can be no doubt in your, or in any other, mind that the field of work in which you will now move is both wider and more strenuous, giving scope both for fuller energy and finer tact. As to this, I can only tell you that Hardinge and I frankly agreed that, had we been free from other obligations, the first governorship of Bengal would have been a pest which either of us might have undertaken, had it been offered to us, with a full realisation of its great importance, and with no illusion that the duties would be simpler or easier than others which we have, or have had, to perform.

'If I were going to Calcutta myself,' he continued, 'I should draw a rough sketch in my own mind of the three main classes of my future subjects, with a provisional outline of the reasonable way to treat each.'

¹ Carmichael, pp. 150-2.
Crewe's 'three main classes' were the European non-officials, the Muslims and the bhadralok.

The first of these — the European non-officials — were more numerous in Bengal than in any other part of India. They numbered 20½ thousand, of whom twelve thousand were in Calcutta, for this was the headquarters of British Indian trade. Through the Bengal Chamber of Commerce and through private influence, the community had always been able to put strong pressure on the Government, and, if checked, its displeasure found expression in the columns of the Englishman, the Statesman, Capital and Commerce, Calcutta's four main British-owned newspapers. The community had a powerful lobby both in Whitehall and at Westminster, and its opinion was normally sought by the officials on matters of importance.

In 1912 it was smarting from the blow to its influence and pride which had been dealt by the transfer of the capital to Delhi. Its leaders had not been consulted about this move and it confirmed them in their belief, born of the admission of Indians in greater numbers to the councils, that the Government was giving way 'before the attacks of a democracy of literati, who have a sense of nothing beyond their own importance.' The Government of India, they feared, had put its foot on a slippery decline which might slide British rule, and with it British commerce, into the sea. Crewe was confident that Carmichael

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1 Englishman, 25 Dec 1913. Cf. ibid, 6 Mar 1913.
would handle them tactfully. He wrote:

The Calcutta English seem to be disposed, many of them, to take a more sensible view of the changes than they did at first; but there seems likely to remain a noisy and violent minority, represented by The Englishman, who will more probably expend their wrath on Hardinge, moreover, than on the new Governor. The community includes, I am sure, a number of honest, capable, and likeable people, but I am not less sure that they are spoilt children in many respects, full of their historical and social importance, anti-Indian au fond, and keen to scent out "disloyalty" in any independent expression of opinion, hide-bound too in class prejudices. You will have to ride them with a light hand, as you are well competent to do - all the more as their mouths are sore for the time being.

The second of Crewe's 'classes', the Eastern Bengal Muslims were also up in arms over the reunification. The 1905 arrangement had suited them very well for it had given them a majority in the new province of Eastern Bengal & Assam and a share in public affairs which they had previously been denied. There had been a bias among the I.C.S. officers in Eastern Bengal & Assam in their favour and their leader, the Nawab of Dacca, had exercised great influence on the Government. Dacca and Chittagong, the capital and port respectively of the new province, had boomed. There had been more jobs for the members of the small Muslim

1 '... it may have been unconscious, but the bias among officials in favour of Mohammedans was strong. All Hindus thought this.' (Carmichael to Crewe, 21 Aug 1912, Carmichael, p. 169.)

2 In the decade 1901-11 the population of Dacca rose by 21% and that of Chittagong by 30%. The increase for Greater Calcutta was only 11.9% and for Bengal as a whole only 8%. (Census of India, 1911, vol. I, p. 31; vol. V, pt. i, pp. 37 & 152.)
middle-class.¹ It was an Indian summer which came to a sudden and
frosty end with the Delhi announcement in December 1911. This cut
the Muslims to the quick. The British, it seemed, had performed a
volte-face to pacify the Hindu extremists. Muslim resentment was
tempered only by the determination to gain as many concessions as
possible as indemnity for British treachery.

Crewe advised Carmichael to take a firm line with them:

As regards the Mohammadans, especially those of Eastern Bengal,
I am glad that Hardinge agreed with me that we ought not to delay
in going to Dacca and having it out with them on the spot. They
are trying, as one would suppose was likely, to extract every
sort of "favourite's" treatment from Government on the strength
of losing their vast numerical predominance. There is a great
deal that they cannot have, and I am clear that the right road
is to help them as a community by educational facilities and the
like, to run at even weights with the Hindus, rather than to
continue indefinitely the practice which has been found necessary
at first, of giving them an advantage in the handicap. They
have a rather clever paper in Calcutta, edited by one Mohamed
Ali, a sharp fellow who used to be in the Baroda service; and I
anticipate that there will be a good deal of talk and writing
before the new machine begins to grind corn. But I feel
confident that the total result will be an alleviation, not an
exacerbation, of feeling in Bengal between Moslem and Hindu,
and that the task of the police will thus be far easier.

Among the third 'class', the bhadralok, there was jubilation over
the reunification of the province. The Moderate politicians, led by
Surendranath Banerjea, claimed this as their victory. The dispute in
the nationalist movement between the Moderates, who favoured constitutional

¹ Large increases in the Provincial and Subordinate Services for both Benga
and Eastern Bengal & Assam were approved in July 1906. In
the latter province the Muslims were given preference for appointment
to these vacancies. (GI, Home Public, A29-31, Jul 1906.)
methods, and the Extremists, who advocated violence, had come to a head at the 1907 all-India Congress session at Surat, where the Moderates had succeeded in ousting the Extremists from the organisation. In Bengal many of the Extremists had been arrested and deported under the Government's severe anti-terrorist measures in 1908, and those who retained their freedom had been forced either to leave politics or to operate secretly. The field was thus cleared for the Moderates who continued their agitation against the partition through the liberal Indian Association. In 1911 they sent Bhupendranath Basu to press their case in England¹ and their memorial to the Government of India on the subject provided much of the wording for Hardinge's despatch recommending the reunification.² Banerjea and his men were well-pleased with the fruits of their labours and they led the bhadralok's rejoicing for the province regained.

Crewe, however, realised that this one measure, no matter how spectacular or welcome, was not on its own sufficient to repair the breach between the bhadralok and the British, and he warned Carmichael against a hasty assumption that the current mood would last. He wrote:

You will find the Bengalis³ immensely civil, and effusive to a degree over the new province. I think it is clear that the party

¹ IA, General meeting proceedings, Apr 1911.
³ At this time the British customarily restricted the term 'Bengali' to the Bengali Hindus.
led by Surendra Nath Banerji has won the day, and that the orders are that the loss of the capital is not to be treated as a public grievance, in view of the benefits actually conferred. In conversation, therefore, one finds little but outpoured gratitude. But there are certainly some sulks in Calcutta itself, particularly as some leading people are owners of house property. Had one of our friends gone there who would be likely, however, able he might be, to take too literally the underlined expressions of Bengali feeling, I should have looked forward with some nervousness to the future, not so much because I should have feared his becoming enthralled by the Bengalis, as because I should have dreaded the subsequent disillusionment and its possible results. But in your case I have no such fears, because I know you won't be tempted to begin by too much credulity, and then break off into a completely unsympathetic course.

Communities & Colleagues

Armed with Crewe's good advice, Carmichael approached his new work with optimism. By disposition an amiable and easy-going man, he believed that others would always respond to goodwill and he saw no reason to think that, in this respect, human nature in India was any different from elsewhere. He was encouraged in his optimism by the enthusiasm with which his appointment was greeted in the Bengal press, and, upon arrival in Calcutta in April 1912, he immediately set out to establish contact with leading members of the various communities.

In his efforts to win the friendship of the non-official Europeans, he enjoyed the inestimable advantage of being a Scot, for both the

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1 See his first speech in Bengal, 1 Apr 1912, Carmichael, p. 157. Carmichael to Crewe, 14 May 1913, ibid, pp. 181-2.
2 Selections from all major papers published in Statesman, 23 & 24 Jan 1912.
commercial and planting communities were led by Scots. He made it clear that he was eager to learn all he could about the needs of Bengal industry, and when he deserted his desk at Government House to inspect the port facilities along the Hooghly or to examine the neglected canals in Eastern Bengal, the non-officials were quick to contrast this with the reluctance of former I.C.S. Lieutenant-Governors to leave their files.¹

Carmichael was a keen and knowledgeable agriculturalist and on his first tours he was horrified by the state of rural Bengal. He believed that, for any improvement to be effected, the Government had to gain the co-operation of the great zamindars.² He was soon on intimate terms with their leader, the young Maharajadhiraja of Burdwan, who, for his part, was merely renewing the position of gubernatorial confidant, which he had maintained for the preceding nine years.

Carmichael, however, was not to be satisfied with courtiers. He was determined to understand all sections of Bengali society, including those who were regarded as his Government's opponents. He caused a stir by inviting the leading nationalists to Government House and by letting it be known that he would learn Bengali.³ His humility and

² Carmichael to Crewe, ibid, pp. 168-70.
³ Author's interview with Hemendra Prasad Ghose, Calcutta, 19 Nov 1960.
his desire to keep in touch with Indian opinion, can be illustrated
with a letter which he wrote on 18 May 1912 to Motilal Ghose, the
veteran nationalist editor of a leading Calcutta English-language
daily, the Amrita Bazar Patrika.

I want to tell you that I shall always be more than grateful to
you, if you directly or indirectly let me know of anything to
which you think I ought to attend. I dare say I shall often
learn of such things from the Amrita Bazar Patrika. I have done
so already. I am sincerely anxious to help any one who is
trying to make Bengal a happier place for its people to live
in. I know that many people must be disappointed with me, for
I know I shall never be able to do as much as many people expect.
They may even be angry with me. I shan't blame them, for people
ought to expect more than is possible from every one put in
authority. It is only by doing so that they are able gradually
to get what is possible. And in the case of a Governor it is
often I fancy only because he is blamed that he is able to get
others whose advice he must often listen to even when sometimes
he least trusts it to agree to try things worth-trying. But I
do want to do all I can and that all must be greater or less
according as those who know where the need lies tell me what
they know. I do not suppose that even if a Governor came here
full of local knowledge instead of coming here as I do ignorant
of even the language of my neighbours he could do a tenth part
of what he would like to do. There are many things to hamper
one.1

He could have chosen no better way of gaining bhadralok goodwill
than by emphasising that he valued their opinions. His hint that he
would not follow blindly after the officials was certain to be noted
with favour and his apology for his ignorance of Bengali was a masterly
touch.

Carmichael's greatest initial problem was with the Muslims. He
had to try to win their goodwill while at the same time making it clear

that the Government felt itself under no obligation to recompense them for their lost province. Acting on Crewe's advice, he took the bull by the horns. Three days after his arrival in Calcutta, in reply to an address of welcome from the Muslim League, he made his position clear. 'I am not here to uphold the interests of one religion or one body of people,' he said. 'I am here to do what I can for all, and no body will feel that more than the Mohammedans.'

His task was made easier by the attitude of the Nawab of Dacca. This powerful Muslim leader was as determined as any of his followers that the Muslim community should gain all it could, but he was also convinced that it would be a mistake to offend the Government by pressing too hard. The Muslims had to maintain the right balance between their demands and their expressions of loyalty. It was essential to the success of this scheme that there should, at all times, be Muslims close enough to the Government to sense when it was time to tip the seesaw one way or the other. The Nawab found Carmichael eager to receive him as a friend and he was soon established as the Governor's closest non-official Indian adviser. The Muslims had another link with the Government in the person of Nawab Shamsul Huda, a High Court

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1 Carmichael, p. 159.
2 For an example of his application of this strategy see his speech in the Legislative Council, 3 Apr 1914. (BLCP, vol. XLVI, pp. 619-21.)
lawyer and a member of a leading Eastern Bengal landholding family, whom Carmichael appointed as the third member of his Executive Council. As a Muslim representative in both the Eastern Bengal & Assam and Imperial Legislative Councils, he had proved himself an adept exponent of the Dacca Nawab's game of balance.

Carmichael had got off to a good start. His initial contacts with the European non-officials, the great zamindars, the bhadralok and the Muslims were encouraging. The success of his mission, however, would depend as much on the attitudes of his colleagues with whom he was to work in the provincial Government as on the response from the Bengal communities. Unless they were men of liberal sympathies he could hope to achieve little. His good fortune was remarkable, for although he had no say in their appointment his two I.C.S. Executive Councillors, Sir William Duke and Percy Lyon, were well disposed towards his plans.

Duke had officiated as Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal in the eight months preceding Carmichael's arrival and his experience was invaluable in the difficult period of transition following the reunification. He was a reserved man, severe of countenance, and to the casual observer he appeared to have little time for the critics of Government, Indian or British. His intimate acquaintances, however, knew him as a man of scrupulous fairness, and, what was less usual in a Civilian, of political imagination. Lyon came to the Bengal Executive Council from Eastern Bengal & Assam, where he had been Chief Secretary during the
partition period. Where Duke was cautious and reserved, he was outspoken. At this time he made no secret of his sympathy for the Eastern Bengal Muslims, and later he was to scandalise the Government of India by speaking to bhadralok students of 'the inherent right of the Indian nation to govern itself.'

The Legislative Council

The rapport which Carmichael had achieved with his colleagues and the leaders of the major communities would assist him greatly in his task of effecting a rapprochement between the Government and the people. He was under no illusion, however, as to the difficulty of that task, but he pinned his hopes of success on the Legislative Council. All the main communities would be represented in this body and there they would have an opportunity to thrash out their difficulties with the Government and with one another. Moreover, the Legislative Council might provide the bhadralok with a means of satisfying their political aspirations. Carmichael understood the importance to the bhadralok of parliamentary institutions and he was aware of their need for political 'elbow-room'. He was determined to give them this in the Legislative Council. He would ensure that the new powers of the members were

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1 GB, Appointment, 4M-4(1-2), A30-31, Sep 1917.
2 Amrita Bazar Patrika, 19 Jan 1916.
3 Carmichael to Crewe, 14 May 1913, Carmichael, pp. 181-2.
circumscribed in no way. He would invite their opinions on all important matters, and demonstrate by his subsequent actions that he valued the advice they gave. In return he would ask for their cooperation in interpreting his policies to the people.¹

In this there was no dissembling. Carmichael was a devoted admirer of the parliamentary system and was convinced that the Morley-Minto reforms had been a step in the right direction. He believed that for representative institutions to develop in India as they should, the Government had to encourage the Council members to exercise their statutory powers of discussion and surveillance, and in this way associate them closely with its decisions.²

There were many technical problems to be dealt with before the new Council could meet. Electorates had to be formed which would satisfy the groups which had sent representatives to the two old Councils of Bengal and Eastern Bengal & Assam. Moreover, in the light of the experience gained at the 1909 elections and subsequently in the conduct of legislative business, it seemed advisable to amend both the Council regulations and the rules of business.³

¹ St Andrew's Day Dinner speech, 30 Nov 1912, Statesman, 1 Dec 1912.
Under the statutory regulations of 1909 the Bengal Council had 50 members, of whom four (the Governor and his Executive Councillors) sat ex officio, and 20 were nominated. The other 26 were elected.¹ In 1912 the Government decided to reduce the number of seats reserved for nomination, thus allowing for two additional elected members. One of these new seats was given to the non-official members of the Calcutta Corporation. The other was to be filled at alternate elections by the local bodies of the Presidency and Burdwan Divisions, the two Divisions most strongly influenced by Calcutta.² This was obviously an effort to increase bhadralok representation on the Council and it was in keeping with the Government of India's declared policy of encouraging greater non-official influence in provincial administration.

A similar spirit of liberality was shown in redrafting the rules of business. This was particularly significant, for the work was done by the Bengal secretariat under Duke's guidance, and, as Duke himself pointed out, the Government on this occasion had a free hand to frame the rules as it wished, without the necessity of submitting them for the approval of the Legislative Council. That no attempt was made in such circumstances to restrict the Council, certainly suggests a measure of goodwill on the officials' part.³

¹ PP, 1910, [Cd. 49877], vol. LXVII, p. 883.
² PP, 1913, [Cd. 67147], vol. XLVII, pp. 9-10.
³ GB, Legislative, A1-6, Jan 1913.
The Return of the Moderates

One of the most significant features of the discussions over the new Council regulations was the participation in them of the Moderate nationalists. Early in 1912 the Indian Association had submitted a memorial outlining the changes which it desired and in June Surendranath Banerjea and Bhupendranath Basu had gone to Darjeeling for a discussion with Carmichael of these proposals. They had emphasised their dissatisfaction with an arrangement which provided the Muslims with separate communal electorates and yet restricted the bhadralok to the representation they could secure through the university and local-body seats. 'The members of the middle class as such, who form the backbone of Indian society, have no votes,' they had complained. They had asked for the formation of a general electorate, with a franchise based on income-tax or local-rate payment.

Carmichael was not prepared to go as far as this but he was willing to concede the Moderates' lesser demands - an increase in the elected membership of the Council and in Calcutta's representation for he appreciated the importance of securing the Moderates' willing participation.

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2 Statesman, 5 Jun 1912.
3 IA, Annual Report 1912, appendix E, p. 23.
4 Ibid.
in the new Council. In 1909 both wings of the Congress in Bengal, Extremist and Moderate, had refused to enter the reformed legislative councils as a protest against the British failure to reunify the province. This abstention had defeated Morley's aim of bringing 'British rulers and Indian leaders' together, and it had prolonged the dangerous situation created by the absence of institutions to contain bhadralok political energies. Carmichael knew that he had to have the Moderates in his Council if he were to have any hope of checking terrorism, and relieving racial and communal tension. Indeed the survival of the liberal, constitutional ideal among the bhadralok depended upon the Moderates entering the Council and playing a significant role in its affairs.

Surendranath Banerjea and the group which had heeded his injunction to boycott the 1909 councils, were aware of the importance of their participation in the new legislature. As a simple matter of political expediency they could not afford to neglect the opportunity, which the reunification provided, of returning to the Council without any loss of face. Excluded for three years by their self-denying ordinance from all institutional politics, they had found it increasingly difficult to maintain their influence, and, more particularly, they had been hard-pressed to offer any worthwhile alternative to the Extremists' campaign of violence. Their style was constitutionalism

\[1\] Nation in Making, pp. 254-5.
and it was high-time that they got back into legislative politics to show that it had some value.

There was more at stake here than the future of one political party. The bhadralok's faith in liberal, secular nationalism had been severely shaken by British actions in Bengal in the period 1903 to 1908, and the alternative offered by eloquent Extremists like Bepin Chandra Pal and Aurobindo Ghose had appeared correspondingly attractive. The vernacular press, which found many of its readers among those sections of the bhadralok which had been drawn into politics for the first time by the partition agitation, had played on the themes of racial and cultural extremism, and in doing so had attacked British political forms and British institutions. These, it asserted, would distort Hindu society, and, for that reason, their advocates - the Moderates - were to be seen as enemies of the country. It reminded its readers of the patriots who had been deported by the British in 1908 and it asked them to consider why none of the Moderates had suffered exile in the Andamans.

The following example of this line of reasoning is taken from an article which appeared during the election campaign of December 1912 in the influential Calcutta Bengali daily, Nayak:

The right of voting is one of the serious evils which, in the guise of boons, English rule has introduced into this country. The Municipalities and District Boards and similar institutions have really nothing to do with the country and with society, either Hindu or Moslem. They do not represent the country and the people, and have nothing to do with the people's religion or society. Only men who have money and possess influence and
can manipulate the voters get into these bodies, which again return members to the Legislative Council .... These Babus who are briskly canvassing for votes, whom do they represent? There is no telling what would have been the outcome of Mr Basu's Marriage Bill, but for the presence of the Maharaja of Burdwan on the Council.¹ Why should such iconoclast Babus be permitted to pass as representatives of the Hindus? These Babus, who are utterly without religion, may be likened to poison thrown out by the churning of Hindu society by the English, and it is for the English like another Nilkantha must grapple with them. Why, instead of doing that, do Englishmen allow this poison to scatter itself over the whole framework of Hindu society?²

The Moderates were profoundly disturbed by the effects of this anti-liberal press campaign. In a note which he prepared for his committee in May 1913, the president of the Indian Association, Ambika Charan Majumdar, wrote:

It is not my intention to create an alarm, but I am afraid our public men would be guilty of culpable neglect if they fail to take timely notice of the actual situation in the country and in any way contribute to their own deception as well as to the growing demoralization of the public. Even the reformed councils will be of no avail to us if there is not a volume of living, healthy public opinion behind them actively working up to the end which these councils are intended to achieve .... Recent events must have painfully impressed both the people and the government that the boast of security of life and property under the British rule has received a rude shock. Robbers, Robbers, Robbers.

¹ Special Marriage Amendment Bill introduced to the Imperial Legislative Council in 1911 by Bhupendranath Basu. It was opposed by orthodox Hindus and Muslims, as it would have made possible inter-caste and inter-creed marriages by providing for civil weddings. (Imperial Legislative Council Proceedings, vols. XLIX & L.)

² Nayak,* 3 Dec 1912. The allusion is to the God Siva, who drank the poison raised by the churning of the ocean by gods and demons, and thus saved the universe from its effects. The poison stuck in his throat, which became blue in colour, and thereafter he was known as Nilkantha, the god with the blue throat.
dacoits and secret murderers have become rampant throughout the country, while innocent and defenceless people in the villages, in some cases not even very far from police stations, are living in constant terror of badmashes. The customary exchange of charges and counter-charges between the police and the public brings no relief to the suffering people, while crime is always in the increase without let or hindrance .... The bureaucracy is no doubt saturated with its own prejudices and predilections and the police is notoriously corrupt and incompetent. But it seems to me that the public cannot be wholly exonerated from the charge that they have as yet done very little actively to help the administration .... A well directed and sustained practical effort on our part may count for much and will at all events serve to justify our position with the government.¹

The Moderates, like Carmichael, pinned their hopes of restoring the situation on the new Council. If they could recapture bhadralok attention by their actions in the legislature and win widespread support with the measures they sponsored, then the community's faith in constitutional methods would surely be renewed. The reunification of Bengal and the British promises of a new liberalism in Indian government augured well. The Moderates' hopes were further encouraged by Carmichael's appointment and by his evident desire to assist them in achieving their aim. Banerjea voiced their optimism in a leading article in the Bengalee of 19 July 1912: 'The future is ours. The world-wide forces of progress are with us and the sympathies of civilized mankind will support us in our constitutional efforts for the realization of our destinies which can only be accomplished by a measure of self-government that will help forward the development

¹ A.C. Majumdar to Pramathanath Banerjea, 13 May 1913, enclosure, IA MSS.
of all that is best and noblest in us. Then will indeed England have fulfilled her high mission in the East.'

The Elections

The elections for the new Bengal Legislative Council were held in December 1912 and January 1913. For Banerjea's group of Moderates this was the first time they had faced a Council electorate, and they framed their appeal to their constituents in terms of their ability to discharge the grave responsibilities of legislators. One of their election manifestos read:

To the people of India has been granted the right of increasing participation in the work of framing laws for themselves, and to prove ourselves worthy of this right we must return the best of our men. Laws that are passed in the Legislative Councils affect the interests of all .... Great responsibilities we [the electors] have before us and if we do not exercise our votes in favour of the best man, the "Hon'ble" members who may go to the Council will not be the sufferers, but we alone shall be left to suffer. Our interests will remain uncared for for three years to come.2

The result of the voting was a great disappointment to the group. Only Banerjea and three others, Surendranath Ray, Devaprasad Sarvadhikari and Abul Kasem, were elected. This was not as overwhelming a failure as at first sight it may appear for it must be appreciated that the Banerjea group could contest only 16 of the 27 elected seats because

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2 GB, Appointment, 18L-3, B427-433, Jul 1914.
of the communal and sectional organisation of the electorates. Only two of their number were Muslims. Therefore they were excluded from three of the five Muslim seats. The remainder of the group, with the exception of Banerjea who was a journalist, were bhadralok lawyers and as such they had no access to the four zamindari constituencies, the Indian commercial seat or the seven European electorates. They could stand only as representatives of mofussil local bodies (11 seats), the Corporation of Calcutta (2 seats) and the University of Calcutta (1 seat).¹

Even allowing for this initial handicap, however, their failure to win more than four seats must still be considered remarkable. It can be attributed to two main factors, both of which had great significance for the future of electoral politics in Bengal. The first of these was the absence of a satisfactory organisation for the conduct of an election campaign. All the members of the Banerjea group belonged to the Indian Association, a liberal political club of Calcutta bhadralok professional men. It had a proud record of achievement from the pre-Morley-Minto period, where it had been remarkably successful in the politics of consultation and protest. Its accustomed methods of action were memorials and petitions to the Government, and public meetings. It could offer its members little assistance, however, with the new tasks of electoral politics.

¹ PP, 1913, Cd. 67147, vol. XLVII, p.199.
There was, for instance, no machinery to ensure that only one Indian Association candidate contested each seat. Benerjea, although the doyen of the Association, was no formal party leader who could dictate to his followers. More serious was the absence of any campaign fund on which the candidates might draw, and the restriction of the Association's activities to Calcutta. Most of the constituencies were in the mofussil and there the Indian Association had no organisation and little direct influence. It is significant that of the four members of the Banerjea group elected in 1912, one was returned for Calcutta University and two others for the Presidency Division municipalities.

Commenting on the election results, a member of the Indian Association, Prithwis Chandra Ray, wrote: 'The popular party has exhibited a weakness or want of organisation which is really lamentable. It lacks cohesion: it lacks discipline. Half-a-dozen candidates scrambled for a seat as starving beggars do after a piece of bread. The party is a bundle of disjointed units which cannot resist the slightest pressure from without.'

In the strictly limited electorates of the Morley-Minto Council, this

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1 In 1912, as a result, three members of the Banerjea group contested one double-member constituency. (Calcutta Gazette, 25 Dec 1912.)

2 Nominally there were branches of the Association in each District but all were moribund. Frequent suggestions at Committee meetings that they should be revived came to nothing.

3 Indian World, 22 Jan 1913.
lack of organisation was not an insuperable obstacle, but, if no attempt were made to rectify the situation, as indeed was the case, then it would have serious consequences when the franchise was extended. As we shall see, this was to be one of the main factors in the Moderates’ downfall ten years later.

The second and more important reason for the failure of the Banerjea group at the 1912 elections was their inability to speak the new ‘language’ of electoral politics. The grounds on which they rested their claim to election – their reputation as opponents of the partition and as agitators for constitutional advance; their experience in Congress politics and in local self-government – were not the grounds on which most voters made their choice. The electors were primarily concerned with the question of their personal obligations to the various candidates, or with the acquisition of local, communal and personal advantages. Most candidates, for their part, regarded these as natural considerations, for they valued election to the Legislative Council, as to Municipalities and District Boards, chiefly as a means of raising their social standing and increasing their local influence.

As the Banerjea group discovered to its chagrin in 1912, what mattered most at an election was not a candidate’s political beliefs or experience of public affairs, but the length of his rent roll, his local prestige, his religion, caste and family, his connections, his wealth and his benefactions. ‘The elections in Bengal were fought more or less on personal issues,’ lamented Prithwis Chandra Ray on
22 January 1913. 'Votes were given on personal considerations, rather than on considerations of public policy or principle. The position of a candidate, not his capacity to work, or the quality of work he would turn out, was looked into.'

A glance at any of the contests in 1912 shows that Ray had good grounds for his complaint. We can take the Rajshahi Division District and Local Boards electorate as an example. Rajshahi Division comprised the whole of Northern Bengal, and the majority of its population was Muslim. The candidates came from four of the five southern and most populous districts. They were Jogesh Chandra Chaudhuri, M.A., a member of the Indian Association and of the Pabna District Bar, and son-in-law of Surendranath Banerjea; Marharaja Girija Nath Ray Bahadur, a large zamindar in both the Dinajpur and Rajshahi Districts, an influential member of the landholders' British Indian Association and a member of the old Legislative Council of Eastern Bengal & Assam; Raja Mahendra Ranjan Ray Chaudhuri, also a member of the Eastern Bengal & Assam Legislative Council and of the Eastern Bengal Landholders' Association, and a titleholder in the Rangpur district; and Maulvi Hafizar Rahman Chaudhuri, a young man, the only Muslim candidate, who was a small landed proprietor from Bogra.

1 Indian World, 22 Jan 1913.
Jogesh Chandra Chaudhuri, hoping to win the favours of the Muslim voters, persuaded two Muslims to propose and second his nomination, but this did him no good. The Muslim community in this area had bitter memories of communal rioting during the anti-partition boycott agitation six years before and for this they blamed Chaudhuri's father-in-law, Surendranath Banerjea. Besides, Chaudhuri had chosen unwisely in selecting his seconder. This man, Maulvi Emaduddin Ahmed, proved to be the chief electoral agent of the Raja of Kakina, Mahendra Ranjan Ray Chaudhuri, and he did his level best to wreck Jogesh Chandra's chances. To this end he used a standard ploy of the period: he informed the voters that the Rajshahi District Magistrate was opposed to Jogesh Chandra's candidature and that his wrath would be felt by any who voted for him. The Raja was an invalid, but his 'following and his purse were long'. Reputedly, he spent Rs.2000 on 'inducements' to voters; he offered travelling expenses to many; and Emaduddin, on his behalf, provided those who came to vote in Rajshahi town with hospitality 'much above his own and their ordinary style of living'. It was the Raja, not Babu Jogesh Chandra, nor even Maulvi Hafizar Rahman, who caught the ear of the Muslims. He let it be known that he was willing to pay off the local Muhammadan Association's debt amounting to Rs.1500, and, better still, he received public support from the Nawab of Dacca. Where the Nawab went, many Bengali Muslims were accustomed to follow. The Raja was elected.¹

¹ Bengalee, 29 Dec 1912. GB, Appointment, 18L-4, B444-462, Oct 1913.
In the light of this story it should come as no surprise when we discover that 17 of the 26 Indian non-official members of the 1913 Bengal Legislative Council were landholders. In other respects those who had succeeded in their bid for election had the same 'social qualifications' as the men in the Banerjea group whom they had defeated. The Hindus were all Brahmin or Kayastha by caste; most of them were university educated and resided in Calcutta or a mofussil town. Like the members of the Banerjea group they were from the bhadralok élite, but they had this one decisive advantage of holding land.

The post-script to the general election was written in February 1913 when the non-official members of the new Bengal Legislative Council proceeded to elect their two representatives on the Imperial Legislative Council. The result was something of a surprise. Of the 68 total votes, 39 were secured by the two nominees of the Banerjea group: Banerjea himself and Bhupendranath Basu. Both men would have been elected had the votes been distributed evenly as had been arranged. By some mischance, however, Banerjea got 22, and Basu, who got only 17, was forced into third place behind the Maharaja of Nashipur, Ranajit Sinha, who had the backing of the European members and some of the large zamindars.¹

The striking thing here was the reversal of the general election verdict against the Banerjea group. This points to an important

¹ GB, Appointment, 18L-56, B1891-1906, Dec 1913. Englishman, 28 Feb & 5 Mar 1913.
conclusion, which helps to explain much of what happened at this and subsequent elections: there existed in Bengal at this time a number of distinct levels of politics, and, for a politician to be successful, he had to be capable of speaking in different 'idioms' at these various levels. He had, for argument's sake, to talk the language of local influence and community to the electors, and the language of nationalism to his fellow legislative councillors.

This situation, which appears unusual to the observer from the West, is a common feature of non-Western societies, where active participation in politics is limited to an élite, and where those not involved have little or no comprehension of the nature and purpose of political action. When the political élite is forced to appeal to non-participating sections — for example, by a need to gain votes under a representative system, or by the desire to recruit a following for a nationalist movement — they must phrase their appeal in terms that will be understood by those sections.

This explains why, in such circumstances, there is often an apparent disconnection between and irrelevance in the professions and actions of a politician on various occasions. For instance, when the Raja of

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Kakina came down to Calcutta from Rajshahi in January 1913 he changed in colour, chameleon-like, from a mottled manipulator of local and communal interests to a true-blue nationalist. In the Legislative Council he followed Banerjea's lead. Here is the explanation of the discrepancy between the amount of influence which the Banerjea group could wield in the electorate and in the Council: although they were not fluent in the idiom of one level of politics, they were the masters of the language of another, and were recognised as such.

This disjunction between the various levels remained a feature of Bengal politics throughout the period of our study. With the extension of the electorate in 1919 and the resort by the Congress to mass politics in the early twenties, it was to become a crucial factor.

To Grind Corn

The first meeting of the Legislative Council of reunited Bengal was held on the morning of Saturday 18 January 1913 in the former Imperial Council chamber at Government House. There was a good attendance of members and visitors to hear Carmichael's inaugural speech. Here was his opportunity to strike his desired note of liberalism and make his plea for co-operation. With a polite bow in the direction of bhadralok aspirations, he welcomed the councillors as fellow parliamentarians and expressed his pride at presiding over their deliberations.

1 Englishman, 19 Jan 1913.
He continued:

Our meeting today is a formal one, but we look forward to other meetings when we shall show that much as we differ among ourselves in some things - possibly in many things - we are all united in our determination to do what we can for Bengal, for India and for the Empire.

Bengal has been without a Council for nearly ten months. Some of you perhaps thought this unfortunate. You may have wished for legislation - some of you, I know, would have liked to ask questions and to move resolutions. But the delay was unavoidable. Now that there is a Council you will, I feel sure, make full and fair use of it, and I feel sure that those of us who have to answer questions or to give consideration to criticism will do so fully and fairly.¹

Looking back on his first nine months in office, Carmichael must have felt pleased with the progress he had made and optimistic for the success of his mission. All communities had responded favourably to his obvious sincerity and goodwill, and the bhadralok seemed reassured that the promise of a new policy was not merely idle words. He had established friendly relations with the Muslim leaders and it seemed reasonable to hope that he might, with their help, placate the community. The warm welcome which he had received at the St Andrew's Day dinner, in Calcutta an accepted barometer of British opinion, set the seal upon his acceptance by the European non-officials.² He had loyal and sympathetic I.C.S. subordinates, and undoubtedly he was satisfied with their preparatory work for the new legislature. Most important of all, the Moderate nationalists had decided to return to the Council.

¹ BLCP, vol. XLV, p. 3
² Capital, 5 Dec 1912.
Although they had not been given all that they had asked for in the revised Council regulations, they had assured Carmichael of their appreciation of his efforts to meet there demands\(^1\) and they had been particularly pleased when he chose S.P. Sinha and Nilratan Sarkar, both distinguished nationalists, to fill two of the seats reserved for nomination.\(^2\) Banerjea, on whom in the last resort the success of Carmichael's mission might depend, was back in the Council and he seemed cheerfully disposed to work the new institution.\(^3\)

So far everything had gone according to plan, but Carmichael had yet to get 'the new machinery to grind corn'. As he had pointed out in his speech on 18 January, there had been a hiatus in institutional politics in Bengal, and with their resumption the real test would begin. 'Now that there is a Council you will, I feel sure, make full and fair use of it,' he had said. Disappointment awaited him, for none of the major communities would co-operate with him in working the Legislative Council as he wished.

**British and Muslim Anger**

The secondary effects of the bitterness of the Calcutta European non-officials and the Muslims over the Delhi announcements were yet to

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\(^{1}\) NP, 23 Nov 1912.

\(^{2}\) NP, 25 Jan 1913.

\(^{3}\) *Bengalee*, 9 Nov 1912.
be felt. As we remarked earlier, the British regarded the talk of a new policy as an admission of official weakness in the face of seditious Indian agitation, and they pointed to the Viceroy, Lord Hardinge, as the chief offender. From the first he had displayed an unconscionable tenderness for Indian opinion and a distaste for Calcutta European society. Obviously, said the non-officials, it was he who was responsible for moving the Government of India away from the salutary influence of the Bengal businessmen.¹ The British community, they said, must organise as a political force to combat the pernicious influence of Indians in the government of the Empire.² In 1912 the European Defence Association (a significant name) was reconstituted in Calcutta. It received large monetary contributions from British firms and, within three months, had enrolled 1400 members.³

An attempt to assassinate the Viceroy on his state entry to Delhi in December 1912 infuriated the British and brought immoderate demands for reprisals. Now, it was said, the Government must recognise where its foolish policy of concessions was leading.⁴ Their anger was still running high when the new Bengal Legislative Council assembled.

⁴ Commerce, 1 Jan 1913.
Carmichael's inaugural speech was immediately followed by a resolution, moved by Surendranath Banerjea, expressing the Council's horror at the assassination attempt. The sight of this 'arch seditious' pledging his countrymen's support in the search for the culprit, was too much for Norman McLeod, the spokesman of the European non-officials.

It is beyond the bounds of belief that the Delhi and similar outrages could take place unnoticed in the midst of a crowd, and yet no one has come forward to denounce the miscreant /he declaimed furiously/. We hear all round of the sins of the Police - a deserving but much-maligned body - but not a word of the sins of the people, and I have read and heard of sympathy unveiledly expressed for the most cold-blooded murders. As long as this attitude of mind exists, as long as the Indian populace display apathy, how can any one expect a reasonable man to admit the possibility of giving an equal voice to such people in the administration of this country - people who so little understand what their duties and responsibilities are as loyal citizens?

This speech and its endorsement in the Calcutta European papers, provoked a sharp bhadralok reaction and added to the resentment between the bhadralok and the British.

As the Council proceeded to business, the European newspapers turned their attention to what they described as the intolerable nuisance of Bengali verbosity. 'Talk, endless, wearisome and often ignorant talk, is taking the place of action,' complained the Englishman on 3 April, and on the following day it wrote: 'It is better to gag the Councils than to clog the executive.' This newspaper

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1. BLCP, vol. XLV, pp. 6-8.
2. E.g. Englishman, 20 Jan 1913.
campaign was followed by a letter to the Government of Bengal, written by McLeod on behalf of the British non-official members of the Council, asking for some limit to be placed upon question time. Acting on the advice of his officials, who were already feeling the strain of the long Council sessions, Carmichael reluctantly agreed to set a maximum to the number of questions for which an oral answer could be demanded.\(^1\) The first retreat from his liberal position had been forced.

Among the Muslims there was growing dissatisfaction with the policy advocated by the community's leaders. A small group of educated younger men began to question the wisdom of relying upon the Government for favours. In their opinion, the reunification showed that the officials could not be trusted to deal fairly with the community. If the Muslims were to improve their lot, they must adopt a more aggressive posture. In the Legislative Council the orthodox approach was maintained for the first three months,\(^2\) but in the budget debate a new voice was heard. On 4 April Fazlul Huq, a young Muslim member from Dacca, brushed aside the polite conventions and in a powerful extempore speech warned the Government that continued failure to heed Muslim demands would lead to trouble. However much the Government might deny it, the Muslims were entitled to compensation for their past ill-treatment, he declared.

\(^1\) GB, Legislative, A1-3, Aug 1913.

\(^2\) E.g. see BLCP, 14 Mar 1913, vol. XLV, pp. 332-7.
To me it seems that Government has arrived at a parting of the ways, and has got to decide, once for all, its future policy regarding questions affecting the Muhammadan community .... in spite of their aversion to agitation, Muhammadans are drifting, owing to sheer force of circumstances, into the arena of political warfare. We feel that we have got to move with the times or else we are doomed. Let not the officials think that the feelings of the entire community can be soothed simply by the bestowal of titles and decorations on our leaders, or by providing for a transitory stay of the officials at Dacca with all the paraphernalia of Government. We require something more than a mere concession to our sentiments, something tangible which can be reasonably set off against our loss by the annulment of the Partition.¹

Shamsul Huda was quickly on his feet to deny the truth of what he euphemistically described as this 'pessimistic view',² but the response which Huq's speech drew from various sections of the Muslim community suggested that there were many who thought as he did. The attention which the speech attracted throughout the province, left no doubt that a new political reputation had been made.³

Huq is an important figure for the political historian of this period, for he brought a new style to Muslim politics in Bengal. Born of a family of Barisal vakils, he followed the well-worn track to Calcutta for education, finishing on the benches of the elite Presidency College. In 1895 at the age of 22 he returned to Barisal with an M.A. and B.L. to teach in the local college and later he assisted his father with his legal practice. After five years Calcutta drew him

¹ BLCP, 4 Apr 1913, vol. XLV, pp. 576-80.
back and he became an articled clerk to the great High Court lawyer, Sir Asutosh Mukherjea. The discussion over the partition found him keenly supporting the measure and his first opportunity for political work came in 1906, when the Nawab of Dacca used him as a runner in his negotiations with Muslim leaders in other parts of northern India prior to the formation of the Muslim League. The Nawab had at his disposal a number of Government appointments in the new Eastern province and he was thus able to reward Huq with a place in the Provincial Executive Service. By 1908 he had become Assistant Registrar of Rural Co-operative Societies. At the time of reunification, however, he was aggrieved at his non-appointment as Registrar for the whole of Bengal, and he left the service in disgust. Again the Nawab came to his aid, ensuring his unopposed return for the Dacca Muslim seat in the Legislative Council.  

Here was a potential Muslim leader of a new kind. Unlike the traditional communal leader, whose influence was locally based on landholding and who was usually a member of one of the great Muslim families, Huq had made his way by personal ability— for it was his ability which had won him the necessary patronage. His education and his experience in teaching, law, administration and political organisation set him apart from the old leadership, and, what was vital, made him acceptable to the bhadralok. Here was a Muslim who

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' The Nawab was very good to me,' was Huq's comment on his political debut. (Interview with the author, Dacca, 11 Dec 1960.)
(to adapt W.S. Gilbert) was the very model of a modern politician. It was important, too, that while retaining his contacts with his Eastern Bengal District he had established himself as a figure in Calcutta, for this enabled him to provide communal leadership on a new level.

Equally significant was the fact that his anger - personal and communal - was directed primarily at the Government. Although remaining a communalist, he would be willing on occasions to ally with other groups in attacks upon that Government. Moreover, he shared with other educated Indians nationalist aspirations quite foreign to the old Muslim leaders. In the years that followed, under the influence of pan-Islamism and a growing distrust of British intentions towards the Khilafat, men like Huq were willing to form an alliance with the Hindus which would have horrified their predecessors. However the political movements of this chameleon, the nationalist communal Muslim, were as hard for the British and Hindus to follow then, as they are for the historian now. We can understand him only if we realise that he was groping uncertainly for a new way forward for his community. For Huq and men of his kind in Bengal, the alliance with the Hindus which they entered in the middle of the second decade proved to be a cul-de-sac and it was not until the late 1920s that they found the right road: the organisation of the Muslim peasantry.
The Opposition of the Moderates

The intransigence of the British non-officials and the Muslims was a severe disappointment to the Government of Bengal's hopes for a reconciliation. Equally disturbing was the attitude of the bhadralok members. Although they obviously valued the Legislative Council as an institution and were ready to participate fully in its workings, they were not willing to co-operate politically with the Governor. They had undergone an apparent metamorphosis in moving from their electorates to the Council chamber. In place of the motley and ill-assorted crew which the elections seemed to have produced, the Government found itself confronted with a squad of determined and inflexible nationalists.

The unity which they displayed is to be explained by Banerjea's ability as a parliamentary leader and the high regard in which he was held by his fellow councillors because of his unique contribution to the nationalist movement in Bengal. Since he figures so largely in the story to be told we should pause at this point to look in some detail at his earlier career.

Son of a westernised doctor, born in 1848 into Calcutta Brahmin society astir with the excitement of a religious reformation and a revival of learning, he spent his school days among the British boys at Doveton College. Having taken a B.A. in English literature from Calcutta University, he went to London and in 1869 passed the Indian Civil Service examination, only one Indian ever having done so before.
His elation was short-lived, for the India Office declared that he and another successful Indian candidate had falsified their ages. Their names were struck from the list. Banerjea challenged the decision in Queen's Bench, won his case and returned to Bengal, unwelcome in a service which until then had been the exclusive preserve of the British. Three years later he was dismissed for a minor and what was almost certainly an accidental error in the return of a law case. He went to England in an effort to have the decision reversed but was unsuccessful, and, when he tried to make an alternative career at the Bar, he was refused admission as a dismissed Government employee. Banerjea the official was finished; Suren Babu the nationalist was born. 'I felt that I had suffered because I was an Indian, a member of a community that lay disorganized, had no public opinion, and no voice in the counsels of their Government,' he wrote later. 'The personal wrong done to me was an illustration of the helpless impotency of our people. Were others to suffer in the future as I had suffered in the past? They must, I thought to myself; unless we were capable as a community of redressing our wrongs and protecting our rights, personal and collective.'

He returned home, his heart set upon the political regeneration of India. With his material worries allayed by a Chair of English literature, provided at a Calcutta college by an Indian benefactor, he

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1 Nation in Making, pp. 32-3.
campaigned his cause through the columns of the *Bengalee*, an English-language newspaper for which he built an international renown in the half-century of his editorship. He founded as his political platform the Indian Association, a *bhadralok* organisation, which had only one influential rival (the landholders' British Indian Association) in Bengal in the following 40 years. At the end of the seventies he toured northern India, firing his audiences with his gospel of nationalism; in the eighties he established himself as one of the leading figures in Congress; in the nineties he visited England to seek support for Indian demands, and he took the lead of the radical elements in the Calcutta Corporation and the Bengal Legislative Council.

Then came his clash with Curzon. In 1899 he led the attack on the Calcutta Municipal Act and throughout the following six years, as *bhadralok* anger at Curzon's measures mounted steadily, it was his voice that was raised in protest. He was a great orator and his public meetings at the Calcutta Town Hall attracted thousands. In his early fifties, a well-built man with strong features and striking white beard, he was a commanding figure. He had the emotional fire characteristic of his people, a command of English which few Englishmen could surpass and an Augustan delivery. When Bengal was partitioned in 1905 his political star was at its zenith. From platform and press he thundered his condemnation, and the extraordinarily vociferous response which it evoked from the *bhadralok* surprised him little less than it did the British.
To his dismay he found that he could not control the agitation which he had started and by early 1907 things were so far out of hand that he joined the great zamindars and the Muslims in a delegation to ask for the Viceroy's intervention. 'It was simply marvellous,' wrote Minto, 'with the troubles and anxieties of a few months ago still fresh in one's memory, to see the "King of Bengal" sitting on my sofa with his Mahommedan opponents, asking for my assistance to moderate the evil passions of the Bengali, and inveighing against the extravagances of Bepin Chandra Pal.' Banerjea had caught a disease which has infected so many nationalist politicians since his day; he had become a moderate in spite of himself.

By 1912 he was no longer the unchallenged leader of the bhadralok but he still had great influence. His steadfast refusal to enter the Calcutta Corporation and the legislative councils until the partition was revoked, had been greatly admired, and his paper, the Bengalee, still shaped the opinions of many of the English-literate bhadralok. His claim to a large share in the triumph over the reunification of Bengal could scarcely be denied and he was able to return to the Bengal Legislative Council in 1913 as a victor.

From the day that the new Council assembled, it was obvious that he was to be the 'leader of the opposition'. In this his age was an

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advantage, for most of his fellow-councillors were his juniors by ten to fifteen years. More important, perhaps, was his experience. His 28 years as a member of the North Barrackpur municipality, the Calcutta Corporation, and the Bengal and Imperial Legislative Councils, had made him a master of legislative manoeuvre and management. His ability as a debater was unmatched in the Council, and, equally important, his judgment of when to remain silent could rarely be faulted. Outside the chamber, he worked with the industry of an able chief whip: holding informal consultations on coming business; persuading the indolent to attend and the waverers to support his line; compromising or threatening; always actively marshalling a united front for the nationalist cause.

And what did the 'nationalist cause' mean? What was Banerjea's line of action in the Council? Quite simply, it was opposition to the Government. Carmichael would make repeated appeals for co-operation; Banerjea would respond with qualified promises\(^1\) – but always the opposition continued, unremitting and, as far as the Government could see, unreasoning. The explanation lay partly in the nature of the powers of the Council and partly in the demands which the *bhadralok* made of its politicians.

Under the constitution of 1909 the Indian members of the Council were placed in the classic position of an irresponsible colonial opposition, with powers of interpellation and censure, but with no

\(^1\) E.g. see *Bengalee*, 7 Apr 1914.
responsibility for formulating or implementing policy. It was one of Carmichael's early promises that he would try to increase the opportunities for non-officials to influence Government policy,\(^1\) and he attempted to honour his promise by placing the broadest possible construction upon the powers of the various standing and select committees of the Council, and by creating ad hoc bodies to advise on important questions. This encouraged the Moderates in their initial hopes that they might have sufficient power to refashion Government proposals, so as to make them more acceptable to bhadralok opinion, and they took advantage of every opportunity to press their views.\(^2\) They had success on many limited issues but it was soon apparent to them that they could achieve little with the Government choosing the questions which they might consider and retaining full responsibility for their implementation.\(^3\) In this situation the existence of a well-organised and effectively led party only aggravated the tensions in the Council and increased the frustration of the bhadralok members.

Equally important was the fact that politically their limited gains brought no reward. To whom could the councillors report their success in modifying a clause of a Bill, or in persuading the Government to re-examine some aspect of its policy? Certainly not to their constituents, for they understood nothing of such subtleties. They

\(^1\) Statesman, 12 May 1912.
\(^3\) Bengalee,* 21 Sep 1913.
might respond if their representative could gain some concession for their locality or community — and the members were always busily engaged in securing such concessions — but they had no concern with high policy decisions. That was not the stuff of electoral politics.

Nor, for that matter, was it the stuff of nationalism. This was vital. To a majority of councillors, the opinions of the electors counted for little, but the opinions of their fellow-members of the élite counted for a great deal. What they demanded was opposition to the Government. To oppose was the work of a nationalist, whether he was a member of a legislative council, a journalist or author, a public orator, or a terrorist. All must oppose or cease to claim the title of nationalist. This was a legacy of the partition period. The British actions which had destroyed bhadralok trust had also dealt a death-blow to co-operation with the Government as a viable political style for any bhadralok politician. In future in Bengal a nationalist, to be worth his salt, had to score off the Government. Thus the bhadralok members of the new Bengal Council, under Banerjea’s direction, tried to embarrass the Government at every turn. In their speeches they accused it of disregarding Indian opinion and of injuring Indian interests. By their questions they drew attention to injustices and inequalities, and by moving resolutions and calling for divisions on legislative amendments they attempted to outvote the officials.

Confronted with this barrage, Carmichael’s first reaction was to insist upon concessions. His officials were to accept what resolutions
they could; enquiries into the alleged grievances were to be instituted; extended time for the consideration of controversial legislation was to be allowed; full information was to be given in reply to all questions, no matter how embarrassing; and outside the Council chamber members were to be consulted on administrative matters affecting their Districts. He was willing to give this ground in the hope that the nationalists would meet him half-way. Again he was relying upon a demonstration of goodwill to gain their co-operation.

But co-operate they could not; that was tantamount to committing political suicide. If the Government was giving ground, they must push it harder, and experience was teaching them when and where to push. In particular, they developed the devastating tactic of offering the Government more than it wanted, thereby putting it in the awkward position of having either to accept inconvenient proposals, almost always framed so as to increase the opportunities for non-official interference in administration, or to appear churlish in rejecting magnanimous offers.

One example may illustrate this point. On 1 December 1913 Banerjea moved a resolution for the appointment of a Council committee to enquire into dacoity in Bengal and to recommend preventive measures. He recalled that the subject was one of frequent and adverse comment,

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and that the Government had asked for non-official co-operation in dealing with it. He offered this advisory committee as the Council's contribution and he expressed his confidence that its findings would prove the Government wrong in imputing political motives to most of the dacoits then so numerous in the mofussil. Duke replied that dacoity was a matter for experts; that the Government was conducting extensive enquiries of its own and could see no likelihood of anything valuable being produced by the proposed committee. The Indian members of the Council would be more profitably engaged in using their influence in public life to combat terrorism. This reply left the Government open to a charge of insincerity in its professed desire for non-official assistance and Banerjea was quick to see his opportunity. Although unconvinced by Duke's arguments, he said he would not press the issue. 'But let it go forth to the world,' he continued, 'let it be reiterated, that we were, from this side of the house at any rate, anxious to help the Government, that we made a suggestion which we thought a good suggestion in the circumstances, and if that suggestion is not accepted the responsibility is no longer ours.'

Terrorism

It was this question of political violence which was the greatest snag in the relations of the liberally-motivated Governor and the

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1 BLCP, vol. XLV, pp. 797-804.
Moderate nationalists. It posed, for a start, a most perplexing problem for the *bhadralok* members of the Council. They were constantly under pressure to define their position, but few, if any, were certain in their own minds as to what their attitude really was. While intellectually repelled by the resort to violence, they were emotionally sympathetic with those responsible. On the one hand, they feared that further constitutional development and the transfer of more power to Indians, which were their goals, would be retarded by terrorist outrages and the existence of revolutionary organisations. Temperamentally, many of them were averse to violence and they were disturbed by the indiscipline in *bhadralok* society which it revealed. When groups of well-bred youths could roam the countryside committing *dacoity* with impunity, it seemed apparent that the very fabric of the social order was endangered. On the other hand, they felt a sneaking admiration for these boys — their own flesh and blood — who were willing to risk life and liberty in attacks upon the foreigners. As *bhadralok* and as opponents of the imperialists, the terrorists' credentials as members of the political elite were beyond question. They were patriots, no matter how indiscreet.

Thus it would have been an outrage to their personal and communal integrity, for the Indian Council members to have joined in any

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2. A.C. Majumdar to P.N. Banerjea, 13 May 1913, IA MSS.
Government sponsored condemnation of the terrorists. Politically it would have been disastrous for them. Here again they were caught in a cleft stick. There could be no shadow of doubt that, to the majority of the bhadralok, the terrorists were heroic figures, whose valour was removing the stigma of Bengali cowardice. The community would not tolerate any public criticism of their actions. Yet the councillors had to find some means of disassociating themselves from these acts of violence if the Government were not to lose faith in their protestations of belief in peaceful and constitutional methods. They attempted to circumvent the problem by asserting, as on the occasion of Banerjea's resolution, that most of what the Government described as political crime was, in fact, ordinary dacoity. Such sophistry satisfied no one. The British accused them of attempting to shield seditionists, and their fellow-bhadralok berated them for imputing such vulgar motives to patriots. Who would dare call William Tell a common outlaw?

Another dimension was added to their problem by the fact that theirs was but one of the two groups competing for political influence in Bengal, and their way (constitutional nationalism) was only one of the

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1 E.g. consider Rabindranath Tagore's attitude as revealed in "The Call of Truth", Towards Universal Man, pp. 258-9. In considering the bhadralok's condonation of violence, account must be taken of the fact that it was non-bhadralok moneylenders who were the chief victims of political dacoities. (GI, Home Political, A138-139, Nov 1913.)
two offering for the political 'elite. To declare openly for the terrorists was to let the contest go by default. Conversely, even to hint at disapproval of terrorism was to provide ammunition for their rivals, who, it should be added, suffering from none of the limitations of Council membership, could talk as irresponsibly as they wished. These rivals were always ready to recall the early days of the anti-partition agitation, when men as eminent as Banerjea himself had encouraged youthful extremism. How old and cautious have our former leaders grown, they sneered. How low the fires of nationalism have burnt.

For the Government of Bengal, as well, crimes of violence were a major problem. In the seven years preceding 1913 there had been more than 1100 cases of dacoity reported to the Bengal police and of these only a handful had resulted in convictions. It had been established beyond doubt that a small but significant proportion of these robberies were committed by revolutionary bands in search of funds with which to buy arms and sustain their activities. More spectacular were the periodic terrorist attacks upon civil and police officers. There had been a significant lull in these in 1912, but, following the unsuccessful attempt to assassinate Hardinge late in December of that year, the

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1 E.g. Amrita Bazar Patrika,* 29 Dec 1915.
campaign had been resumed in all its horror. If the Government were to retain the confidence of the public and its own officers, it had to put an end to this violence.

Carmichael, upon whose shoulders rested the responsibility for choosing a course of action, was convinced that a return to the authoritarian methods which had been tried in 1908 would do more harm than good. Unless the police received general assistance, there could be no hope of more convictions. Repression would make the terrorists martyrs and the objects of public sympathy. Carmichael was convinced that a lasting solution could be found only by marshalling bhadralok opinion against violent methods, and this could best be done by demonstrating that the British were sincere in their desire for increasing Indian participation in government. The problem was basically political, he held, and a political solution to it had to be found. He pointed out that if the Government were to enforce an ordinance, dealing with political crime, over the head of the Legislative Council, the bhadralok would rightly regard the talk of reform and a new order as insincere. If any additional legislation were needed to deal with terrorism, it had to be passed by the Legislative Council, preferably with the concurrence of the bhadralok members. His own political experience enabled him to appreciate the difficult position in which they were placed, and he understood the ambivalence of their

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1 GI to Secretary of State, 26 Mar 1914, GI, Home Political, Despatch no. 13, 1914.
attitudes. He knew that personally and politically they would be reluctant to speak in public against the terrorists, but he realised the importance of encouraging them to commit themselves before the Government acted. If action were taken without this commitment, there could be little hope of later support.¹

Carmichael's attitude towards the Moderates brought him into serious conflict with the Government of India, who rejected what Sir Reginald Craddock, the Home Member, described as this 'tame cat theory of treating seditionists'. In his opinion men like Banerjea should be told, quite frankly, that the Government regarded them as enemies and would treat them accordingly. He wrote of Banerjea:

I am convinced that his dossier would show the truth of every word said, that he is an arch-enemy of the Government without a spark of honesty in his composition. I do not for a moment believe that Lord Carmichael knows his past history or regards him as any more than an advanced politician. With the "tame cat" policy a man of this kind gets a swollen head, and struts about hugging himself with pride at the thought that he is so clever and powerful that Government is afraid of him, and dare not assume any attitude except friendship and conciliation towards him. What if he is driven into the arms of the enemy? He will be less and not more dangerous than he is at present?

These are the lines on which I would act in Bengal. There is no via media between futile conciliation and stern dis­countenancing of these mischievous pseudo-constitutionalists.²

Deeply shocked by the attempt on Hardinge's life, the Government of India was angered by Carmichael's apparent indifference to terrorism.

¹ See his numerous letters to Crewe in 1913 & 1914, Carmichael, p. 180ff.
² Minute, 4 Jan 1913, GI, Home Political, A9-13, May 1913.
They interpreted his reluctance to act without public support as a sign of weakness, and they were perturbed, in particular, at his failure to silence the Bengali press, which in their opinion was spreading hot sedition. Craddock maintained that they should immediately take the matter out of Carmichael's hands by enforcing a repressive ordinance, but most of his colleagues disagreed on the ground that this would make nonsense of the policy of liberalisation and the devolution of power to the provinces. Some of them hinted that they were not in full agreement with that policy but they pointed out that it was Crewe's darling and that he would not countenance any attempt to push the provinces against their will.

Obviously, the only course was to convince both Crewe and the Bengal Government that a firmer line was needed. To this end a despatch was sent to Bengal emphasising the Government of India's concern and asking the provincial Government to outline its proposals for dealing with terrorism. Craddock went to Calcutta to suggest to Carmichael and his officers what these proposals should be, but he returned in disgust to report that although the Bengal Government recognised the gravity of the matter they were unwilling to apply strong measures. What was worse (and this was obviously beyond his comprehension) they could give no guarantee that their own policy of conciliation would work.

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1 GI, Home Political, A9-13, May 1913.
2 GI, ibid, A72-75, May 1913.
Craddock was convinced that the Government of Bengal had only a superficial understanding of the problem and on 27 April 1913 he wrote a long minute to demonstrate its complexity. This document was a masterly social analysis - masterly but for one grave flaw: the lack of any appreciation of the bhadralok's need for political self-expression. Because of his failure or refusal to recognise the significance of this need, Craddock could explain terrorism only as a product of some evil inherent in Bengali society.

He attributed the administrative ills of the province to the weakness of its revenue agency, the paucity of British officers and the difficulties of communication. He pointed to the Permanent Settlement and the resultant subinfeudation, with its product: the bhadralok. This class, he said, had shown an extraordinary liking for English-language education, and as a result the professions in Bengal had become over-crowded. The disappointed and half-educated men which the system produced were easily swayed by the outpourings of a seditious press. The result, as he saw it, was a society in which evil had taken possession of men's minds. He wrote:

It is a strange world, a topsy-turvy arrangement under which all the maleficent influences are hailed as deliverances, and all the benevolent influences are howled down in press and on platform as tyrannical and malevolent .... In no other country in the world than India, and in no other part of India except Bengal, could such an absolute inversion of right and wrong apparently find acceptance among people, who are more than ordinarily gifted with intellectual gifts. In Bengal there is
apparently nobody to rally round the Government and no means of securing a rally ... 1

From this can be seen the gulf which separated Craddock from Carmichael. Whereas the latter believed that terrorism resulted from the frustration of the bhadralok's legitimate political aspirations, the former could see it only as the evil product of a diseased society. Carmichael believed that it was the British who had to change their ways; 2 Craddock said that Bengali society had to be refashioned, 'for if there are poisonous humours in the body politic which produce these growths, the mere application of caustic or the knife to the growths themselves can produce no permanent beneficial effect. 3

Regimentation

Craddock warned his colleagues that the trouble in Bengal, if left unchecked, would spread rapidly to other provinces. The Government of India had to consider its wider responsibilities. 'Whatever value we may attach to provincial autonomy or decentralization,' he wrote, 'we cannot overlook ourselves, or let local Governments overlook, the Imperial aspects of any weakness or defects in administration.' 4

This argument, although at first sight apparently straightforward,

1 GI, Home Political, A72-75, May 1913.
2 Carmichael to Crewe, 20 May 1914, Carmichael, p. 191.
3 Minute, 27 Apr 1913, GI, Home Political, A72-75, May 1913.
4 Ibid.
was based on an assumption of far-reaching consequence. What Craddock was saying in effect was that the problem of maintaining order in British India was to be solved by keeping the provinces regimented. For the sake of the whole company no individual should be allowed to step out of line. If there was to be any movement, all should move in unison.

This was the principle that had governed Curzon's policies but it had been discarded by the reformers in the period 1909 to 1912. Morley, for instance, recognised that although Bengal had only a Lieutenant-Governor, its administrative problems demanded that, unlike other Lieutenant-Governor's provinces, it should not be denied an Executive Council.¹ In the legislative reforms of 1909 Bengal's superior political maturity was acknowledged by the provision of Representative Government. No other province was given this. The 1911 arrangements took careful account of Bengal's special needs, and Crewe, in his letter to Carmichael of 15 January 1912, emphasised the importance of encouraging the separate development of the province. The new Legislative Council regulations of 1912 provided another opportunity to make special local adjustments and it was one of Carmichael's basic tenents that Bengal was not to be treated like the rest of India.²

¹ Secretary of State to GI, 27 Nov 1908, PP, 1908, Ed. 44267, vol. LXXVI, pt. i, p. 52.
² GB, Political, A45-62, Mar 1913.
At this point he clashed head-on with the Government of India, and, unfortunately for the bhadralok, it was the Government of India that had the final say. Bengal was ready for an advance to Responsible Government by 1914, but, because of the Government of India's insistence that no province should be allowed to get out of step with the rest, it had to wait until 1921, with disastrous consequences for the liberal ideal in bhadralok politics.

Carmichael's Defeat

Most of the remedies for the situation in Bengal which Craddock advanced in his minute of 27 April 1913 were considered too drastic by Hardinge and the other members of the Government of India. They did, however, accept his suggestion that there should be stricter control of appointments to teaching posts in Bengal, in order to keep 'seditionists' from poisoning the minds of the young. They also agreed to the appointment of a committee to investigate the subordinate administration of the province, for its report was certain to provide evidence which they might use to support their demands for firmer measures.¹

For Carmichael, things were going badly. He was convinced that if he were to have any hope of success in his wider mission, he must be given the opportunity to move cautiously against the terrorists,¹

¹ GI, Home Political, A72-75, May 1913.
carrying with him some degree of Moderate support. With the Government of India pressing ever harder for action, however, it was obvious that he had only a limited time to secure that support. He was disheartened by the lack of response from the Moderates. In personal conversations and in his speeches in the Legislative Council and on tour, he had appealed for their assistance. He had succeeded in obtaining encouraging promises from a number of leading nationalists, but their resolve faltered when it came to translating private assurance into public action. In the Legislative Council the bhadralok members continued their harassing methods, until the Government finally felt itself obliged to show less indulgence in providing information and in replying to attacks in conciliatory tones. The lines in the Council were now drawn in just the way Carmichael had striven to avoid, with the officials and the European non-officials on one side, opposing the Indian non-officials on the other.

In the British community at large, feeling was running high at the frequency of terrorist killings, and alarmist writing in the European press did nothing to ease the Governor's task of reaching a modus vivendi. Moreover, the British non-officials were growing

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2 Carmichael to Crewe, 15 Jul 1914, Carmichael, p. 193.
3 E.g. see BLCP, 2 Apr 1914, vol. XLVI, pp. 544-60.
4 E.g. see Capital editorial, "Crimes of Violence in India", 16 Apr 1914.
impatient at his persistence in negotiating with the nationalists. 'Is it not time to discriminate between legitimate political aspiration and open or semi-veiled sedition, to ask straight out who is on our side and who is against us?' demanded the president of the European Defence Association, F.H. Stewart, at the 1913 St. Andrew's Day dinner.¹

The actions of the Government of India were also disturbing bhadralok opinion in just the way Carmichael had wished to avoid. Frustrated in most directions by the new policy of decentralisation, the Government of India had seized upon the University of Calcutta and the education service, over which it retained direct control, to teach the 'seditionists' and the Government of Bengal a lesson. In May 1913 the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Calcutta, Asutosh Mukherjea, submitted the names of three lecturers for the Government of India's confirmation. The men – Abdul Rasul, Dr Abdulla-al-Mamun Suhrawardy and K.P. Jayaswal – had already taken up their posts with the Government of Bengal's sanction, but the Government of India refused to confirm their appointment on the ground that they had been active in politics and could not be trusted to refrain from expressing anti-British sentiments.² Earlier it had issued orders aimed at

¹ Englishman, 1 Dec 1913.
tightening official control over schools and colleges,¹ and, in
June 1913, in appointing a new Director of Public Instruction for
Bengal, it disregarded the claims of the Provincial Education Service
and brought out a young man from England, in the hope that a new
broom would sweep clean.²

These moves were seen by the bhadralok as attacks upon their
group identity. They smacked strongly of the policies of the Curzon
era and the speakers at a Calcutta Town Hall meeting (the traditional
method of bhadralok protest) declared that the 'Spirit of Partition'
was still rampant.³ An even greater uproar was narrowly averted
early in 1914 when the Government of India was persuaded by Carmichael
and Crewe to drop a proposal to put an Englishman in place of
Mukherjea as Vice-Chancellor of the University.⁴

It was patent that in its educational decisions, the Government
of India had disregarded the wishes of the provincial Government.
This confirmed the bhadralok's suspicion that the policy of devolution
of power was a sham - and they asked what price now for the other
arm of the new order: liberalisation?⁵ As early as June 1912 Crewe

¹ Englishman, 4 Jul 1913.
² GI, Home Political, A72-75, May 1913. Capital, 17 Apr 1913.
³ Englishman, 29 Jul 1913.
⁴ Carmichael to Crewe, 15 Jan 1914, Carmichael, pp. 178-9. IA, General
meeting proceedings, 13 Feb 1914.
⁵ Capital, 8 Jan & 5 Mar 1914. Navak,* 15 Jan 1914.
had disclaimed the suggestion that there had been any intention at
the time of reunification to establish provincial autonomy,¹ and this
had provoked the inevitable retort that he was trying to explain away
an indiscreet promise.² By the beginning of 1914, it was an open
secret that the Government of Bengal enjoyed little freedom of action,
and the Bengali Moderates were losing faith in Carmichael's ability
to keep his side of any bargain.

Carmichael was also having trouble with his own Government. From
the first, many of his officers, including those most sympathetic to
his liberal aims, had thought him over optimistic in his hopes of a
response from the bhadralok leaders.³ Faced with the continued failure
of his efforts, with the unabated violence of terrorism and with
incessant complaints from Delhi, they had begun to urge him to take
stronger action. His difficulties were increased by a personal
misunderstanding between Duke and Lyon.⁴ With his two chief advisers
barely on speaking terms, he had to carry alone his burden of worries.

By the time Hardinge came to Calcutta at Christmas 1913, he found
Carmichael finally resigned to the necessity for action against the

¹ S.R. Mehrotra: "The Politics Behind the Montagu Declaration of 1917",
² IA Annual Report 1912.
³ Carmichael to Crewe, 15 Jul 1914, Carmichael, p. 193.
⁴ GI, Home Political, A72-75, May 1913.
terrorists. The Governor insisted, however, that the Government use only the statutory powers which it already possessed, until such time as a Bill, extending those powers, could be got through the Bengal Legislative Council, with the approval of at least some of the Indian non-officials.\(^1\) He was supported in his stand by Crewe and the British Cabinet,\(^2\) much to the annoyance of the Government of India, who saw how little real hope existed of obtaining Indian support for such measures.\(^3\)

Throughout the first half of 1914, Carmichael struggled vainly to prove them wrong. He failed to obtain the legislation he needed and also he repeatedly saw charges, which his Government laid against suspected terrorists under the existing law, dismissed by the Calcutta High Court, which at that time was a confirmed antagonist of the executive and which distrusted police evidence on principle.\(^4\)

The Government of India was growing increasingly impatient at what it regarded as Carmichael's futile persistence with moderate methods. With the outbreak of the European war in August 1914, it saw its opportunity to take the matter out of his hands. It informed

\(^1\) GI, Home Political, A39-48, Nov 1914.
\(^2\) Carmichael to Crewe, 20 May 1914, Carmichael, pp. 191-2.
Crewe that under the changed conditions exceptional measures could no longer be avoided. In December it assumed complete charge of the handling of conspiracy and in March 1915 it passed the Defence of India Act, which gave it power to arrest and detain suspects without trial.

'These are the lines on which I would act in Bengal,' Craddock had written in January 1913. 'There is no via media between futile conciliation and stern discountenancing of these mischievous pseudo-constitutionalists.' Carmichael knew very well that the Moderates' professed attachment to constitutional methods was no pretence and he appreciated the potential danger to the future of bhadralok politics of dismissing them as mischievous busybodies. Throughout, his actions had been based on the fundamental conviction that a via media between 'futile conciliation and stern discountenancing' had to be found to save liberalism in Bengal. He had clashed with the Government of India on this issue and had been defeated. With the passage of the Defence of India Act the Craddock line had triumphed, to the ruination of Carmichael's attempt to gain the co-operation of the bhadralok through the Legislative Council.

1 GI, Home Political, A39-48, Nov 1914.
CHAPTER III

TALL TALK AND LOW PERFORMANCES

The Moderates in Trouble

Among the bhadralok there was indignation at the Government of India's actions in the early months of 1915. In January it published the report of the Bengal District Administration Committee. This was the committee of enquiry established at Craddock's instance in October 1913 and its report was virtually an extension of his minute of 27 April 1913, concentrating attention upon the shortcomings of the provincial administrative structure and system of education, and the role of educated Hindus in 'seditious' activities. The report had been withheld for some months and when it did appear it roused the ire of the bhadralok who regarded it as an offensive attack on their community.¹

The passing of the Defence of India Act in March brought immediate protests from all sections of Bengali political society, Hindus and Muslims alike.² The Government was accused of having taken advantage of the general state of uncertainty to restrict civil liberties. The manner in which the Bill had been hustled through the Imperial Council,

¹ NP, Feb 1915. A.C. Majumdar's presidential address, IA, 14 May 1915, IA, General meetings proceedings.
² NP, Mar 1915.
without reference to a select committee, was held to be evidence of the Government's disregard for the elected representatives of the people.¹

When its provisions were first enforced, many of those imprisoned or placed under house arrest were bhadralok students and there was an outcry against handing innocent youths over to the cruelties of the police.²

In his presidential address to the Indian Association on 14 May 1915, A.C. Majumdar declared that the Government had forfeited the trust of Bengalis. 'Co-operation is a word easily uttered and easily repeated, but not as easily acted upon,' he said. 'Let both sides be frank and acknowledge that there is no sympathy and therefore no co-operation between the people and the Government. The co-operation can only come with trust and confidence which unhappily are very much wanting.'³

It is significant that just over three years earlier, Majumdar had been one of the signatories to the Moderate nationalists' declaration expressing 'our profound homage, our devoted loyalty and our heart-felt gratitude' at the 'happy Reunion of Bengal'.⁴ As this suggests, there had been a significant loss of confidence among the Bengali Moderates in this period. The optimism with which they had greeted the reunification,

¹ IA Committee meeting proceedings, 19 & 23 Mar 1915.
² NP, Mar 1915 onwards.
³ IA General meetings proceedings.
⁴ Bengalee, 16 Dec 1911.
as the signal of a new era, had died, for their high hopes in entering the Legislative Council had not been realised. Their elected majority had proved to be of no real advantage for they had no power over the executive and their well-organised legislative party had found nothing better to do than to needle the Government at every possible point. Frustrated by such a profitless occupation, they abused the officials for their unwillingness to take notice of non-official opinion. In his presidential speech to the Bengal Provincial Conference in April 1914, Byomkes Chakrabarti, a leading Moderate and a representative of the Presidency Division zamindars in the Council, had said:

This is the impression one gains from a perusal of recent proceedings in the Imperial Council as well as the Bengal Council. The members of Government seem to be in no way anxious to encourage non-official co-operation. Almost every non-official suggestion is met with an emphatic, if courteously expressed, negative. Sometimes the aspirations of non-official members are treated with a sort of amused cynicism. It is dangerous to public interest to trifle with the legitimate demand of public representatives to be furnished with the materials which will better enable them to represent the views, not of themselves in particular, but of the educated public, though comparatively small, who are interested in matters coming up for discussion.¹

The continued activities of the terrorists had proved a severe embarrassment to the Moderates, whose evasion of Carmichael's requests for a repudiation of violent methods had further strained their relations with the Bengal Government. It had also hastened the direct intervention in provincial affairs of the Government of India, which obviously had

¹ *Hindu Patriot*, 20 Apr 1914.
none of Carmichael's sympathy for the Moderates' aspirations. The enactment of the Defence of India Act was the final demonstration of the Moderates' impotency, and, as if to complete their humiliation, the Government of India had directed that the non-official members of the legislative councils should demonstrate their support for the war effort by foregoing all discussion of controversial subjects.¹ Thus, at a time of rising bhadralok anger at British actions, the Moderates had to content themselves with loyal utterances and petty talk of local affairs.

When they had entered the new Legislative Council in 1913 it had been to the accompaniment of a chorus of jeers from the Extremists, who declared that the Moderates had been duped by the British into thinking that they were being given something worthwhile.² It now seemed that the Extremists had been right, and, as a consequence, the Moderates were held up to ridicule in the bhadralok press. 'What a tempting and beautiful picture was drawn by the Congress leaders when the bonbon of the reformed Councils was dangled before the eyes of the people, and how sad and deplorable is the reality!' wrote the Amrita Bazar Patrika.³ On a later occasion it compared the Council members

³Amrita Bazar Patrika,* 17 Apr 1916.
with a swarm of noisy little hornets, able to sting and inflict pain but with no poison to do real harm.¹

In an article on 'Lord Morley's "Reforms"' in the Calcutta Hindu Review of April 1914, Bepin Chandra Pal had written:

What was really wanted was not a reform and expansion of the Legislative Councils, but a reconstitution of the Executive Administration. The new patriotism craved really for neither reform nor reconstitution, but rather only for a little more freedom of self-expression and self-reliant civic activities. This was the inner meaning of the Boycott Movement and the organisation of the so-called National Volunteers .... The "Moderates" have been "rallied", but the "revolutionaries" are almost as active as ever. These revolutionaries actually helped the Moderates to the enlarged privileges which the "Reforms" bestowed on them. And these very Moderates now, by keeping up a constant stream of unfriendly and unwise criticism of executive action and policy, are, in their turn, materially, though unconsciously, contributing to the strength of the revolutionary party. For, the failure of every Resolution brought before the Councils by the popular leaders, and the rejection of every amendment proposed by them in any Bill under the consideration of the legislatures, inevitably strengthen the conviction of the impossibility of working out any reasonable reconciliation between popular rights and the British connection with this country. Lord Morley's "Reforms" have, thus, only increased the difficulties of an already difficult situation.²

By early 1915 the Moderates were forced to admit that there was a great deal of truth in what Pal had said. Their failure to achieve anything worthwhile in the Council because of their lack of power, had seriously weakened their influence with the bhadralok, and, what was more serious, it had very largely discredited their political style: constitutional nationalism.

¹ Amrita Bazar Patrika,* 31 May 1917.
² Nationality and Empire, pp. 222-3.
As a debating point, they had always argued that the Extremists were foolish to criticise the Morley-Minto councils for what they were not, without considering what they might become. They had to be regarded merely as staging points on the road to self-government, the Moderates insisted.¹ This assertion, however, depended upon faith — faith in the British intention to give India self-government — and the Extremists maintained that this faith was groundless. They pointed out that the British had never declared self-government to be the object of their policy in India and they held that there was nothing in British actions to suggest that they would ever voluntarily give up power. The reformed Legislative Councils and the talk of liberalising provincial administration were simply sops to appease an angry people. It was the Craddocks, not the Carmichaels, who were the real force in British Indian government and the Defence of India Act was the true product of their work.²

The logical conclusion of this argument was, as Pal had said, 'the conviction of the impossibility of working out any reasonable reconciliation between popular rights and the British connection with this country', and that almost certainly meant violent revolution. To the Moderates this was a frightful conclusion.

¹ E.g. see Indian World, 19 Nov 1913.
² B.C. Pal: Nationality and Empire, passim. NP, Mar 1915.
They could see only one sure way of defeating that logic: to secure a clear declaration from the British that they intended India to be self-governing. This should be followed immediately by the transfer of some measure of real power to the Indian members of the legislative councils and a guarantee that more would be given at successive stages. The object was to restore that faith in the value of liberal, constitutional methods of political action which had been so badly shaken, first by the partition of Bengal, and later by the Moderates' difficulties in the reformed councils. To achieve this object, there had to be a minimum of hesitation on the part of the British in making their declaration and no display of reluctance in giving the powers demanded by the Moderates.

Demands for Constitutional Advance

This critical point in their thinking had been reached by the Moderate nationalists in Bengal by the middle of 1915. As we have seen, the actions of the Government of India in the months following the outbreak of the war had had a negative influence in forcing them to this conclusion. The declaration of war itself had had a more positive effect. In India, as in other parts of the British Empire, August 1914 sent a wave of excitement and hope through the educated classes. There was talk of a short and glorious campaign, to be followed by a re-adjustment of international relations, in the forefront of which would be a new partnership of the nations of the British Empire. A new
conception of India caught the imagination of Indian nationalists: a self-governing India taking its place as an equal beside the other British dominions in an Imperial federation. Already, they declared, India's new status had been foreshadowed by the employment of large numbers of Indian troops beside those of Great Britain and the white dominions on the European battlefields. 'Comrades in arms, it will be difficult to treat them as helots in politics,' declaimed the Bengalee in September 1914.

Excited by this prospect, the Moderates set about preparing schemes for constitutional reform, typical of which was one published in July 1915 by Surendranath Banerjea. It is worth studying in detail, for it contained the essence of important later proposals: S.P. Sinha's Congress presidential address of December 1915; the memorial presented to the Viceroy in October 1916 by 19 members of the Imperial Legislative Council; and the Congress-League scheme of December 1916.

Banerjea assumed that a constitutional reconstruction was imminent and he argued that the best way for the Indian leaders to draw attention to their demands was for Hindus and Muslims to agree to a common plan. 'The ideal is self-government within the Empire, and every part of the scheme must tend towards it,' he wrote. The demands should be for the appointment of a higher proportion of Indians to the Civil Service,

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1 E.g. B.C. Pal: Nationality and Empire, pp. 140-61.
2 Bengalee,* 9 Sep 1914.
real autonomy for the provinces, and an Imperial Legislative Council with extended powers. The Government should be bound by council resolutions, and elected members should be in a two-thirds majority in all deliberative bodies, with effective representation for 'every district and every interest'. Most important of all, the legislative councils should have the power of the purse, for this, Banerjea held, was the key to real self-government.¹

In this, as in the later schemes, the demand was for the extension of the powers of the existing institutions, for that would justify the Moderates' participation in the old councils, and, as an advance along a recognised line of constitutional development, would afford them a clear victory. Accompanying their programmes of reform, was an appeal to the British to make a declaration that India was to be given self-government - a declaration 'with regard to which there will be no evasion, no misunderstanding possible'. The words are S.P. Sinha's and he followed them with an article from the Moderates' creed: 'if the noble policy of Malcolm and Elphinstone, Canning and Ripon, Bright and Morley, is not steadily, consistently and unflinchingly adhered to, the moderate party amongst us will soon be depleted of all that is fine and noble in human character.'²

¹ Bengalee,* 2 Jul 1915.
Advance Deferred

The Moderates had made their plea and it was important to them that the British should respond quickly and generously, for any hesitation, any hint of neglect for constitutional aspirations, would reinforce the growing impression that the Moderates had no influence. The British acted neither quickly nor generously. More than three years had elapsed from the declaration of war before the British Government announced its plans for India's future, and then only when its hand had been forced by Indian agitation and non-official British action.

At the outset the attention of the British and Indian Governments was fully occupied with the urgent problems of reorganising for war, and, although the excitement in India over the possibility of constitutional reforms did not pass unremarked, it was agreed that consideration of such questions should await the return of peace.1 Even when hopes of a quick victory had receded, the Government of India was reluctant to make any move which might disturb political order in India and thereby jeopardise its contribution to the war effort.

For the first two years of the war its primary concern was the handling of conspiracy. Bengal occupied the lion's share of its time, for it was very afraid that the terrorists there would receive direct aid from German agents, and it could not persuade Carmichael to apply

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1 GI, Home Public, A128-131, Oct 1914.
the Defence of India Act as rigorously as it considered necessary.\(^1\) Although the Governor's liberal policy was virtually wrecked, he refused to give in completely to Simla, and his last two years in office were devoted to a struggle to prevent the extraordinary powers which the executive had acquired, from being used to stifle healthy public life in his province.

To the Government of India's reiterated demands for extreme action, his customary reply was: 'we must wait patiently and not lose our heads.'\(^2\) He opposed suggestions for the deportation of political suspects.\(^3\) He insisted on the formation of committees to examine the evidence on which suspects were detained, and he proposed the inclusion of Indian non-officials on these committees to gain public support. 'Till there is general confidence in the fairness of our enquiries, we shall not get on very far.'\(^4\) He stood firm against pressure from the Government of India and his own officials to use the Defence of India Act retrospectively against men whom the police believed had been involved in political crime as far back as 1908.\(^5\) He insisted that the members of the Legislative Council should be given full information in reply to

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\(^1\) GI, Home Political, A172, May 1916.  
\(^2\) Carmichael to Crewe, 5 May 1915, Carmichael, p. 208.  
\(^3\) Same to Same, 25 Feb 1915, ibid, p. 205.  
\(^4\) Same to same, 25 Mar 1915, ibid, p. 207.  
\(^5\) Same to same, 5 May 1915, ibid, p. 208.
their questions on the application of the Act,\(^1\) and whenever he addressed the Council he explained the reasons for actions which his Government had taken.\(^2\)

The 1916 Elections

He had his reward for this persistence in trying to mitigate the severity of British wartime administration, in the decision of the Moderates to contest the June 1916 Legislative Council elections. The Extremist press in Bengal ridiculed the idea of any further participation in the Morley-Minto legislatures\(^3\) and it is not unlikely that the Moderates would have repeated their 1909 boycott had Carmichael been less sympathetic.

In these elections nationalist politics played a more important role than in the 1912-13 contests. In the ten local body constituencies, where bhadralok opinion was most clearly expressed, there was a decisive change. The five sitting members for the District and Local Boards seats were defeated by men who were younger and more angry, if we may judge from their subsequent behaviour in the Council. The Municipalities seats were won by angry old men, five veterans of the anti-partition campaign, all Indian Association lawyers: Kisori Mohan Chaudhuri,

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\(^1\) E.g. see E.L.C.P., 4 Sep & 13 Dec 1916, vol. XLVIII, pp. 446-7, 454, 472-5, 478 & 532-61.


K.B. Dutt, Ambika Charan Majumdar and, two re-elected members, Surendranath and Mahendranath Ray. This suggests that a considerable change had occurred in the electorates since the Banerjea group's debacle in 1913, and a comparison of the political affiliations of the members of the old and new Councils points to the same conclusion. Of the 16 elected Hindu members in 1913, ten belonged to no organisations outside their local regions, whereas in 1916, all but one Hindu member belonged to some province-wide association. While local influence was still important in securing votes - and the contests gave good evidence of this - a nationalist reputation now carried considerable weight at the polls.

It appears that, because of the impact of the events of the years between 1913 and 1916, the activities of nationalist politicians, and the writings of the vernacular press, the values of the 'upper' level of politics were by this time understood and, to some degree, accepted at the next level. Thus, in spite of the shortcomings of the Morley-Minto Council and the consequent frustration of its bhadralok members, something really significant had been achieved in Bengal in this period.

There was a great opportunity here for the British. At the same time, however, there was grave potential danger. If they could meet the demands of the active political elite and thereby reconcile the upper level of political society, they would have a good chance of stabilising the second level as well. That it was not too late to do this, was indicated by the Moderates' participation in the 1916 elections - particularly the participation of the young uncommitted men. Conversely
if the British were to fail to meet the demands of the political élite, thereby leaving the anger of the upper level unchecked, there was now a serious likelihood of that anger running like a scrub fire through the second level - and even beyond. The Legislative Council was no longer the exclusive concern of the active élite, and this meant that the question of its reform had assumed a completely new significance.

That the anger of the élite was real, was demonstrated in the Legislative Council as soon as it assembled. The first act of the new members was to reject Surendranath Banerjea as their representative on the Imperial Legislative Council.¹ This was a disaster for him, for, faced with a new regulation which prevented members from sitting in both a provincial council and the Imperial Council,² he had not contested a seat for the Bengal legislature, relying upon his return to the centre. His defeat was an obvious gesture of impatience with the restrained, decorous methods of protest for which he stood and it was an ominous sign for the British.

Having given this warning, the councillors then set out to demonstrate that unlike the old representatives they respected public opinion more than any directive from the Government of India. Taking their cue from the vernacular press, they probed every case of house search, internment and deportation under the Defence of India Act, alleging illegality or

² PP, 1914, [Cd. 7379], vol. LXIII, p. 69.
injustice wherever they sensed a weakness.¹ They also attacked the police without restraint. In the budget debate early in 1917, one member after another criticised the work of the police and demanded a reduction in expenditure on the force. 'We are not very proud of our Police,' declared Majumdar, 'and I do not realize the justification of such lavish expenditure on their account unless some definite scheme is arrived at to make them more efficient and useful to the public.'²

There were repeated complaints from the Indian non-official members that the Government was denying them information, disregarding their suggestions and using the official bloc to vote down their resolutions. 'I have now been four years in Council and know that going against official opposition is like dashing one's head against a stone wall,' complained Huq.³ Speaking at the end of the budget debate on 14 March 1917, Akhil Chandra Datta told the Government that its obstructive attitude had cut the ground from under the feet of the Council supporters. 'Will not the impression go forth from one end of the country to the other that our much vaunted reformed Council is not, for all practical purposes, a whit better than that of pre-reform days?' he asked. 'My Lord, as the proceedings of the Council went on these two days from resolution to resolution, the feeling that oppressed me most

¹ E.g. see B.L.C.P., 4 Sep & 13 Dec 1916, vol. XLVIII, pp. 446-78 & 532-61.
was that we non-official members sit here only to play the part of the chorus in a Greek tragedy."  

A Warning Disregarded

This political discontent in Bengal was of great concern to the Government of India, for it considered it a menace to the maintenance of order throughout India generally. Craddock was adamant that the solution lay in a reform of the provincial administrative structure and education system, and the provision of new economic opportunities for the bhadralok. In an effort to get the Government of Bengal's endorsement of this programme, the Government of India requested it in April 1916 to outline the remedial measures it thought necessary, having regard to the Bengal District Administration Committee's recommendations.

The reply which was received from the provincial Chief Secretary late in September was satisfactory, but with it came a disturbing note of dissent from the senior member of the Executive Council, Percy Lyon. The solution to Bengal's problem was not to be found in any tinkering administrative adjustments, he asserted, but in a fundamental political reform. Here in Bengal the British were faced with a genuine nationalist movement, and they had to acknowledge immediately the people's legitimate

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2 GI, Home Political, A225-232, Aug 1917.
3 Ibid, A172, May 1916.
aspirations for self-government. The moment was critical, Lyon said. There could be no delay.

I am profoundly convinced that the authors of this letter have failed to diagnose correctly the root-cause of our present trouble in Bengal—which is political in its nature. In considering the various influences which have given it a violent and explosive character, they have overlooked entirely the spirit of nationalism which inspires it, and they have consequently restricted themselves to schemes for the improvement of the administration and of our system of education, while omitting all reference to the urgent need for an advance towards self-government, without which such schemes will fail to remove the distrust with which Government and all its measures are regarded.

This feeling of nationality is at the basis of the propaganda of the revolutionaries whom we are actually fighting: it is the "idea" which is being spread to them in most of the schools and colleges of Bengal: it is referred to in paragraph 15 of this letter as "a spirit of almost exaggerated devotion to Bengal"; and it is alluded to in the Report of the District Administration Committee, where "the English-knowing classes" are described as "deeply imbued with national sentiment". Sir Satyendra Prasanna Sinha made it the burden of his presidential address at the last National Congress: it is the constant theme of every leading speaker and writer in Bengal; and, under the stimulus that has been given by the World War to the spirit of patriotism in all civilized countries, the vast majority of the educated classes and almost every student who thinks of public questions at all are deeply affected by it. Moreover these classes can no longer be regarded as an isolated and insignificant minority of the population. They are already learning to identify themselves with the masses, and are spreading their own distrust of British rule amongst them, and they will ultimately carry the people with them in their demands that nationalist views should be introduced into the government of the country.

Hopeless and criminal as the methods of the revolutionaries are, and essential as it is to exterminate those methods, their aspirations to political freedom are the same as those held by moderate and loyal Bengalis, and can never be condemned utterly by the British nation. It would be inconsistent with the whole history of our race and our recent action in the domain of world-politics if we failed to recognize such aspirations and made no attempt to satisfy them. And, should we make no effective advance towards self-government in India at the conclusion of the war,
we shall so disillusion and disappoint the educated classes as to intensify the very unrest which we desire to remedy, and render our campaign against political crime even more difficult than it is at present.

We have to attempt, therefore, to find a solution of the political problem which will modify the distrust with which our rule is regarded and enable us to secure the co-operation of the people in the maintenance of law and order and the introduction of the reforms which we consider necessary. It appears to me that a frank declaration of the ultimate goal and aim of our policy in governing India is the first step we have to take. I believe that this goal should be proclaimed to be such self-government within the Empire as will enable India to take her place as one of the self-governing nations which constitute the Empire.... The war has given us an opportunity of adopting a broad and constructive policy of reforms with these objects in view. If we fail to obtain them, our proposals will lead inevitably to coercion followed by an administrative collapse, and it may then be too late to guide the political evolution of the country along any safe and peaceful course.  

As Lyon himself pointed out, he was merely restating in this note what the Moderate nationalists had been saying over and over again in the preceding twelve months. The Government of India had refused to acknowledge their appeals and once more upon Lyon's note it preserved a stony silence. In its opinion, Lyon would be better occupied in applying himself to the details of provincial administration than in trying to teach the Government of India its business on all-India affairs.

The endorsement of Lyon's sentiments by Carmichael, confirmed Craddock and his school in their opinion that these two senior members

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1 GI, Home Political, A225-232, Aug 1917.
of the Government of Bengal were fundamentally unsound. Earlier in 1916 the Government of India had even considered asking for their resignations because of what it regarded as their attempts to obstruct the proper handling of terrorism, and it was only in consideration of the fact that both were due to retire early in the following year that they had been left in office. Craddock, his able pen as usual at the ready, had given his verdict on Carmichael's administration of Bengal:

Lord Carmichael's conciliatory policy and his efforts to meet the politicians at every turn has brought him some personal popularity but it has not had the smallest effect on anarchy. His affability to the extremist politicians and journalists may have secured some surface quiet, but it has not made the work of Government smoother. Under that policy anarchy has continued to grow and it was only when he was assisted by war legislation and able to take stern measures, that he secured a lull.

Carmichael, a sad and disappointed man, gave his own verdict on his achievement. Writing on 2 September 1916 to his wife, who had returned to England because of illness, he said:

I feel horribly sad today, though it is a lovely, lovely day .... ever since you went away I have been working very hard - it mayn't come to much, but I can, at any rate, claim I have worked really hard, and have never gone to bed without feeling dead tired, and it isn't always easy to get even a few minutes to do what one wants. I tell Gourlay [his secretary] it's like Grotius's epitaph "Vitam perdidi operosum nihil agendo," but old Gourlay won't hear of the nothing and talks of casting bread on waters, etc. But all the same, India is for everyone a throwing away of work.

1 GI, Home Political, A225-232, Aug 1917.
2 Ibid, A172, May 1916.
4 Carmichael, pp. 213-4.
The New Men

The departure of the two Liberals from the Bengal Government early in 1917 gave the Government of India its opportunity to inject some 'backbone' into the provincial administration. Lyon's place was taken by Sir Henry Wheeler, who had capped a brilliant secretariat career with service under Craddock as Home Secretary to the Government of India from 1912. The new Governor was the Earl of Ronaldshay, a 40 year old Conservative member of Parliament who had travelled extensively in Asia and written a number of books on his experiences. He had served in India for a short period in 1900 as Curzon's A.D.C. and had returned in 1912 as a member of the Lothian Commission on the public services.

These appointments perturbed the Bengali nationalists who feared a return to the reactionary policies of the partition period. They regarded a Curzonite and a Simla secretariat man as unwelcome replacements for Liberals like Carmichael and Lyon, and Ronaldshay's arrival in Calcutta on 21 March 1917 was greeted with protests from the newspapers and political associations. Ronaldshay recognised the need to mollify this hostility and he took care in his first public speeches to emphasise that he was approaching his new duties free from rigid preconceptions.

2 Essayez, p. 68.
Despite this denial he did have well-formed notions of the way in which he should act. He believed that the tasks facing his administration were twofold, the first being to advance the material welfare of the Bengali populace. He wrote:

Previous acquaintance of the problems of rural India had taught me that the average Briton has a genius for assuming the role appropriately termed in India that of ma-bap (mother-father), when dealing with backward peoples, and I had little difficulty in deciding that the key-note of my policy so far as the great mass of the population were concerned, must be encouragement and support of the members of the numerous Public Services from the Indian Civil downwards ...

The second task was to deal with the Bengali intelligentsia with its predilection for terrorism. This he saw as a problem 'of far greater complexity as it was concerned with the psychology of a people - a people moreover whose history, traditions, modes of thought, philosophies and religions - whose whole outlook on life in short, differed profoundly from that of the West.' Ronaldshay saw terrorism as the product of a reaction against the acceptance of European institutions and values. He believed that it was inspired by a deep-seated fear that in embracing an alien culture 'India was immolating her own soul'. ¹

There is a marked and significant contrast between his views and those which Carmichael had expressed as he approached the same problems four years before. Carmichael had written: 'I conclude that we should

¹ Essayez, pp. 68-9 & 76.
do well if we assumed less often than we do that the Indian mind is entirely different from the European mind, and expected the Indian more often to be swayed by the same motives which actuate Englishmen.¹

From this assumption he argued that a rational approach to Indians, an appeal to their innate liberalism and goodwill, would have beneficial results. Ronaldshay, working from a different assumption, argued differently. He held that it was pointless to reason with the terrorists because of the psychological gulf separating them from Englishmen.

This came close to the position taken by Craddock in his minute on bhadralok politics of 27 April 1913: 'In Bengal there is apparently nobody to rally round the Government and no means of securing a rally.' Ronaldshay would have accepted at least the spirit of the first half of this but he would have rejected the proposition that there was no means of securing a rally, for he believed that by developing a parliamentary system in India the British could train an ever-widening group of responsible Indians, who would recognise the need to support the Government as an institution requiring support for the good of the country.² Obviously there was an element of inconsistency between this argument and that about the alien psychology of the Bengali intellectual. Reasoning logically from that premiss, one would reach Craddock's conclusion, but Ronaldshay had spent ten years as a member

¹ Carmichael to Crewe, 14 May 1913, Carmichael, pp. 181–2.
² Essayez, pp. 81–3.
of Parliament and was therefore predisposed to accord the parliamentary system an importance which would have appeared exaggerated to men of Craddock's ilk.

Ronaldshay had always believed that the logical outcome of the reforms of 1909 was the development of a parliamentary system in India, and he was therefore amazed to discover when he arrived in Bengal that the Government of India still denied that this was the direction which constitutional advance should take. In a despatch to the Secretary of State a few months earlier it had written: 'We have no wish to develop the Councils as quasi-Parliaments.'

Snail's Pace

Events in India and Great Britain in 1916 had finally forced the Government of India to give serious consideration to the question of constitutional reforms. To the insistent demands of the Indian nationalists had been added the comments of an influential group of British public men, students of Imperial affairs, who had reached the conclusion that India had to be given some measure of self-government to qualify it for admission to the Imperial federation which they advocated. This group - the Round Table as it called itself - was led by Lionel Curtis, a former administrator and politician in the Transvaal,

1 Essaye, pp. 81-3.
2 Quoted, Essaye, p. 82. Cf. Mehrotra, op. cit., p. 86.
and it numbered among its members men who were well placed to influence the thinking of the British Cabinet. ¹

The Government of India resented what it regarded as the interference of these men in Indian affairs,² but it also realised that unless it took some action itself, it was in danger of losing the initiative to them. If this happened, some reckless scheme might be foisted upon it. Hardinge had already sketched out a plan of limited reforms.³ Lord Chelmsford, who replaced him as Viceroy in April 1916, was convinced that the British should define the aim of their rule in India and he pressed his Government to agree to a declaration of policy being made. The Members conceded that some such gesture would be a fitting reward for India's loyal contribution to the British war effort.⁴

The deliberations went on throughout the year, as the Government of India slowly and cautiously considered every possible aspect of a policy statement, without any apparent realisation that time was fast running out. As Lyon vainly tried to tell them in September, there was an urgent need for a bold and arresting declaration to save the situation in politically 'advanced' regions like Bengal. The purpose of that declaration was to demonstrate the British desire to further

² Secretary, Home Department, GI, to Chief Secretary, GB, 5 Mar 1917, GB, Appointment, 18L-10(1-80), A93-172, May 1917.
³ Mehrotra, op.cit., pp. 82-3.
⁴ Ibid, p. 85.
Indian constitutional advance; to prove that they valued the loyal aspirations of the Moderate nationalists and were prepared to heed their requests; and to discount the assertion that concessions would only be made in the face of violent agitation. Nothing of this would be achieved if the British hesitated too long, for by then Indian demands would have become extreme and any subsequent British action would appear to have been forced.

When Lyon wrote his minute of dissent in September there may have been just time enough to act. By the beginning of the new year it was too late, for in the closing months of 1916 the Extremists had been taken back into the National Congress, which had formed an alliance with the Muslim League with the purpose of extracting constitutional concessions from the British.

By December 1916 the question of Indian reforms was already under discussion between the Government of India and the Secretary of State, but throughout they had obstinately refused to give any public indication of the direction in which they were moving. And they were travelling at a snail's pace. It took them another eight months before they made their announcement. On the 20 August 1917 Edwin Montagu, who had been appointed Secretary of State for India in the preceding month, made the following statement in the House of Commons:

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The policy of His Majesty's Government, with which the Government of India are in complete accord, is that of increasing association of Indians in every branch of the administration, and the gradual development of self-governing institutions, with a view to the progressive realisation of responsible government in India as an integral part of the British Empire. They have decided that substantial steps in this direction should be taken as soon as possible, and that it is of the highest importance, as a preliminary to considering what these steps should be, that there should be a free and informal exchange of opinion between those in authority at home and in India. His Majesty's Government have accordingly decided, with His Majesty's approval, that I should accept the Viceroy's invitation to proceed to India to discuss these matters with the Viceroy and the Government of India, to consider with the Viceroy the views of local governments, and to receive with him the suggestions of representative bodies and others.

I would add that progress in this policy can only be achieved by successive stages. The British Government and the Government of India, on whom the responsibility lies for the welfare and advancement of the Indian peoples, must be judges of the time and measure of each advance, and they must be guided by the co-operation received from those upon whom new opportunities of service will thus be conferred, and by the extent to which it is found that confidence can be reposed in their sense of responsibility.

Ample opportunity will be afforded for public discussion of the proposals, which will be submitted in due course to Parliament.¹

Bhadralok Distrust

The British had made their bold, arresting declaration - but for Bengal, at least, it had come a full year too late. The bhadralok politicians, frustrated by the limitations of the Morley-Minto councils and angered by the years of delay in securing as much as an acknowledgement of their demands for reforms, were no longer to be satisfied by

a nicely-phrased statement of British intentions. As early as June 1917 a contributor to the Modern Review had written:

... history is strewn with the graves of pious promises issuing in reactionary deeds. Ever since the foundation of British rule in India there has been a continued shower of utterances breathing sympathy with the final goal of Indian aspirations, but actually so little has been done that these utterances are now regarded merely as a convenient cloak, under which the task of preparing for freedom the subject races of India may continue to be the white man's pleasant burden for evermore. The time has now come when a time-limit must be prescribed, so that the goal may be clearly seen and the steps towards it clearly thought out.

The same scepticism characterised Bengal press comment on Montagu's declaration in August. Attention was concentrated on the second paragraph of his statement and it was generally agreed that the qualification regarding the achievement of self-government by successive stages could be made the excuse for years of delay. Unless some definite time-limit were fixed, there could be no certainty of the British ever fulfilling their promise. Similarly, although most papers were pleased that Montagu was coming to examine the situation in India for himself, they feared that the Europeans - official and non-official - would dominate his thinking throughout his visit. 'Here he will be influenced by the official atmosphere which will surround him as soon as he lands,' observed the Sadagat. 'He will thus see things through a new pair of spectacles. His ears will become proof against public opinion.' Even Banerjea's vernacular paper, the Bangali, could

1 NP, 1 Sep 1917.
2 Sadagat,* 25 Aug 1917.
summon only enough enthusiasm to remark: 'But we must rest content, as half a loaf is better than no loaf.'

In Bengal the British had failed completely to restore faith in their good intentions. The bhadralok now watched with suspicion the developments which flowed from the August declaration, genuinely fearing that the 'pious promise would issue in reactionary deeds'. They expected the British to procrastinate and hedge before they gave anything. They predicted that the I.C.S. would contrive to build barriers into any scheme of reforms to protect its autocratic powers and that concessions would be made to reactionary groups - such as the European business community and the Muslims - to buttress British rule in India. Nothing which happened in the three and a half long years which it took the British to frame a new constitution and get it working, served to dispel these initial fears. To illustrate this point we shall examine the attitudes towards the reform proposals of the official and non-official Europeans in Bengal, and in the following chapter we shall consider the Bengali Muslims' position.

The Bengal Officials

In his memoirs Ronaldshay recalled that Montagu's declaration 'caused considerable fluttering in the official dovecots in Simla and

1 Bangali,* 22 Aug 1917.

2 E.S. Montagu: An Indian Diary, pp. 66-7. NP, Sep-Dec 1917.
in those of the capitals of the Provinces. His further announcement that he proposed coming to India in propria persona to gather material for the construction of the constitutional edifice of which he had visions, added to the fluttering a chorus of squawks'. The I.C.S. distrusted Montagu, for he had notoriously radical ideas on Indian politics and administration, and was severely critical of the bureaucratic methods by which the country was governed. Speaking in the House of Commons just a week before he entered the Cabinet as Secretary of State, he had attacked the Government of India as 'too wooden, too iron, too inelastic, too antediluvian'. That such a man should now have responsibility for a major reconstruction of the Indian constitution was profoundly disturbing to the I.C.S.

In these circumstances it was some reassurance to the Bengal Civilians that they had Ronaldshay as Governor, for he fully recognised the inevitable difficulties and dangers that lay ahead in the period of readjustment, and he emphasised his determination to maintain a firm, conservative Government in his province to provide the bedrock on which experimental structures could be built with greater safety.

He already had Wheeler, an acknowledged strong man, as his second-in-command and he appointed a former provincial Chief Secretary,

1 Essayez, p. 82.
J.G. Cumming, to take special charge of the administration of the Defence of India Act. When S.P. Sinha went to England in 1918, Ronaldshay appointed the leader of the Bengal great zamindars, the Maharajadhiraja of Burdwan, to fill his place on the Executive Council. This brought a protest from Montagu, who wanted a nationalist politician included in the Bengal Government, but Ronaldshay refused to give way, arguing that he would have enough to do with politicians when the proposed reforms were implemented, while Burdwan would bring with him the support of Bengali conservatives.¹

Cumming retired in 1920 and his portfolios of Justice and Jails were given to Sir Abdur Rahim, a Bengali Muslim judge of the Madras High Court who had served with Ronaldshay on the Lothian Commission. A few months later the Executive Council was enlarged to four members and the Chief Secretary, J.H. Kerr, a man of great vitality, was included as Finance Member. Thus throughout this period of uncertainty, Ronaldshay was able to provide himself with conservative subordinates of outstanding ability and experience, who were a match for any of the Bengali nationalists with whom his Government had to deal.

For the Bengal officials, the Governor's conservatism was one element of security in an insecure situation. Another was the Viceroy's evident concern that the nationalists should not monopolise

¹ Essayez, p. 133.
Montagu's attention while he was in India. In a private letter to Ronaldshay on 27 September 1917, Chelmsford wrote:

It is all-important that the interests of every class, including those of the European and commercial communities, those of the landed aristocracy and those of the people professing moderate and conservative opinions, as well as of people holding advanced opinions, should be represented before the Secretary of State and myself.

If you find that any important classes or interests which ought to be moving in the matter are not alive to the position, I would suggest that you should point out to them the desirability of their taking steps to secure that their views receive proper consideration.¹

This was music to the ears of the officials and they busied themselves with the task of sorting out the right people for Montagu to meet. The names of 54 conservatives and moderates were suggested as a 'Rough list of persons who might be asked to see the Secretary of State'.

'Ve must see that the conservative men do not hold back,' wrote the Governor's Secretary, W.R. Gourlay, emphatically.²

Montagu came to India in November 1917 and for five months toured the sub-continent with Chelmsford. As a result of their enquiries, the two men presented a joint report to the British Government in July 1918. It recommended a greater devolution of power by the Home Government to the Government of India, and by the Government of India to the provinces. It insisted that Indianisation of the services should proceed more rapidly. It suggested the enlargement of the legislatures,

¹ GB, Appointment, 6R-1(17), B441-455, Mar 1919.
² Gourlay to J.H. Kerr, 3 Oct 1917, ibid.
an extension of the franchise and the transfer in the provinces of responsibility for some functions of government to Ministers responsible to the legislative councils.¹

These proposals brought protests from the I.C.S. officers in Bengal, as in other parts of India. J.H. Kerr, Chief Secretary to the Bengal Government, wrote:

Official opinion is, on the whole, frankly dubious as to the working of the scheme, and the most experienced administrators in this Presidency regard it with serious misgivings, even as a temporary measure during a transitional period .... there is a widespread feeling that the line of advance proposed in the Report is attended with even graver difficulties than are in fact admitted and that these may cause a serious breakdown. Whatever the intentions of the framers of the Report ... it is apprehended that the scheme is bound, in practice, to lead, at any rate in the first instance, to the establishment of an oligarchy, the smooth working of which in conjunction with an official element of different traditions is at least problematical.²

This was the Civilians' greatest fear: that an immediate advance towards Responsible Government would mean the consolidation of power in the hands of the small group of bhadralok nationalist politicians, whose intentions they distrusted. What, they asked, would become of the I.C.S. tradition of protecting the weak and uplifting the impoverished if the members of the service had to obey the dictates of high-caste politicians? Closer to home, what security would an English officer have if his career were subject to Indian political

¹ Report on Indian Constitutional Reforms.
² Kerr to Secretary, Home Department, GI, 15 Oct 1918, Government of India's Despatch of March 5th, 1919, and connected papers, p. 194.
control? In the higher branches of the administration they saw the danger of a disastrous collapse if politics were allowed to influence vital departments like police and justice.¹

Montagu and Chelmsford had invited criticism of their proposals and the Bengal Government made the most of the opportunity.² It also began preparing its submissions for the two committees which were to tour India at the end of 1918 to consider schemes for a new franchise, and for the division of functions between the Government of India and the provincial Governments, and between the two branches proposed for the new provincial Governments.

The Bengal Civilians decided that their major effort should be directed towards securing a large extension of the franchise in the province, for this seemed to be the only possible means of preventing, or even mitigating the effects of, the monopolisation of power by the 'bhadralok oligarchy'. A broad electorate would ultimately enable the mass of the people to exert their rightful control over the administration of the transferred powers. The alternative, as far as the officials could see, was to acquiesce in the continuance of corrupt and self-indulgent bhadralk politics. 'I am aware that there

¹ Government of India's Despatch of March 5th, 1919, and connected papers, pp. 194-213. GB, Appointment, 6R-19(1-51), A8-58, Dec 1918.
² 'The Viceroy himself somewhat worried about the famous Reform scheme. All Provincial Governments, it appears, have given it an extremely rough handling.' (Ronaldshay diary entry, 31 Dec 1918, Essayez, p. 132.)
are numerous objections to this proposal for an extended electorate,' wrote the District Magistrate of Tippera, D.H. Wares, 'but they will have to be faced ultimately, and the sooner this is done, the better it will be for the country.' Wares' superiors in the provincial Government were of the same opinion and they accepted this as their guiding principle in formulating their reform proposals.

The practical limitation to the extension of the franchise was the machinery available to prepare electoral registers and poll votes. Inevitably the lion's share of this work would have to be borne by the District and Sub-Divisional officers, as an addition to their normal duties. Previously they had had to handle no more than a few hundred voters at each election but now the electors would be numbered in thousands and the majority would be illiterate. The officers would be unable to turn for guidance to the experience of their fellow administrators in other colonial territories, for this was the first time in the history of the British Empire that an attempt had been made to form a mass electorate.

The Government of Bengal refused to be discouraged by these formidable obstacles, and, to the dismay of the Government of India,

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1 Wares to Chief Secretary, GB, 10 May 1918, GB, Appointment, 18L-6(1-83), A1-83, Oct 1918.
2 Fifth Despatch on Indian Constitutional Reforms, p. 363. GB, Appointment, 6R-25(1-59), A94-152, Dec 1918.
it proposed an increase in the number of voters from the twelve thousand registered to elect the old councils, to an estimated one and a half millions. The bulk of these would be in rural areas, where the main franchise qualification would be the annual payment of a minimum of one rupee in cess. The provincial Government explained that, unless the qualification were kept as low as this, even well-to-do cultivators would be excluded and Hindu voters would greatly outnumber the Muslims, in spite of the general numerical superiority of the latter.

The importance of this consideration will be somewhat qualified if separate Muhammadan electorates are created, wrote the Government committee on electorates, but even so, it is necessary to have a fairly numerous electorate in order to prevent corruption and also in order to give a wide body of Muhammadans a political education which will enable them to hold their own when communal representation is abolished.

The Montagu-Chelmsford report had recommended that the Muslims be given separate electorates only where they had a minority of voters, but the provincial Government insisted that the Bengal Muslims be given communal representation throughout the province to safeguard them against the domination of Hindu landlords and moneylenders. The Hindu backward classes should be provided for by nomination.

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1 This proved to be a considerable overestimate. (See Simon Commission Report, vol. VIII, p. 130.)
2 5 Jun 1918, GB, Appointment, 6R-25(1-59), A94-152, Dec 1918.
4 GB, Appointment, 6R-25(1-59), A94-152, Dec 1918.
In an attempt to lessen the influence of the bhadralok stronghold, Calcutta, which the Government regarded as 'tending to swamp all else' in the political life of the province, it proposed to give the city only three general seats (two Hindu and one Muslim)\(^1\) and to prevent carpet-bagging by insisting upon a residential qualification for candidates.\(^2\)

The Franchise Committee accepted the Government of Bengal's recommendations for a wide franchise and for separate communal electorates for the Muslims throughout the province. It yielded to bhadralok pressure, however, and opposed the suggested residential qualification for candidates. It also recommended eight seats for Calcutta and an additional five seats for the neighbouring areas of the Presidency Division. The Government of Bengal prepared figures to show that if this were done the city would be 'absurdly over-represented',\(^3\) but its protest was ignored and it had to make the best of a bad job by organising the Calcutta Hindu constituencies in such a way as to ensure that minority groups, such as the Marwaris, secured representation.\(^4\)

The reports of the Franchise and Subjects Committees were published in February 1919 and in the same month a Cabinet committee was formed.

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1. GB, Appointment, 6R-25(1-59), A94-152, Dec 1918.
appointed to prepare the Government of India Bill for its introduction to Parliament on 29 May. It was then submitted to a Joint Select Committee, which spent three months examining witnesses and drafting amendments. The Bill had its third reading in both Houses in December 1919 and received the royal assent on 23rd of that month.

There was only one task left to be done before the new constitution could be inaugurated: rules had to be framed for the reformed councils. This was the officials' last chance to protect their powers. The Bengal Government took its stand on the proposition that the British parliamentary model should not be applied to Bengal without modification, so that a large area of government might be left free from political interference. For this reason it had favoured an Executive Council with a majority of European members¹ and it now rejected the Joint Select Committee's recommendation that a British parliamentarian should be brought out to preside over the Legislative Council.² It also opposed Montagu's suggestion for the appointment of Council Secretaries to fulfil the functions of British Parliamentary Under-Secretaries in assisting members of the Government with their departmental duties and representing them in the legislature. 'We strongly objected to it,' explained the Chief Secretary, H.L. Stephenson, 'on the ground that there was no analogy between the conditions of parliament at

¹ GB, Appointment, 6R-2(1-8), A3-10, Apr 1920.
² Ibid.
home and the Legislative Council here.\textsuperscript{1} Obviously what the officials found unpalatable was the thought of a politician being pitchforked into their tidy bureaucracy. 'I think there will be endless confusion,' grumbled Wheeler, 'if the Council Secretary came, in any way as a cog in the Secretariat machine.'\textsuperscript{2}

Looking back over this narrative of the part played in the reforms discussions by the Bengal officials, it will be seen that there was nothing which might have served to restore bhadralok faith in the beneficence of British intentions. The Civilians were concerned throughout to safeguard their powers, just as the bhadralok press had predicted they would be, and they made no attempt to conceal their animus for the bhadralok which led them to advocate a greatly extended franchise, separate communal electorates for the Muslims, and a restricted representation for Calcutta. They obviously had no desire to see a parliamentary system developed in India and could be expected to oppose a further transfer of power to Indians. They, at least, had fully justified the bhadralok's suspicions.

The European Non-Officials

So too had the European non-officials. As a small community with large vested interests in Indian trade and commerce, they had been

\begin{multicols}{2}
\textsuperscript{1} \textit{Minute}, 29 Aug 1920, GB, Appointment, 6R-36(1), A1025B.
\textsuperscript{2} \textit{Minute}, 12 Aug 1920, ibid.
\end{multicols}
greatly alarmed by the initial proposals for the establishment of parliamentary institutions in India. Up to this time they had relied upon their personal contacts with senior members of the I.C.S., with Governors and Viceroy's, and with Civil Servants and politicians in London to maintain their considerable privileges. Knowing that real power lay with the Home Government and with the officials in India, and confident of their ability to influence their decisions, the British non-officials had been able to disregard the legislative councils or, at best, to treat them with an air of amused tolerance. Service as a European representative in a legislative council had been regarded as an irksome distraction from the important business of money-making, and twelve months as a member was generally considered to be all that a man could be asked to devote to such unprofitable work. That the Indian nationalists resented this cavalier attitude and regarded the community's privileged access to the Government as evidence of racial discrimination, did not trouble the Europeans, for they were secure in the knowledge that the Indians were unable to make good their threats.

This security depended upon the maintenance of the existing arrangement, with the officials holding real power and according their non-official compatriots a preferential hearing. This explains why the British non-official community had been so perturbed by the reunification of Bengal and the transfer of the Imperial capital to

1 In the period 1913-1920 the two Bengal Chamber of Commerce seats in the Bengal Legislative Council had eleven occupants.
Delhi in 1912. These moves were a response to Indian pressure, and, worse still, they had been kept secret with the express purpose of preventing the European non-officials from exercising their normal influence on the decision.¹ The Statesman, in a revealing leading article, had described this as a violation of India's 'Constitution'. 'In the interests of commerce it is essential that the English public should know that India is not wholly subject to the caprices of a one-eyed bureaucracy,' it wrote, 'that public opinion here insists on being consulted, and that the recent irregular and irresponsible proceedings have been vigorously challenged.'²

Montagu's declaration in August 1917 was even more alarming. Again it was a response to Indian demands and this time the whole system seemed to be in danger. If parliamentary institutions were established, with a Government responsible to a representative body, the old methods of confidential access and influence would have to give way to 'sordid' political negotiations.

Worse still, power would be transferred from British officials to the very Indians who were most antagonistic to the privileges of European commerce. A Calcutta businessman, commenting on Lionel Curtis' reform proposals earlier in 1917, had voiced his community's fears:

¹ Lord Hardinge: My Indian Years, 1910-1916, pp. 38-40.
² Statesman, 2 Feb 1912.
You propose to destroy a Government in which British Commerce trusts, and to put in its place one in which British Commerce cannot trust.

If you destroy the present Government you must put something in its place which will ensure that our Interests are safeguarded as at present, and that we are not placed at the mercy of Bengali Zamindars and Lawyers, and I am satisfied that you are attempting an impossibility. ¹

How could this disaster of bhadralok domination be averted now that Montagu had made his 'rash promise' of concessions? The European community saw two possible means. Firstly, they would impress upon British opinion at Home the dangers of establishing a parliamentary system in India. Secondly, they would frame a scheme of limited reforms which would stop short of a transfer of power from the provincial and Imperial Governments.

Their newspapers immediately launched a campaign to demonstrate how the interests of the British Empire in India and of the great mass of Indians would suffer if the misguided schemes of British radicals were accepted. In an article in the Calcutta Review of October 1917 entitled "The Evacuation of Asia", "Brit" wrote:

> It is, of course, popular government that our British progressive proffers. But I am afraid it is something rather different that the educated, moneyed, landed Indian wants - it is not government "by the people" he wants; it is government of the people, by the educated, moneyed and landed classes for themselves! It is a House of Lords he wants, but not a House of Commons; it is oligarchy, hierarchy, plutocracy he aims at, and not democracy. He is in a hurry for autonomy, but his progress in democracy will be slower than ever. Zemindar and mandarin - it is only a difference of a letter,

When Montagu and Chelmsford came to Calcutta at the beginning of December, the three European organisations - the Bengal Chamber of Commerce, the Calcutta Trades Association and the European Association - put forward similar proposals for limited reforms. They emphasised that in their opinion the time was not ripe for constitutional changes of any kind, but that, if the Government were determined to press ahead, it must avoid 'experiments on a large scale that might mean large disaster'. Reforms should be limited to the development of local self-government, the extension of the legislatures as advisory councils, and provincial and local decentralisation. It was stressed that British non-official representation in the legislative councils should be maintained and that any suggestion of establishing responsible government at that stage was absurd.

The European Association desires to state, definitely and deliberately, its opinion that a grant of anything approaching self-government to India at the present time would be utterly disastrous to the real interests of the country and a grave injustice to her peoples. It would place the many of the lower castes under the heel of the few of the higher castes, and could only impair the British tradition in India, that tie between the British and Indian peoples to which the lower castes look for their ultimate emancipation, and by which alone the future advancement of India can best be secured.²

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² PP, 1918, [Cd. 91787], vol. XVIII, pp. 495-8 & 508-9.
In his interviews with the associations' representatives, Montagu urged that the British non-officials should in future take part in politics and 'rest their claim to protection on the vindication of their case to the Indian people rather than for ever on the Government of India'.\(^1\) This did nothing to reassure the community. Nor did the prominence given in the joint report to the need for a less exclusive racial spirit among the British in India.\(^2\) It was adding insult to injury, the Calcutta European press asserted angrily, to conclude the document with an appeal to the Europeans for a sympathetic acceptance of Indian aspirations so that the proposed reforms might be a success. 'Statesmen who make a rash promise without consulting public opinion have no right to call upon the whole world to co-operate cordially in extricating them out of the thicket into which they have jumped,' growled the Statesman.\(^3\)

Montagu and Chelmsford were accused of riding roughshod over the British community in an effort to win the applause of a small group of self-interested Indians. It was asserted that their proposed reforms would leave the vital interests of British commerce unprotected and ruin the I.C.S. by placing it at the mercy of corrupt politicians.\(^4\)

\(^1\) E.S. Montagu: *An Indian Diary*, p. 80.
\(^3\) *Statesman*, 12 Jul 1918.
The *Englishman* demanded that the report of the Rowlatt Committee, which had just concluded enquiries into the extent of seditious conspiracy in India, be widely distributed in England, for it 'is a necessary antidote to the easy nonchalance and frequent irresponsibility of the Chelmsford-Montagu proposals; it serves the purpose of a sign of warning upon a dangerous road.  

On 2 October 1918 the Bengal Chamber of Commerce met to pass judgment on the joint report. Its president, W.A. Ironside, voiced the indignation of his community:

Never before in the history of this Chamber have its members assembled together at a more momentous occasion, seldom perhaps in the history of the world has any community in similar circumstances, small in numbers yet vast in interests, been asked to face a future which presents to all sane, steady-thinking men of our community such far-reaching possibilities for evil to the country and its people.  

Despite their anger, the British non-officials now realised that a reconstruction was coming and that they had to concern themselves with the form it would take and with evolving new methods of action by which they could maintain their political influence. With this realisation came the opportunity for more moderate voices to gain a hearing. By the last quarter of 1918, the European journals were willing to devote space to articles decrying the earlier alarmism and calling for a positive effort to work with moderate Indians to make

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2 GB, Appointment, 6R-18(1-10), A10-19, Mar 1919.
the reforms a success. Similarly, there was a noteworthy change of spirit in the European representations before the Franchise and Subjects Committees, although again there was a demand for safeguards: weighted representation for the community in the legislative councils and the retention of powers of law and order in the hands of British Governors.

At the annual meeting of the European Association in March 1919, the president, P.L. Buckland, called for a new attitude of respect for the legislative councils. He observed that the reforms would give them increased power, in view of which the British non-officials would have to take them more seriously than in the past. In particular they would have to find representatives who were willing to devote their full attention to their legislative duties and he suggested establishing a fund to pay their salaries.

Under the reforms Act passed at the end of the year, the Europeans were given a large representation (almost a sixth of all elected seats) in the provincial Legislative Council, the Legislative Assembly and the Council of State. Although they protested that this was inadequate and grumbled at having been 'more or less ignored' in the reforms discussions, they saw clearly enough that their political future now

3 Bengaloe,* 15 Mar 1919.
4 PP, 1920, 6Cmd. 8127, vol. XXXV.
depended upon the ability of their representatives to form alliances with Indian groups in the legislatures and thus maintain the community's advantages.

Speaking in the Bengal Legislative Council on 3 February 1920 to a motion expressing the members' gratitude at the passage of the Government of India Act, R.M. Watson-Smyth, a representative of the Bengal Chamber of Commerce, said that the time had come 'for the British mercantile community to put their cards on the table and to state definitely what their attitude is to be with regard to this Bill.'

He continued:

It is well-known - and I hasten to admit it - that we were of opinion that these reforms, although we agree to a certain extent with the principle, went too fast and too far. We thought and we still think that the time was not ripe for the introduction into India of a form of government on western democratic lines, and that the franchise difficulty was so great that any form of elected government to be really representative of the will of the people was a practical impossibility. These were not conclusions hastily arrived at, but were the results of much thought and consideration, and I would that we could say that we had had a fair hearing when the measure was being discussed, but this is not so ... All this, however, is past history. By the vote of Parliament and by the will of the Sovereign this Bill has become law, and now, without recrimination and with no illwill, we enter the next stage - a much more difficult stage - that of carrying these reforms into effect ... to the moderates I say stretch out your hand and we will take it. Ask for our co-operation and you shall have it and you and we will then tackle this problem of reforms and turn the Bill into something for which thanks are really due - something to the great benefit of the people and to the lasting good of this mighty Empire of India which is both yours and ours.¹

The bhadralok members could surely be excused the display of disgust with which they greeted this 'magnanimous' offer of co-operation. The European non-officials had changed their tune only when the pressure of circumstances and considerations of their own self-interest had forced them to do so. It could scarcely be credited that they had any genuine sympathy for bhadralok aspirations after having attacked the group so bitterly.

Throughout the reforms debate the European non-officials had hit the bhadralok at their most sensitive points. They had denied Indian equality with their own race and declared India unfit for parliamentary institutions - 'the time was not ripe for the introduction into India of a form of government on western democratic lines'. They had denounced the bhadralok's professed desire for constitutional advance as a subterfuge to gain selfish power - 'it is not government "by the people" he wants; it is government of the people, by the educated, moneued and landed classes for - themselves!' They had explicitly stated that the bhadralok could not be trusted to uphold the British tradition if India were granted self-government. 'It would place the many of the lower castes under the heel of the few of the higher castes, and could only impair the British tradition in India'. And all the time they had been using their fund of backstair influence and

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1 B.L.C.P., vol. LII, pp. 64 & 66.
their vituperative press to restrict the degree of change so that their own privileged position might be maintained.

The effect of such opposition on the bhadralok's trust in the promises of the Imperial Government is too obvious to need elaboration. How could they believe that the British really intended to do for India what they had done for the white empire when the British non-official community in Calcutta was talking so arrogantly of Indian inferiority and when it was given such a disproportionate share of the legislative representation? How could they believe that liberal, constitutional methods of political action would be sufficient to secure real power from the British when this influential group was obviously prepared to use any device to maintain its position in India. The British had been asked to give proof that they meant what they said, and this is what they had produced. 'Tall talk and low performances may be amongst the many and varied privileges of Englishmen,' remarked Fazlul Huq bitterly, 'but do they seriously realize what the verdict of history is likely to be on the achievements of their own countrymen in India?'

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1 Presidential address, All-India Muslim League session, Delhi, 30 Dec 1918. Azizul Huq collection.
CHAPTER IV

THE FORGOTTEN MAJORITY

The Lucknow Pact

Putting forward his constitutional reform scheme in July 1915, Banerjea had emphasised the advantages of Hindus and Muslims making a united demand. At the time he was writing, there seemed a reasonable chance of some measure of agreement being reached between the leaders of the two communities in Bengal. The death of the Nawab of Dacca in January 1915 had removed the most intransigent of the old-guard Muslims, and many of those involved in the succession struggle which followed were young educated men, nationalist Muslims like Fazlul Huq, who spoke the same political language as the Hindu nationalists.

Moreover, the anger of these younger men with the Government at the reunification of Bengal had been reinforced by their concern over the entry to the war of Islamic Turkey as a German ally. The Indian Muslims accepted the Sultan of Turkey, the Khalifa, as the spiritual and temporal leader of all Islam, and the fact that he was now at war with the British imposed a severe strain on their loyalty to the

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1 Carmichael to Crewe, 25 Feb 1915, Carmichael, p. 204.
British raj. While still protesting their primary commitment to the Muslim community, the nationalist Muslims in Bengal were therefore willing to co-operate with Hindu nationalists in formulating demands for constitutional concessions.

In 1915 and 1916 they gained control of the Bengal Presidency Muslim League, with Fazlul Huq as secretary, and they subscribed to a proposal for a joint scheme of constitutional reforms to be adopted by the Congress and the League in their annual all-India sessions at Lucknow in December 1916. The Lucknow Pact, as this came to be known, was based on a memorial submitted to the Viceroy by 19 members of the Imperial Legislative Council in October 1916, but, as the price of Muslim support, their scheme was modified to give the Muslims over-representation in the proposed new legislative councils of those provinces where they were in a minority. In Bengal and the Punjab, the Muslim majority provinces, the Hindus were to have a slight weightage. Thus the Bengal Muslims, while forming 52.6 per cent of the population, were to have only 40 per cent of the Council seats.

This decision was generally unpopular with the Muslim community in Bengal and there was great anger at those who had agreed to such disadvantageous terms. The young Muslim Leaguers were accused of

1 NP, Sep-Dec 1914.
2 GB, Political, lists of office-bearers of recognised associations, 1915-1916.
betraying the interests of their community to please the Hindus and there was a reaction against co-operation. 'Those who apprehend that the Moslems will suffer political death if they do not unite with the Hindus are greatly mistaken,' declaimed a Calcutta Urdu daily, the Resalat. 'We have already stood alone 1300 years. What is wanted is that we should firmly abide by our religious laws and not become faint-hearted.'

It was on this issue that debate among the Bengal Muslim leaders turned in 1917. The supporters of the Congress-League Pact insisted that the first aim of all Indians should be to force the British to yield power, while its opponents maintained that the protection of communal interests was the paramount duty of the Muslim leaders. Montagu's declaration in August, bringing as it did the need for action, only added to the acrimony of the dispute.

The Rejection of the Pact

It was settled quite suddenly, however, by communal rioting in Bihar late in the following month. When the Muslims of Shahabad District attempted to perform their traditional cow-sacrifice on the Baqr-Id, they were attacked by Hindus. The nature and extent of the rioting which followed - more fierce and prolonged than any which

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1 Resalat,* 17 Apr 1917.
2 NP, Jan-Sep 1917.
previously had occurred in British times - suggested a premeditated attempt on the part of the local Hindus to put an end to cow-sacrifice in the District.1

This had serious repercussions on communal relations in neighbouring areas of eastern India. In Bengal, where excitement was already running high at the prospect of reforms, the Muslim leaders hurled the accusation of treachery at their Hindu opposites. Here, they declaimed, was an example of the use to which the Hindus would put any power they could wring from the British. This was a foretaste of Hindu raj.2 All thoughts of co-operation were drowned in a wave of communal bitterness and the old religious animosity of the two communities was revived. 'In the West religion and politics can be separated but in the East never,' declared the Sadagat.3

It was in this atmosphere of recrimination, that the Bengal Muslims set about drawing up their submissions on constitutional reform for Montagu and Chelmsford. Already there had been a number of defections from the ranks of the provincial Muslim League of those who repudiated the Lucknow Pact. The Central National Muhammadan Association, a Calcutta organisation of long standing which had formerly concerned itself primarily with Muslim education, offered these men an alternative

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2 NP, Oct 1917.
3 Sadagat,* 22 Nov 1917.
body through which to work. They persuaded the Association to form a Constitutional Reforms Sub-Committee, of which they took command.¹ They then prepared an address to Montagu and Chelmsford in its name, attacking the Lucknow Pact and demanding legislative representation for the Bengal Muslims in proportion to their population. The spirit of their submissions was characterised by the concluding sentence of the address: 'For England now to place the Indian Moslems, without proper, definite, and ample safeguards, under the heels of a hostile non-Moslem majority, would, your humble memorialists venture respectfully to submit, be a cruel act of breach of faith and violation of trust.'²

In November the same group of League defectors, under the leadership of Golam Husain Cassim Ariff and Dr Abdulla-al-Mamum Suhrawardy, formed a new and specifically political organisation of their own—the Indian Moslem Association³—and drew up another address. Its tone was more extreme. It emphasised its authors' determination to secure communal advantages at any cost and it characterised the Lucknow agreement as a snare and a delusion for Muslims and British alike. 'Indeed the ink of the compact of fraternity itself has been washed away by the blood of the victims of the Bakri-Id riots at Arrah and the Ram-Lila Moharrum disturbances at Allahabad.'⁴

² PP, 1918, [Cd. 91737], vol. XVIII, pp. 498-9.
⁴ PP, 1918, [Cd. 91787], vol. XVIII, p. 504.
In the provincial Muslim League, the supporters of the Pact were now unchallenged but they were uncomfortably aware of the unpopularity of the Pact's provisions for Bengal and the consequent danger for them of being left out on a political limb. They attempted to save themselves by advocating a modification of the scheme to give the Bengal Muslims 50 per cent of the Council seats,¹ and, at the same time, with the assistance of some United Provinces members of the League, they started a new Urdu daily in Calcutta to support the scheme in this modified form.²

Thus when Montagu and Chelmsford came to Calcutta in December 1917, the three Muslim associations were united in their opposition to the representation provisions of the Lucknow Pact and all were demanding more generous treatment for their community.

Montagu had little sympathy with this demand. He believed that constitutional protection for minorities - particularly for large minorities like the Muslims - encouraged their separatist tendencies, and, at the same time, discouraged them from making the effort to stand on their own feet in politics.³ He was eager to do away with communal electorates but reluctantly discarded this idea when he realised the strain which such a reversal of British policy would impose on Muslim

¹ NP, Nov 1917.
² Sadagat,* 24 Nov 1917.
³ E.S. Montagu: An Indian Diary, pp. 100 & 115.
loyalty. In the joint report published in July 1918, he did make it clear, however, that he disapproved of communal representation in principle, and he emphasised that he would not agree to its extension, or even to its maintenance, in any province where the Muslims formed a majority of the voters.

The Bengal Muslim leaders were aghast at the implications of this for their community. If the British accepted the provisions of the Lucknow Pact as a fair basis for the distribution of seats in the new legislative councils, the Bengal Muslims would not be given a representation proportionate to their overall numerical majority, and yet, if Montagu had his way, that majority would be made the excuse for depriving them of their separate electorates. There were vehement protests from the political associations. 'My Committee have carefully studied the Constitutional Scheme in all its aspects and apprehend that its working in its present shape would be disastrous to Moslem interests, and lead to the political extinction of a great and historic community in India,' the secretary of the Central National Muhammadan Association told the Government of Bengal.

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1 E.S. Montagu: An Indian Diary, p. 68.
3 Honorary Secretary, Central National Muhammadan Association, to Chief Secretary, GB, 12 Sep 1918, GI, Home Public (Reforms), Deposit 15, Jul 1919.
Courtiers and Co-operators

The Bengal Muslims were, indeed, in a desperate position. At this crisis in Indian constitutional development, with the future of their community hanging in the balance, they were faced with the failure of both courses of political action which they had pursued in the preceding decade.

The first of these, which had been evolved in the period of the partition agitation and the Morley-Minto reforms, was the Dacca Nawab's method of dependence upon the British Imperial rulers. It assumed that the Muslims, as an educationally and economically depressed community, could not hold their own with the bhadralok in the hurly-burly of politics. It also assumed that the British were worried by the growing strength and increasingly aggressive tone of Hindu nationalism, and would welcome the clientage of the Muslims — a distinct and self-conscious community which might serve as a counterpoise to the bhadralok. The strategy was for the Muslim leaders to proclaim the loyalty of their community to the British raj and to offer it in liege to the Imperial Government.¹ In return they would expect the community to receive favoured treatment in any constitutional or political settlement.

The British were in need of support and they willingly accepted the arrangement on these terms. As a result the Muslims gained many

concessions in the period between 1906 and 1911, the most significant being separate communal representation in the reformed legislatures.

As with all systems of patronage, however, this relationship depended upon the maintenance of a fine balance between the interests of patron and client. In this case the balance would be disturbed if the British considered that it was in their interest to make concessions to communities other than the Muslims. Thus the reunification of Bengal in 1912, which was intended to benefit the bhadralok, was held by the Muslims to be a breach of faith, and it raised doubts in their minds as to the value of the whole arrangement.

The Nawab of Dacca, however, insisted that there was no satisfactory alternative to this system for the Bengal Muslims. He saw that what was required was the establishment of closer contacts between the Muslim leaders and the Government. To ensure that the community's needs were adequately represented to the British and also to ensure that the community was never again caught unawares by Government action as it had been in 1911, it was vital that it should at all times have 'courtiers' who were in the confidence of the Governor and his official entourage.

In this regard, the opening years of Carmichael's regime could scarcely have suited the Muslims better, with the Nawab himself installed in a place of honour at the Governor's right hand, and Shamsul Huda sitting in the Executive Council. Following the Nawab's death in January 1915, however, the system broke down. There was no able and
aristocratic successor to take the Nawab's place at 'court', and, when Huda's term on the Executive Council expired in June 1917, Ronaldshay gave the seat to S.P. Sinha, a member of the bhadralok. This perturbed the Muslim leaders. The Bengal Chief Secretary, J.H. Kerr, remarked on 18 August: 'The present Government is already suspected of being less favourably inclined to, or at any rate less mindful of, Muhammadan interests than the late Government which included a Muhammadan member and Mr Lyon who was well known to be actively pro-Muhammadan and pro-Eastern Bengal in his tendencies.'

The full extent of their loss was apparent to the Muslims only after Montagu's declaration. They then realised that they had been deprived of their means of confidential access to the Government at the very moment when it was most important for them to be able to influence its decisions. The disastrous consequences of this seemed to be foreshadowed in the opposition of the Montagu-Chelmsford report to the provision of separate communal electorates in Muslim majority areas.

The other method of political action which had been tried and found wanting by July 1918 was co-operation with the bhadralok, as advocated by Fazlul Huq and his nationalist Muslims. These middle-class professional men were not acceptable to the Government as 'courtiers', nor did they wish to fill such a role. After the re-unification of Bengal in 1912, they rejected the Dacca Nawab's style

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1 Minute, GB, Appointment, 4M-4(1-2), A30-31, Sep 1917.
of dependence on the British, declaring as invalid the assumptions on
which it was based. The British no longer welcomed the Muslims as
clients, they said, nor was it necessary for the Muslims to avoid the
rough and tumble of politics, for they now had an educated élite
which could hold its own with the bhadralok.

The political future of the Bengal Muslim community, as they saw
it, lay in an alliance with the bhadralok against the common enemy:
the British. The aim was to wrest power from the British and this power
was to be divided between the communities according to a pre-arranged
scheme which would give the Muslims their fair share. This was the
object for which Huq and his men subscribed to the Lucknow Pact.

Their confidence that the alliance would force the British to
yield power was shown by subsequent events to have been fully justified.
This, however, proved to be a doubtful blessing, for in negotiating the
Pact the Bengal Muslim leaders had failed to secure a sufficiently
large slice of the new powers to satisfy their own community. Thus an
arrangement that was originally intended to safeguard the Bengal Muslims
had, by 1918, come to be regarded by that community as the gravest
danger to their position in the impending constitutional resettlement.

The Riots

Faced with this alarming failure of their efforts, the Bengali
Muslim politicians were at a loss for any constructive suggestions for
future action. Throughout July and August 1918 they talked despairingly
of the 'political extinction' of their community. They accused the British and the bhadralok of a desire to cripple its strength, and they accused one another of treachery.¹

There could have been no worse moment for such a display of weakness, for the Muslim community in Bengal was desperately in need of the reassurance of firm leadership. Among its educated members, the unwelcome tone of the Montagu-Chelmsford report and the increasingly extreme demands of the Hindu nationalists were the cause of grave anxiety. To the orthodox Muslims, the defeats suffered by Turkey and the widely credited rumours that Britain intended to depose the Khalifa were the cause of deep concern,² while the mass of the community was suffering from the effects of a bad harvest, heavy flooding due to an early monsoon and extraordinarily high prices for cotton goods. Added to all this were the ravages of the great influenza epidemic, which had struck Bengal in July 1918.³

With this general unrest and a demoralised leadership, the community was an easy prey for extremist agitators, and a group of such men were on hand to take advantage of the opportunity. Their leaders were three non-Bengalis – a Punjabi, Habib Shah, a Madrasi, Kalam, and a

¹ NP, Jul-Aug 1918.
² Ibid.
Bihari, Fazlur Rahman - whose chief influence was among the Urdu-speaking immigrant community of Calcutta: the Muslim traders, manufacturers and lower-class factory labourers.¹

Throughout 1918 these men had been looking for a chance to stir up trouble and they saw September as their best opportunity, for in that month the Muslim Bakr Id would coincide with the Hindu Durga Puja. Such a concurrence of religious festivals always brought the likelihood of communal disorder² and, with bitter memories of the previous year's rioting in Bihar still fresh in Muslim minds, the situation on this occasion promised to be unusually explosive.

The Muslim press was busy whipping up discontent. The Bihar riots were frequently mentioned, with heavy underscoring of the moral: 'The Moslems should be on their guard in time this year.'³ Hoarders were blamed for the prohibitive price of cotton goods and the finger of accusation was pointed at the Marwaris.

This money-lending community, which came from the Rajputana states, had established itself in force in Calcutta in the preceding decade.⁴ In trade, its members worked in closely-knit family groups, and, with their flair for a good speculation combined with a large measure of

¹ Essayez, pp. 112-3.
³ Mohammadi,* 6 Sep 1918.
unscrupulous dealing, they had quickly secured an important position in Bengal commerce. ¹ Communally exclusive and religiously ultra-orthodox, they kept aloof from both the Muslims and the Hindus in Bengal, which did nothing to dispel the jealousy and mistrust which their rapid success had engendered. They offended the Muslims, in particular, by their deep aversion to cow slaughter and it was an unfortunate accident of geography that threw together large numbers of both communities in the overcrowded lanes around Burra Bazar in central Calcutta. By August 1918 the Marwaris of this area were aware of the hostility surrounding them, and, fearing looting of their warehouses should rioting break out in September, they imported up-country guards. This was noted with disfavour in the Bengali press.²

The situation was perfect for the Muslim agitators. All they had to do was to strike the spark which would ignite this tinder. Habib Shah was the incendiary. At the beginning of August in his Urdu paper, the Naqqash, he took exception to a paragraph published a few days earlier in the Indian Daily News, on the ground that it contained an offensive reference to the prophet Muhammad. This created a furore. The other Muslim papers joined the Naqqash in its attack and on 4 August the Bengal Presidency Muslim League called upon the Government to institute proceedings against the editor of the Indian Daily News.

² NP, Jul-Aug 1918.
At a public meeting six days later there was wild talk of a holy war against the infidel and it was decided to call an all-India gathering of Muslims in Calcutta for 8 and 9 September to consider the religious and political future of the community. 'At this moment, Moslems are being attacked from all sides,' wrote the Naqqash. 'They say that their feelings are hurt by everybody. But the mere expression of such a sentiment will not stop the mouths of the enemies of Islam. Practical steps should be taken. They should act on the motto, iron must be hammered by iron.'

Moderate Muslim politicians were becoming alarmed by the trend of events but they were reluctant to denounce the agitators publicly lest this endanger their personal popularity and in some way favour their rivals. They became a little more resolute when they found themselves excluded by the extremists from the reception committee which was formed after the meeting of 10 August to organise the following month's demonstration, but even then they would risk nothing more than a confidential appeal to the Government to prohibit the rally.

The Government of Bengal was slow to recognise the gravity of the situation. It handled the affair of the Indian Daily News ineptly and provided much ammunition for the Muslim press before the Government of India intervened to persuade the Daily News editor to publish an apology. Ronaldshay was absent from Calcutta and it was not until his return at

Naqqash,* 15 Aug 1918.
the end of August that his Government considered the matter of the all-India rally. Twelve Muslim leaders were then called to discuss the question with the Executive Council. The representatives of the reception committee denied any intention of fomenting trouble, but their moderate opponents accused them of deceit and favoured cancelling the gathering. At Ronaldshay's request, the reception committee met that evening to reconsider its decision but it used the occasion as an excuse to heap abuse on the heads of the moderates for what it described as their collusion with the Government.

In the meantime there had been much inflammatory writing in the Muslim press and a number of religious leaders had arrived in Calcutta from other parts of northern India. On 4 September the Government banned the gathering, ordered the visitors to leave Bengal and stopped the publication of the *Naqqash* and a number of other Muslim papers. The reception committee, in defiance of the order, went ahead with its arrangements.

Most of the moderates were now thoroughly frightened and some went as far as requesting police protection. An exception was Fazlul Huq. For ten days from 26 August he had been absent in Bombay attending the special sessions of the Congress and the Muslim League called to consider the Montagu-Chelmsford report, and on his return he had been confined to bed with a fever. As soon as he recovered he made an effort to ensure that the Government's order would be obeyed. Speaking to a meeting of the reception committee on the evening of 7 September,
he persuaded all but three of its members to abandon the rally. The three were Habib Shah, Kalami and Fazlur Rahman.

On the following day a crowd of five or six thousand Muslims assembled at the site of the rally but they dispersed when they were told that the Government had granted another interview to the reception committee for the next afternoon. On the morning of the 9th a large mob gathered around the Nakhoda Mosque in Burra Bazar, and, shortly after midday, began moving towards Government House. Huq asked for police permission to talk to them but this was refused. They were stopped by armed constables and forced to return to the mosque, where they milled angrily in the surrounding lanes. Fearing damage to their property, some of the Marwaris ordered their durwans to clear the footpaths in front of their gateways. Blows were exchanged, and, when a shot was fired from one of the Marwari houses, rioting broke out. The police charged with lathis but were bombarded with bricks. They then opened fire, killing and wounding a number in the crowd. Looting and arson had already begun in many parts of the city, with the Marwaris as the chief victims. It took three days and the bayonets of a regiment of British troops to restore order.¹

The Lessons of Violence

Looking back over a half century disfigured with the scars of communal rioting in Calcutta, the pattern of these events seems too

¹ This account of the riots and the events leading up to them is based on Essayez, pp. 108-16; & Report of the Non-Official Commission on the Calcutta Disturbances (1918), pp. 4-29.
familiar to excite comment, but in 1918 it was novel and alarming. For men of property in general and for the Marwaris in particular, it raised an awful vision of the disastrous possibilities of a breakdown of law and order in the face of a malcontent or fanatical rabble. They were uncomfortably aware that in some way the stability of Indian society had been shaken in the war years. The small delegation of businessmen - Bengali Hindus, Marwaris and Muslims - which Byomkes Chakravarti led to the Writers' Building on 17 September to thank the Government for suppressing the riots, was expressive of a concern for what was to come as much as of relief for what was past.

The political implications of the riots were equally disturbing. For the first time in British India an attempt had been made to use mob violence as a political weapon. Certainly the political aims of the agitators were not clearly defined, but this does not alter the fact that in its organisation the 1918 rioting differed in kind from previous communal disorders. Habib Shah and his fellows were engaged in a political contest in which they used violence and the threat of violence against their opponents. The organisations through which they worked were political and they played upon political as well as communal grievances.

Their success suggested a corollary: that by this time there was latent mass discontent which could be exploited for personal or

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*Bangali,* & *Nayak,* 18 Sep 1918.
communal advantage by unscrupulous politicians. This gave a completely new significance to the numerical strength of the Muslim community, and forced the basic fact of its majority on the attention of the British, the bhadralok and the Bengali Muslim politicians - courtiers and co-operators alike - all of whom had been acting as though they had forgotten that majority.

There were other important lessons to be learnt from the riots. In the first place, they had shown the Muslim politicians that a resort to violence could provide a means of expressing their anger and frustration when other forms of political action had failed. More important still, it was apparent that the mere threat of such violence could force the British and the bhadralok to pay more serious attention to Muslim demands. In other words, violence had been proved an effective political mode of action. The techniques for promoting mass violence had been well noted. The Muslim agitators of the future appreciated only too well the value of the mosque as a rallying point, of the migrant groups of the bustee areas as a source for rioters, of the Marwaris as an alien and unpopular object of violence, and of the vernacular press as a medium for incitement.

Obviously violence in Calcutta was a sword which the Muslims might use against their communal opponents, but it was a double-edged sword. As the September 1918 riots had shown, the instigators of an outbreak could never be certain that they would be able to control the disorderly elements which they had set loose, and when the rabble got out of hand
no one was free from danger - certainly no one of property. The size of Calcutta; the overcrowding of its older areas, with their jumbled maze of narrow lanes and alley-ways; the mixed racial and religious composition of its population; its drifting and unstable migrant section; its large criminal class; its spectacular inequalities of wealth and opportunity; its influential yellow press - all of these factors contributed to the exceptional difficulty of maintaining order in Calcutta or of arresting disorder once it had begun.¹ And this problem of law and order was a matter of concern for politicians as well as police. After the September 1918 riots, no Bengali political leader could ever again disregard the possibility that extreme action on his part might provoke mass violence in Calcutta, with possibly disastrous consequences. This consideration, as we shall see, loomed large in the minds of the bhadralok leaders as they searched for new methods of political action in the following two years.

The Government of Bengal was also shaken by what had happened in September 1918. Clearly it had misjudged the situation. Its initial hesitation and its later reliance upon police and troops to the exclusion of assistance from Muslim leaders, almost certainly cost lives. Its actions were censured by both the Government of India and a non-official committee of enquiry,² and Ronaldshay, writing his

memoirs 30 years later, still felt the need for a lengthy apologia.\textsuperscript{1}

Some good came of the affair. Apart from a reorganisation of armed police in Calcutta in an attempt to obviate the use of troops, there was a realisation among the officials that new forces were at work in Bengali society and that the politics of the post-war years promised to be very different from those of the past.\textsuperscript{2}

\textbf{A New Course}

The events of August and September left many reputations tarnished. The willingness of most of the Muslim politicians to subordinate public duty to considerations of personal advantage and security, their preoccupation with petty intrigue and factionalism, had been plain for all to see.\textsuperscript{3}

Fazlul Huq had come through the affair better than most, but he was in disfavour with the bulk of his community because of his persistent support of the Lucknow Pact. His election to preside at the December 1918 session of the all-India Muslim League won him few friends in

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{1} Essayez, pp. 108-16.
\item\textsuperscript{2} GB, Police, 20(4-6), B15-19, Dec 1918.
\item\textsuperscript{3} Ronaldshay to Chelmsford, 9 Oct 1918: 'Since the death of Nawab Sir Khaja Salimulla Bahadur the Bengal Mahomedans have suffered greatly from lack of leadership. There is no outstanding personality amongst them who commands the confidence or the respect of the community as a whole, and the relations existing between the number of smaller men who aspire to leadership are characterised by personal jealousies and pettiness.' (GI, Home Public, Deposit 36, Apr 1919).
\end{itemize}
Bengal, and his characterisation, in his presidential address on that occasion, of talk of Hindu raj as a 'gross libel' was particularly unwelcome in the atmosphere of communal acrimony following the Calcutta riots. Huq had tarred himself with the brush of co-operation and it was a long time before this was forgiven. 'He has a strong desire to gain a reputation among all communities,' wrote the Moslem Hitaishi contemptuously in October 1919. 'So he keeps himself in the good graces of a certain section of Moslems and is ready, without the least hesitation, to sacrifice Moslem communal interests in order to win fame and position among the Hindus.'

What the Bengal Muslims were looking for late in 1918 was not a leader who would compromise but one who would put communalism before all else in the battle which was about to be fought over Muslim legislative representation. The man who supplied the need was Nawab Khan Bahadur Saiyid Nawab Ali Chaudhuri, the Eastern Bengal representative in the Imperial Legislative Council. He had much to recommend him. A Bengali and a great landholder, he stood apart from the Urdu-speaking intelligentsia of Calcutta who had been chiefly responsible for the recent troubles. At that time he had spoken out strongly against the encouragement of violence and yet had retained the appearance, at least, of non-involvement in the various intrigues.

1 Azizul Huq collection.
2 Moslem Hitaishi,* 31 Oct 1919.
3 Essayez, p. 111.
More important, at no stage in his career had he had dealings with the nationalists. He was a communalist first and last. When the non-official members of the Imperial Legislative Council drew up their memorial on reforms in 1916, he had refused to sign on the ground that Muslim interests were not explicitly protected. He had resigned the presidency of the provincial Muslim League in 1917 because of the terms of the Lucknow Pact and in December had argued the case for his community in a personal interview with Montagu and Chelmsford.

His main work lay before him. In August 1918 he was elected president of the Central National Muhammadan Association and immediately set about preparing submissions for the Franchise and Functions committees. The latter he regarded as supplying an opportunity for a public protest against the 'serfdom' imposed upon the Muslims by the bhadralok. It would be suicidal for the Muslim to agree to any scheme for the progressive realisation of self-government, the committee was told, for there was 'no common sentiment of nationality between the Moslem and the Bengalee'.

The evidence for the Franchise committee was of more practical importance, for the distribution of legislative seats was still an open question. The Government of Bengal, preparing its recommendations, had

1 Mohammadi,* 20 Oct 1916.
2 GB, Appointment, 6R-1(17), B441-455, Mar 1919.
3 Ibid, 6R-18(1-10), A10-19, Mar 1919.
come to the conclusion that no satisfactory franchise qualification could be devised which would give the Bengal Muslims a majority of voters and that, that being so, they were entitled to separate electorates. It accepted the Congress-League scheme as 'a convenient solution' of the problem of apportioning seats between the two communities and recommended a Legislative Council for Bengal of 112 members. Fifty-nine of these should be elected from territorial constituencies, with the Muslims providing 27 and the Hindus 32. The Central National Muhammadan Association strongly opposed this suggestion. The Lucknow Pact was acceptable for the rest of India, it asserted, but for Bengal it was unfair to the Muslims. Their population entitled them to at least 50 per cent of the Council seats.

The Franchise committee did not agree. It accepted the Government of Bengal's argument for communal electorates and its apportionment of 45 per cent of the territorial seats to the Muslims.

Chaudhuri had not appeared as a witness before either of the committees but he had not been idle. As an old comrade of the Dacca Nawab, he knew the value of personal intercession at the highest level, and he had been active in Delhi talking with members of the Government of India. He had insisted that the Muslim League did not truly

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1 GB, Appointment, 6R-25(1-59), A94-152, Dec 1918.
2 Evidence taken before the Reforms Committee (Franchise), vol. II, p. 393.
3 Report of the Franchise Committee, pp. 9-10 & 52.
represent the Muslim community in Bengal and that the application of the Congress-League scheme to the province would be regarded by his community as a betrayal similar to that of the reunification in 1912.

He had spoken persuasively. 'I have been much impressed by the arguments which have since been addressed to the Government of India by Saiyid Nawab Ali Chaudhuri,' wrote Sir William Vincent, the Home Member, in opposing the Franchise Committee's proposals.¹ Vincent spoke for his colleagues. They had all been impressed by Chaudhuri's plea and they insisted that the Bengal Muslims be given 44 seats instead of the 34 recommended by the Southborough committee.² The question was referred back to the Government of Bengal, with the request that it prepare a scheme to increase Muslim representation, but it stood by its earlier recommendation that 45 per cent of the territorial seats was sufficient. 'I admit the case for more Muhammadan seats is arguable,' wrote Wheeler, 'but the paucity of Muhammadan voters is a practical difficulty, as also is the comparative backwardness of the community vis-à-vis the Hindus.'³

Chaudhuri would not give up without a fight. Throughout the remainder of 1919, by personal interviews and letters he kept up his

¹ Fifth Despatch on Indian Constitutional Reforms (Franchises), p. 388.
² Ibid, p. 373.
pressure on the members of the provincial and Indian Governments.¹ Through the Central National Muhammadan Association he organised Muslim conferences in various parts of the province, at which resolutions were passed disavowing the right of the Muslim League to speak for Bengal and urging the British to honour their pledges to the Muslim community.² Forwarding a final note to the Government of Bengal on 10 January 1920, he warned of the consequences of a failure to satisfy Muslim demands:

Any decision to adhere to the recommendation of the Southborough Committee would leave the moderate element among the Muhammadans practically without any influence or following in the reformed Council and in the country. Disappointed in securing what they justly regard, and what was also confirmed by the very mature and considerate decision of the Government of India as the proper ratio of representation, the Mussalmans, if they do not maintain a spirit of aloofness, will certainly look with disfavour and rankling discontent on a constitution in which, in spite of their numerical superiority, they shall be in a decided political minority. Should the state of things be left as they are, it does not require much imagination to conceive their eventual capture by the extremists to wreck the constitution.³

Chaudhuri's argument here is of great significance. He did not approach the Government as a courtier, with a humble petition for concessions in recognition of his community's loyalty. Nor did he take a stand with the bhadralok nationalists in demanding India's just

¹ GI, Reforms Office, Bundle 1920 Jan-May B(2), B244-245, Jan 1920. GB, Appointment, 6R-8(1-3), A166-168B, Feb 1920.
³ GB, Appointment, 6R-8(1-3), A166-168B, Feb 1920.
constitutional deserts. He simply drew the Government's attention to the fact that the Muslims were in a majority in Bengal and demanded the constitutional recognition of that majority. As a sanction, he added the comment that a failure to satisfy this demand would endanger political order. 'Should the state of things be left as they are, it does not require much imagination to conceive their eventual capture by the extremists to wreck the constitution.'

The lessons of the September 1918 riots had obviously not been lost on Chaudhuri, and he was now pointing the way for the Muslim community to a new course of action: the use in politics of its numerical strength. He was pointing in the right direction, for it was by following this course throughout the decade which was just opening that the Bengal Muslims were able to wrest power from the bhadralok.

The immediate outcome of Chaudhuri's note of 10 January 1920 was unsatisfactory for the Muslims, for the British disregarded his admonition. The total number of members in the new Council was raised to 140, with 85 territorial seats, but the Muslim percentage was kept at 45. They were to have only 39 seats to the Hindus' 46. Chaudhuri was disappointed but he recognised that there had been worthwhile gains. 'The treatment accorded to the Mussalmans by the British government had not been quite satisfactory indeed,' he wrote, 'but it has at any rate saved us from being swamped by more powerful

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interests. Separate communal electorates, which had seemed in jeopardy in Bengal following Montagu's strictures in 1918, had been preserved, and the Muslims had secured five seats more than a strict adherence to the Lucknow Pact would have given them. This meant a gross reduction of ten in the voting power of the Hindus; to Muslim minds an admirable gain.

The Bhadralok's Fears

For those who valued friendly intercourse and political co-operation between Hindus and Muslims, the years of the constitutional reforms debate in Bengal - 1915 to 1920 - had given little cause for pleasure. Banerjea's hopes of July 1915 for a united campaign against the British looked sad when compared with the acerbity which characterised communal utterances in 1919 and 1920. The object of Banerjea and his fellow Moderates had been to restore the bhadralok's confidence in the efficacy of liberal, constitutional methods of political action. The whole trend of Muslim politics in Bengal from 1917 had been in the opposite direction. The Muslim community had rejected Huq and the other men of compromise who had subscribed to the Lucknow Pact, and taken as its leader an unblushing communalist, who regarded the nationalists - Muslims or Hindus - as the enemies of Indian Islam. When thwarted in their demands for a larger share of constitutional

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1 Views on Present Political Situation in India, p. 12.
concessions, the Muslims had resorted to violence in Calcutta, and from that time onwards had placed an increasingly aggressive emphasis on their numerical majority.

Nothing could have been better calculated to alarm the bhadralok, and edge was given to their fears by their distrust of the British. How could the bhadralok be sure that the British would not encourage this new spirit of Muslim hostility, or themselves use the Muslim population figures for some nefarious purpose? The British officials obviously had no time for the bhadralok leaders, while they always seemed ready to spare a friendly moment for Chaudhuri and his kind. For the bhadralok it was a bad sign that certain provisions of both the Lucknow Pact and the Montagu-Chelmsford report had been disregarded by the Government in order to strengthen the position of the Bengal Muslims. This was no encouragement to the bhadralok's faith in the value of liberal constitutionalism.
CHAPTER V

THE RELUCTANT DEMOCRATS

The Years of Uncertainty

In making their demands for reforms in 1915, the Bengal Moderates were not motivated simply by a desire to further the constitutional ideal. They were desperately concerned to save themselves. Their political influence had been seriously weakened by their difficulties in the Morley-Minto councils and by the general trend of Government policy in 1914 and early 1915. Hard-pressed by the Extremists, they pinned their hopes of repairing their political position upon a satisfactory British response to their demands. If the British immediately made the desired declaration regarding self-government, the Moderates would be able to point to this as proof of their ability to influence the Government. If the British implemented reforms along the lines proposed by the Moderates, the latter would be able to assert a proprietary title to the new constitution – they would be able to speak with assurance of the reforms as 'their reforms'.

As we have seen, the declaration was not made with any despatch, nor was the new constitution – with its built-in safeguards for the officials, the European non-officials and the Muslims – what the Moderates had wanted. The very length of the reforms discussions
worked against the Moderates, and, indeed, against the security of the bhadralok as a whole. Its consequence was the inordinate extension of the period of flux and uncertainty in political life. Instead of being a brief transitional stage between one political order and another, the interregnum was so long as to become almost a new order in itself.

In this lengthy interlude, the balance of political relationships was upset, and new relationships developed, owing their form primarily to the existing state of uncertainty and not to the future order as would have been the case had the period of reconstruction been brief. That swift and direct progress from one political order to the next, which would have kept intact the structure of the old political society and enabled the Moderates to rule a straight line from their first intentions to their final achievement, was replaced by five years of confused movement and counter-movement in which the clarity of original intentions was blurred. In this chapter we shall trace the development of bhadralok politics through these five uncertain years – 1916 to 1920.

The Return of the Extremists

For the nationalists as for their opponents, the prospect of reforms brought the need for reappraisal and action. The future of political India was in the making. One had either to take part or stand back and be content to see others shape the nation's destiny. If one did stand back, one had to accept the fact that those who had a hand in the construction would almost certainly attempt to secure for themselves a favoured position.
The Extremists had been content to remain outside the arena of the Morley-Minto councils and bespatter the participants with the mud of their invective. Their studied refusal to become involved constituted their political style and it had served them well while that political order lasted. But the constitutional reconstruction brought it to an end. All groups, whether actors or 'mud slingers', had then to search for a new style which would give them a position in the future order. In doing this, they were faced with difficulties, for they had to look in three directions at once: to their own immediate past; to the reforms which were being evolved; and to their position in the political society of the future.

In all three ways, paradoxically, the Extremists had the greatest problem. Looking to the past, they had in some way to maintain a semblance of consistency. Certainly in the excitement accompanying the first news of reforms there was an excellent opportunity to slough off the old skin of non-participation, but there was then the danger that one would be unrecognisable in one's new colours. Worst of all, one might be taken for a Moderate, which might be disastrous for one's political future. To avoid this, the Extremists had to give a convincing explanation of any change which they might make and demonstrate by their attitude to the reforms that they were not simply following the Moderates' lead. They explained that they were being forced to intervene on behalf of the mass of their countrymen to
prevent the Moderates from twisting the reforms to suit their personal
and class ends.

Home Rule or self-government notwithstanding, the real object
of Surendra Nath and his followers is to increase the power
and prestige of the English-educated community and to secure
for them a larger share in the public service (the Nayak told
its readers on 11 July 1917). What we want, however, is to
place the handful of educated Babus in the background and to
uplift the inarticulate masses whose interests are never cared
for by our so-called leaders. These latter give displays of
oratory in the halls of the Indian Association and the British
Indian Association with the object, not of ameliorating the
miseries of the people at large, but to advance their own
self-interests.

To demonstrate that they had not become camp-followers of the
Moderates and in order to remain true to their past, the Extremists
aimed their constitutional demands high. They insisted (and there is
no reason to doubt their sincerity in this) that the British would
give nothing worthwhile unless they were pushed hard. 'No alien
conquering nation has ever voluntarily granted, nor can ever grant,
Home Rule or responsible government to a conquered and subject people.
It is a thing not to be given by way of charity,' declared the Nayak.¹

The Extremists asserted that, under the pretence of constitutional
reform, the British would attempt to buttress their rule in India by
making concessions to reactionary groups - such as the landholders,
the Muslims and the Moderates - and that the nation at large would be
left to suffer at the hands of these strengthened vested interests.

¹Nayak,* 23 Nov 1917.
It was their self-imposed duty to ensure that the Indian people were not sold out to the foreigner by a handful of selfish opportunists. 1

Where the Extremists were weak, the Moderates were strong: their consistency in advocating reforms could not be questioned. They had their problems nonetheless. Knowing full well that whatever reform schemes they advanced would almost certainly be whittled away by the British, they had, as a matter of tactics, to demand more than they expected to receive and declare this to be an 'irreducible minimum'. There was the consequent risk that unreal expectations would be aroused, in view of which the final achievement would appear disappointing. A tactical withdrawal is always too close to a retreat for comfort.

The Moderates had to succeed and succeed gloriously. Similarly they had to prevent rival groups from stealing a share of the credit for whatever was achieved and yet they were obliged to encourage those same groups to associate themselves with their reform proposals in an effort to convince the British that these were national demands. This was what prompted them to readmit the Extremists to the Congress of 1916 and to enter upon the series of negotiations with the Muslims which produced the Lucknow Pact. It is significant that the Moderates were at pains to stress that they were still in control of the reform movement, having merely enlisted the Extremists and the Muslims as recruits. Commenting on the 1916 Congress session, Banerjea wrote in

The Bengalee: 'All are now gathered together under the banner of self-government, which they are resolved to achieve by and through the aid of all constitutional means at their disposal. The constitutional party derives added strength by this union.'

The New Men

The Moderates had to face a challenge from another quarter: from the new men who were entering politics. As at the time of the anti-partition campaign ten years before, so now in the activity of the constitutional reconstruction there were opportunities for newcomers to break into political life in Bengal. With the old political order in dissolution, the sources of influence and power on which its leaders had depended - their reputation as anti-partition agitators; their control of local bodies, public organisations and political associations; their membership of the legislative councils - were, for a time at least, of reduced importance. It became possible for a man to cut a figure simply by adopting a striking attitude towards the reforms, provided, of course, that he had social standing.

The outstanding example was the rapid rise to prominence in 1917 of Chitta Ranjan Das. Socially, Das was everything a member of the bhadralok should be. His family were Brahmos (originally Vaidyas) from Dacca District. His father and uncle were Calcutta High Court

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1 Bengalee,* 5 Jan 1917.
vakils and he had been educated at Presidency College, where he had been an active member of the Students' Association in the exciting days following Surendranath Banerjea's dismissal from the I.C.S. After graduation, he had himself been sent to England by his family as a candidate for the I.C.S. but, having failed, he had turned to the Bar. As in so many similar cases, his father was impoverished by the financial effort required to send him to England and, for ten years after his return to the overcrowded legal profession of Calcutta, Chitta Ranjan was unable to build up a practice large enough to repair the family fortunes.

All was changed by his part in the political trials of 1907-8. His successful defence of Aurobindo Ghose, Bepin Chandra Pal and other leading nationalists brought him fame and riches. In a few years he had become the city's leading barrister, enjoying the luxury of frequent trips to Europe in the legal vacation and renowned in Calcutta society for his hospitality and his Bengali poetry.

He took no direct part in politics until the talk of constitutional reforms caught his interest. In the discussions at the influential Calcutta Bar Library he emerged as a leader of radical opinion,¹ and, as a result, was asked to preside at the Bengal Provincial Conference to be held in April 1917 in his home suburb of Bhowanipur. It was ironical, but indicative of the problems faced by the established

¹ E.S. Montagu: An Indian Diary, pp. 66-7.
leadership, that it was Surendranath Banerjea who formally proposed that he should take the chair. His speech was a huge success, winning the acclaim of the Bengali press as a turning point in provincial politics: 'the message of a new life for Bengalis, a call to patriotic service, an appeal for the development of education in the interests of the national welfare.'

Das had established an immediate claim to be included in the first rank of Bengali politicians. When, three months later, a Town Hall meeting nominated a deputation of six to carry its protest to the Government against the internment of Annie Besant, Das was one of those named. The composition of this deputation is interesting, for it included all the chief contenders for provincial leadership: the two old rivals of political journalism, Surendranath Banerjea of the Bengalee and Motilal Ghose of the Amrita Bazar Patrika; Sir Rashbehari Ghose, one of the great figures of the National Education movement; and a trio of younger men, all lawyers, Byomkes Chakravarti, Fazlul Huq and C.R. Das.

The rivalry among these men was soon revealed. On 29 August the Provincial Congress Committee met to choose a president for the all-India Congress session to be held in Calcutta in December. With

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2 Dainik Basumati,* 23 Apr 1917.
3 Nation in Making, pp. 241-5.
Banerjea's backing, a Moderate landholder, Provas Chandra Mitra, proposed an Oudh taluqdar, the Raja of Mahmudabad, but Chakravarti nominated Mrs Besant and this was seconded by Das. Mahmudabad was chosen by 34 votes to 30. The Congress Reception Committee met the following evening to ratify this decision and both parties attempted to pack the meeting with their supporters. It was immediately apparent to Banerjea that his group was hopelessly outnumbered; and, after a brief angry exchange over the accuracy of the minutes of the previous night's meeting, he and his supporters left the hall to shouts of 'Get Out'. The chairman, Baikunthanath Sen, went with them but this did not deter those who remained from proceeding to the election of Mrs Besant as Congress president. 1 The dispute was not resolved until nearly two months later when a compromise was patched up through outside intervention 2 and, in the meantime, the rift in the Bengal Congress had been opened so wide as never again to be bridged.

Expressing its concern at this dissension, the Dainik Bharat Mitra put its finger firmly on the cause: the constitutional reconstruction.

The political situation in India is just now very delicate. So long as Government was following the policy of repression, the public leaders were of one opinion. But simultaneously with Mr Montagu's announcement a strange change has come over them. They have become divided into parties. They do not seem to realise that this is extremely prejudicial to India's welfare. 3

2 Amrita Bazar Patrika,* 6 Oct 1917.
3 Dainik Bharat Mitra,* 6 Sep 1917.
Certainly Banerjea and his fellow Moderates realised that it was prejudicial to their reform plans, as well as endangering their personal leadership.

If India is to obtain her political emancipation wrote the Bengalee on 4 September 1917, it must be by the cultivation of a spirit of discipline, by veneration for great leaders, through the strict observance of constitutional usages, and the avoidance of all rowdyism. Any departure from these principles would supply the enemies of Indian aspirations with a powerful weapon for denouncing their claims to self-government.

But things had gone too far to be set right by Banerjea's lecturing. Already the chief protagonists for political power were declaring their positions on reforms, and Banerjea alone stood by the Lucknow Pact. Fazlul Huq, caught awkwardly in the cleft stick of communalism and nationalism, hesitated between the Congress-League scheme modified to give increased representation to the Bengal Muslims, and a proposal for an Indian federation with provincial Cabinet Government. Das, Motilal Ghose and Chakravarti all demanded full responsible Government in the provinces. Their stand won the loudest applause. It was clear and unqualified. Unlike Banerjea, they had nothing to lose if they failed to secure their demands. Indeed, their almost certain failure

1 E.S. Montagu: An Indian Diary, p. 92.
2 Ibid, p. 91.
3 Ibid, p. 84.
was to their advantage, for the prevailing mood was one of mistrust of British intentions. '... nobody believes that we are in earnest,' a British newspaper correspondent in Calcutta told Montagu; 'nobody believes that we will do anything.'

The Moderates were alarmed at the possible effects of this spirit of scepticism on the reforms negotiations and they appealed to the British to act quickly and generously to dispel it. 'If we may be permitted to say so, it has been the weakness of Indian administrators in the past to handicap all great experiments with that dead-weight of hesitation and even of mistrust which has interfered with their complete success,' wrote the Indian Association on 4 December 1917 in its address to Montagu and Chelmsford. 'We pray that the same mistake may not be repeated'.

The Assault on the Indian Association

It was obvious that the Moderates had lost the initiative to the Extremists. They retained one major advantage. They had control of the Indian Association and, through it, of the Provincial Congress Committee. It was eloquent testimony to the power which Banerjea had once wielded in Bengal nationalist politics, that the Indian Association had the local Congress organisation in its pocket. It enjoyed the

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1 E.S. Montagu: An Indian Diary, p. 66.
2 IA, Annual Report, 1917.
right to nominate the majority of the members of the Provincial Congress Committee¹ and to fill casual vacancies;² it was customarily asked by District reception committees to suggest presidents for the annual Provincial Conferences;³ and it could send as many delegates as it wished to the all-India Congress sessions. In 1914 there had even been a resolution passed at the Provincial Conference recommending that the Provincial Congress Committee become a sub-committee of the Indian Association.⁴ Certainly there was little for a separate Provincial Congress Committee to do. The few District Associations which existed were inactive⁵ and, apart from the agenda for the Provincial Conference, all matters of importance were decided at the Indian Association.⁶

The Besant/Mahmudabad election dispute, however, had shown how valuable control of the Provincial Congress Committee could be in a time of political crisis. On that occasion, the Extremists obviously commanded the larger following, but, had Mahmudabad's election not required ratification by the Reception Committee, they would have been

¹ IA, Committee meeting proceedings, 1 Feb 1919.
⁴ IA, Annual Report, 1914.
⁵ Herald,* 10 Apr 1914.
⁶ IA, Committee meeting proceedings, passim.
helpless. Their dissatisfaction with this state of affairs was reflected in the Pravasi in September 1917: 'This Congress machinery, which is in the hands of Babu Surendra Nath Banerji and his party, has been lying unused for a long time and got rusted. They will neither use it nor admit their incapacity to use it and retire from the political field.'

The lack of an organisation through which to work was one of the main problems facing the Extremists. Earlier in the year they had, with some enthusiasm, taken up Annie Besant's idea of a Home Rule League and under Chakravarti's control it had provided a useful platform. The locus of power, however, was elsewhere, in the established political organisations, and, after the election dispute, it became apparent to the Extremists that they had to gain control of these.

Their answer was an attempt to capture the Indian Association executive. Looking ahead to the election of office-bearers at the annual general meeting to be held on 31 January 1918, they put forward the names of 79 men for admission to the Association, but Banerjea and his supporters replied by nominating 62 new members of their own, and, at a committee meeting on 16 January, these 62 were accepted while the others were rejected.

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1 Pravasi,* Sep-Oct 1917.
3 IA, Committee meeting proceedings, 4 & 16 Jan 1918.
Despite this reverse, the Extremists went ahead with their plan. The Indian Association hall was packed for the annual general meeting, with every notable Bengali nationalist present for this trial of strength. Fighting on his home ground, Banerjea was invincible. His nominee for president was Baikunthanath Sen, while Das put forward Byomkes Chakravarti. Sen received 86 votes to Chakravarti's 23. The tale was the same right down the line. Das and Chakravarti both failed in their bids for the five positions of vice-president and Fazlul Huq was outvoted in his effort to enter the committee. Banerjea, with a final gesture of magnanimity, personally nominated Das and Chakravarti for the committee, and they then had to face the humiliation of gaining the bare minimum of votes necessary to secure their election.¹

The Montagu-Chelmsford Report

The victory was Banerjea's but it was to be one of his last. The tide of public opinion was running against him and his policy of moderation. Das and his fellow Extremists had made their mark as they toured Bengal in the preceding months expounding their gospel of 'no compromise'.² Although so thoroughly drubbed at the Indian Association in January, they had gained control of the Provincial Congress Committee by the middle of 1918³ and on 6 June they issued a circular in its

¹ IA, General meeting proceedings, 31 Jan 1918.
² NP, Oct-Dec 1917.
³ The author has been unable to find evidence of how this was achieved.
name calling for general opposition to the Montagu-Chelmsford proposals, should these fall short of their demands. Commenting in the Bengalee on this circular, Banerjea shed a tear over his lost influence:

The old leaders are the men of yesterday; and they of course should have no voice or influence over the deliberations of the New India which they have helped to build up. For we are always wiser than our fathers; and to acknowledge our indebtedness to them is to belittle our own importance, which must always be a prime consideration. There is only one little risk which their policy involves; and they may as well be reminded of it early, viz., that they may be paid back in their own coin, and with compound interest, by those who come after them.2

The Moderates' position was desperate. The reform proposals, on which they had staked their future, were about to be published and, at this juncture, they had lost control of Congress to a group which was sworn to reject any moderate scheme. Their only possible course of action - and it was tantamount to an admission of defeat - was to form a new political organisation through which they could fight for the reforms. Early in June the National Liberal League was founded in Calcutta for this purpose, with Banerjea as its first president.3

The Extremists poured scorn on this new development. After this, they asked, who could doubt that the Moderates were prepared to pick up any crumb that fell from the British table?4 By the end of June,

1 Bengalee,* 6 Jun 1918.
2 Ibid.
4 Amrita Bazar Patrika,* 19 Jun 1918.
feeling between the two parties had become bitter, and personal insults were being freely bandied back and forth.¹ No hope was left of the Montagu-Chelmsford report being considered on its merits. It was published on 8 July, to receive the plaudits of the Moderates and to be rejected out of hand by the Extremists.² Both parties went to defend their position at the special session of the Provincial Conference on 14 July, but the Moderates got no hearing and a series of resolutions were passed condemning the Montagu-Chelmsford scheme.³

The Extremists' argument was straightforward. They said that the proposed reforms were hedged about with so many provisions to protect the bureaucracy, British commerce and 'loyal' Indian groups, that the nationalists would be merely consenting to their own ensnarement should they accept them. The British would listen to no reasoned protest, hence the only hope of gaining anything worthwhile was to force their hand by rejecting the whole scheme. 'The British Government have not proposed to introduce the reforms of their own accord,' observed the Millat on 24 July. 'You asked for them and they have opened the door a little in response to your knocking. So the more you agitate for them the larger number of concessions will you get.'

¹ E.g. see Bangali,* 26 Jun 1918.
³ IA, Committee meeting proceedings, 12 Jul 1918. Bangali,* 16 Jul 1918.
The Rowlatt Act and Amritsar

Again the Moderates were in trouble. They too were dissatisfied with what was proposed, but they were desperately afraid that nationalist opposition would play into the hands of the British 'diehards', enabling them to block the reforms. A difficult situation was made impossible for them by the publication of the Sedition Committee's report at the end of July. This committee had been set up, under the chairmanship of Justice S.A.T. Rowlatt, by the Government of India in December 1917 to report on the extent of revolutionary conspiracy in India and to suggest remedial measures. It recommended that the Government arm itself with permanent legislation to enable it, whenever it felt the need, to take extraordinary power to deal summarily with seditious offenders. This brought a storm of protest from all political groups in India. The Moderates pointed out reproachfully that nothing could have been better calculated to lend colour to the Extremists' assertion that within the Jekyll of the reforms lurked the old Hyde of repression.

A special session of Congress had been called for 29 August at Bombay to consider the Montagu-Chelmsford report but the Moderates decided not to attend, knowing that they would be in a hopeless minority. Instead they would hold an all-India conference of their

2 NP, Aug 1918.
own to support the reforms. This also met at Bombay on 1 November. The separate meetings emphasised the division between the two parties. The Indian Association appealed to the Congress to open negotiations for a reconciliation, but the only reply it received was a curt note from the local secretary informing it that its representation on the Provincial Congress Committee had been reduced from 40 to 15.

When the Franchise and Subjects Committees were formed at the end of 1918, the leading Moderates were asked to serve as members, but their compliance was proclaimed by Extremists to be a further proof of their readiness to lackey for the British. In January 1919 Montagu appointed S.P. Sinha as Under-Secretary of State for India with a seat in the House of Lords. This gesture of goodwill was well received in India, but again the effect was ruined. A fortnight later the Government of India introduced two Bills to the Imperial Legislative Council to implement the Rowlatt Committee's recommendations, and, against the vote of every Indian non-official member, they were forced through. The Moderates were appalled by this slap in the face to

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2 IA, Committee meeting proceedings, 30 Dec 1918.
3 Ibid, 1 Feb 1919.
4 NP, Dec 1918.
5 NP, 18 & 25 Jan 1919.
Indian opinion. '... there will be agitation, intense, bitter, widespread, accentuated by deep discontent,' lamented Banerjea. 'Is this a prospect which the Government contemplates with unconcern?'

The all-India Congress Committee called for hartals in protest against the Acts, and, as a result, there was rioting in a number of north Indian cities in the first and second weeks of April. In Amritsar in the Punjab five Europeans were murdered by a mob on the 10th and the city was placed under the military. On the 13th a prohibited meeting held in a walled square, the Jallianwala Bagh, was fired on without warning by British troops and there were heavy casualties. Two days later martial law was proclaimed in Amritsar and neighbouring cities, under which floggings and other humiliations were imposed upon the Indians as reprisals for the loss of British lives.

With the news of this brutality, a wave of anger swept over the country. '... what has happened can never be forgotten or forgiven,' wrote C.F. Andrews with emotion to his friend, Rabindranath Tagore. 'I find that every Indian I meet is saying "Take away your d-d Reforms: we dont want them & we wont have them. Answer us this, are we to be treated as serfs, with no human rights at all?"'

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1 Bengalee,* 4 Feb 1919.
2 Report of the Commissioners appointed by the Punjab Sub-committee of the Indian National Congress.
3 1 May 1919, Andrews MSS.
As Andrews was writing, the Government of India Bill was being prepared in London for its introduction to Parliament. At long last the Moderates were to have their constitutional reforms but there was to be no triumph. Instead of the jubilation they had expected, there was anger and distrust. They were abused not acclaimed for their efforts. They had lost control of Congress and there seemed no hope of their dominating the new political order.

The Extremists' Dilemma

On 23 December 1919 the royal assent was given to the Government of India Bill. The Extremist party, although triumphantly masters of the National Congress and the darlings of public opinion, were faced with a problem. Should they persist in their opposition to the reforms or should they accept them as a fait accompli and use their power to dominate the new institutions? Certainly their reputation in the preceding two years had been built upon their steadfast rejection of all British proposals and their condemnation of those Indians who were prepared to co-operate, but they could contend, with some degree of truth, that this had been a stratagem designed to force the British to yield more power. That game was played out (so the argument ran) and the only result of a continued refusal to participate in constitutional politics would be the loss of the field to 'a tribe of timid, little-souled people who will think of themselves first and of
their country last or not at all. Even under the Morley-Minto constitution, the Extremists had had qualms about leaving the legislative councils to the Moderates and the danger seemed greater now that some of the functions of the provincial Governments were to be transferred to Indian ministers.

On the other hand, the Extremists asked, was there any reason to believe that participation in the new councils would be more profitable than it had been in the old? No matter what concessions had been made to Indian demands, the British bureaucracy was still in command and (the Extremists held) Amritsar had shown that it was as reactionary as ever. 'If the fountain remains as it is,' wrote Motilal Ghose, 'the addition of a few more conduits will not make the water any more drinkable than it was.' What was needed was a change of heart, and this, the Extremists maintained, had not happened. The racial arrogance, which had characterised British Indian policy in the past, had been in evidence throughout the reforms discussions. Even the basic assumption upon which the Montagu-Chelmsford scheme rested: that Indians had yet to learn the art of self-government - and its corollary: that they should be given constitutional protection against their ignorance - were considered offensive.

3. Amrita Bazar Patrika,* 1 Dec 1919.
To accept the reforms, even under protest, would be to acquiesce in this judgment of Indian inferiority and this would injure the growth of national self-confidence. Many of the Extremists believed that it was self-confidence, above all else, that India needed. As a subject people, Indians had lost faith in their ability to act independently. For nearly two centuries they had been taught to distrust their own judgment and to accept without demur the decrees of a paternalistic foreign regime. To save their soul they had to repudiate the right of others to think for them. They had to act for themselves.

... what makes the difference between the Englishman and you? Swami Vivekananda has asked his countrymen in 1897. The difference is here, that the Englishman believes in himself, and you do not. He believes in his being an Englishman, and he can do anything. You have been told and taught that you can do nothing, and nonentities you are becoming every day. What we want is strength, so believe in yourselves. What we want is muscles of iron and nerves of steel. We have wept long enough. No more weeping, but stand on your feet and be men.1

Vivekananda had a profound influence upon the development of twentieth-century Indian political and social thought, and his gospel of national self-assertion found a particularly rich soil in his native Bengal, where the ground had been prepared by the novels of Bankim Chandra Chatterjea. His teachings were given political application by Aurobindo Ghose, Bepin Chandra Pal and Rabindranath Tagore, who called upon their compatriots to prove their manhood by

1 Vivekananda: Collected Works, p. 224.
defying British power. This was the philosophy which inspired the swadeshi and national education movements, and the terrorists at the time of partition, and it was the underlying reason for the Extremists' rejection of the Morley-Minto reforms. They saw that merely to accept institutions provided by the British and work them as they instructed, would do nothing to advance India's self-reliance. This was just a new form of the old dependence. To prove their independence, to themselves as much as to the British, Indians had to reject what was proffered. They had to have the courage to cut their leading-strings.  

The question was: what then? In the Morley-Minto period some individuals had avoided this problem by turning away from politics — to religion like Aurobindo Ghose or to literature like Rabindranath Tagore — and for the Extremist party as a whole no satisfactory answer had been found. The years between 1909 and 1915, the years of negative opposition, had been full of frustration. Again in 1920 they had the chance to reject a British constitution and again they had to ask: what then? This time more depended upon their answer for now they had political power, with all its opportunities and responsibilities. In 1909 they had been outside the Congress, but in 1920 they had control of the organisation and commanded a large following. If they did not

participate in the new councils, they had to formulate a satisfactory programme of political action of their own.

It was a measure of their uncertainty when faced with this difficult decision, that they vacillated for a year before finally rejecting the Montagu-Chelmsford constitution. The December 1919 Congress at Amritsar resolved to work the reforms, but this decision was reversed by a narrow majority at a special session in Calcutta nine months later, and the plenary meeting at Nagpur in December 1920 voted overwhelmingly for withdrawal from all co-operation with the British. Between Amritsar and Calcutta, Calcutta and Nagpur, there were some remarkable changes of mind. At Amritsar the Bengal contingent, led by Das, Chakravarti and B.C. Pal, voted against the reforms; at Calcutta they voted for them; at Nagpur they were all for non-co-operation. This period of twelve months in which the bhadralok leaders wavered uncertainly between the alternatives of co-operation and non-co-operation with the British, was one of the great crises in the modern political history of the province, for the magnitude of the issues involved forced the bhadralok, for the first time, to examine the values underlying their politics.

Gandhi

To understand the nature of the bhadralok's dilemma, it is necessary to understand the person and policy of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. It was Gandhi who commanded the majority at Amritsar and Calcutta,
where the bhadralok leaders voted with the minority, and it was to Gandhi that they capitulated at Nagpur.

Gandhi, a Gujerati lawyer who had won a great reputation in South Africa with his work for Indian rights, had emerged in the first rank of nationalist leaders after a spectacular success in leading a protest movement against the indigo planters of Bihar in 1918. It was at his instigation that the hartals of April 1919 in protest against the Rowlatt Acts had been organised. The nationwide response to his appeal was testimony to his extraordinary influence, but the violence which resulted, shocked him deeply. He was convinced that without greater self-discipline India could not challenge the British, and, for this reason, he demanded that the Congress accept the Montagu-Chelmsford constitution. To those, like the Bengalis, who argued that the 1919 Congress session at Amritsar should reiterate the earlier uncompromising resolutions on the reforms, he replied that this would be irresponsible if the Congress had nothing constructive to offer in their place.¹

Two incidents in January 1920 forced him to think again: the hero's welcome accorded on his arrival in Britain to General Dyer, the officer responsible for the Amritsar tragedy, and the rejection by the British Government of Indian Muslim protests over the Turkish peace terms. Gandhi was convinced that, after these demonstrations of British disregard for their feelings, it would be degrading for Indians to maintain

¹ NP, Dec 1919–Jan 1920.
their contact with British Imperialism. He therefore set out to formulate a programme of non-co-operation which Congress could offer to the nation in place of the reforms.

Firstly, support for the institutions of the British Indian Government - offices, councils, courts, colleges and schools - should be withdrawn and Congressmen should devote themselves to the construction of national institutions in their place: 'a government of one's own within the dead shell of the foreign government'. Resistance - non-violent and symbolic - might be offered to individual acts of British oppression, but the really important work was in national reconstruction.

For the nation as for the individual, Gandhi taught, salvation could be gained only by internal reformation. Society had to be rid of its evils, especially those of dissension and human exploitation. As a first step, he called for a reconciliation between religious communities and he took up the Khilafat issue as a means of cementing Hindu-Muslim unity. 'We both have now an opportunity of a life-time,' he wrote. 'The Khilafat question will not recur for another hundred years. If the Hindus wish to cultivate eternal friendship with the Mussalmans, they must perish with them in the attempt to vindicate the honour of Islam.' He also demanded that caste-barriers be broken.

1 The development of Gandhi's ideas in this period may be followed through his articles in Young India, 1919-1922.
2 C.F. Andrews to Rathindranath Tagore, 6 Sep 1920, Andrews MSS.
3 M.K. Gandhi: Communal Unity, pp. 5-6.
down and that the untouchables be accepted into the body of Hinduism. Congressmen of all castes should work with the harijans (the children of God, as Gandhi called them) to help them rise from their degradation.

Similarly there had to be an end to economic oppression. Gandhi was adamant that self-government for India would be a travesty if the mass of the people were not freed from the exploitation of capitalists, landholders and moneylenders. The nationalist movement had to be the people's movement, to benefit the mass of the people. 'I don't want Swaraj at the cost of the depressed classes or of any other classes for that matter,' he wrote. He therefore insisted that Congress demonstrate its concern for the welfare of the Indian poor by adopting a programme of economic rehabilitation. Congressmen should leave their urban professions and go into the villages to start cottage industries. The local manufacture of cotton cloth should be revived. The spinning wheel should become the symbol of India's new life and the wearing of khadi a gesture of the nation's rejection of imperialism.

The Bhadralok Reaction

Apart from having a rare ability to sway great masses of people, Gandhi was an astute politician, and throughout 1920 he was gathering about him an influential group of personal adherents on whose support he could rely when he put his programme of non-co-operation before

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Congress. Despite this there remained powerful sections who were opposed to the adoption of the scheme and who were determined not to acquiesce in his domination of the nationalist movement.

Foremost amongst these were the bhadralok leaders. One obvious reason for their opposition was that they saw Gandhi as a rival. Das certainly aspired to national leadership and Chakravarti may have had a similar ambition. Personal jealousy aside, however, there was reason for them to be apprehensive, for Gandhi made it clear that there would be no room for dissenters in any political organisation which he commanded. '... so long as you choose to keep me as your leader,' he told a meeting of Muslims in 1920, 'you must accept my conditions, you must accept dictatorship and the discipline of martial law.'

This was something new to Indian nationalism. Formerly the great Congress leaders - Noaroji, Mehta, Banerjea, Gokhale, Lajpat Rai, Tilak - had derived their power from one province and they had worked in alliance with leaders from other provinces, on the understanding that there should be a minimum of mutual interference in regional activities. Gandhi relied far less upon the support of any one area and his ambition was to subordinate regional differences to his national plan.

2 Ibid, p. 53.
This was too much for the bhadralok. As had often been observed with regret by nationalists from other provinces, the bhadralok were parochial and exclusive in their political loyalties.\(^1\) To submit to dictation from outside, such as Gandhi sought to impose, came very hard to them. Rationalising their emotional reaction, Bepin Chandra Pal wrote: 'Blind reverence for Gandhiji's leadership would kill people's freedom of thought and would paralyse by the deadweight of unreasoning reverence their individual conscience.'\(^2\)

There was also a personal element. As a Gujerati bania, Gandhi was unacceptable to the bhadralok. Mirad Chaudhuri has pointed out that we must take account of 'the class-conscious Bengali gentleman's deep-seated aversion to a proletarian, which Gandhi was, if not by birth, at all events by theory and adoption.'\(^3\)

The bhadralok also despised his philosophy of non-violence and asceticism. Coming from the trading-castes of western India, Gandhi had been strongly influenced by the quietist doctrines of vaisnavism and it was one of the secrets of his mass appeal that he customarily used popular vaisnavite images in his speeches. The bhadralok traditionally looked down upon the 'beggarly and cringing' vaisnavite.

\(^1\) E.g. Dinshaw Wacha to Dadabhai Naoroji, 25 Jan 1907, Wacha letters.
for they were Saktas, worshippers of the principle of strength in the goddess Durga. The neo-Hinduism of Bankim Chandra Chatterjea and Swami Vivekananda, by which they had been so strongly influenced, had also emphasised the Brahmanic virtues of strength and the avoidance of extremes. Self-assertion, not self-abasement as Gandhi preached, was the doctrine of the bhadralok, and they refused to accept his philosophy of politics. 'This does not remove the inherited slave-mentality which is the root of all our degradations and miseries,' wrote Pal.

Passive-resistance was a powerful means of coercion when used by a suppressed majority, but the bhadralok were a dominant minority, demanding a form of political action which enabled them to exert themselves against their adversaries, the British, and yet retain their hold on political life. These requirements were satisfied by legislative politics and terrorism, both of which provided opportunities to strike at the British and yet involved relatively small numbers. It was in these activities that the bhadralok were accustomed to engage. Thus Gandhi's demand for a boycott of the legislative councils and his insistence upon non-violence threatened their political way of life.

3 I am indebted to Dr Dietmar Rothermund, Marburg University, for this distinction between dominant minorities and suppressed majorities.
It also threatened their political ideal. Gandhi was arguing that Congressmen should withdraw from the legislative councils and the other institutions of British Indian government because those institutions were alien and imposed. To the bhadralok, such an argument was nonsense. In the past when they had boycotted the legislative councils, it was not because the councils were foreign—because they were based on the English parliamentary model instead of an indigenous Indian model—but because they did not conform closely enough to the English model, their powers being so severely limited. The bhadralok wanted parliamentary self-government in Bengal, and terrorism was their protest against the British refusal to recognise the intensity of their desire or to admit their capacity for such a form of government.

This reveals the cultural gulf dividing Gandhi from the bhadralok: their political methods were European in inspiration, his were Indian. The bhadralok had evolved a synthetic culture (their politics being a part of it) which owed a great deal to Europe and which had taken them out of the main stream of Indian intellectual development.¹ For this reason, they were shocked and offended when Gandhi insisted that India could regain its strength only if Anglican cultural excrescences were cut away. A return to simplicity of living to free the individual from the tyranny of material possessions; the renunciation of all non-

essentials; a total commitment to the struggle against foreign
domination - these were Gandhi's demands. To the bhadralok, this was
philistinism. They were passionately proud of the richness of their
culture and were unconvinced that they should strip their life bare
in this way. Andrews, whose work with Rabindranath Tagore at
Santiniketan had given him a deep sympathy for bhadralok values,
described their reaction. Writing to Tagore in January 1921 of the
joys of painting, he remarked:

Here are things which Mahatma Gandhi finds it difficult to
understand, and he would suspend them all, while we get
Swaraj - but not I, not I! I could never give up these!
.... No, there is some fundamental difference there: &
perhaps it runs through the whole of Bengal as compared with
Gujerat. Here, in Bengal, Mahatmaji is saying "Let every
student take up spinning & weaving, & drop everything else". But the Bengali students say "We will take up spinning &
weaving, but we shall not drop everything else." - There
again, is the difference!"¹

Tagore himself spoke from the heart of the bhadralok when he
demanded rhetorically of Gandhi: 'The mind, surely, is not of less
account than a length of cotton thread spun on a wheel!'² In a series
of public addresses in Calcutta in August 1921, on his return from an
extended trip abroad, he protested against Gandhi's anti-intellectualism
and narrowness of view. Let us not obscure our vision of the wider

¹ 31 Jan 1921, Andrews MSS. Cf. Andrews to Tagore, 26 Jan 1921,
quoted, Chaturvedi & Sykes, p. 176.
² "The Call of Truth", speech at a public meeting in Calcutta, 29 Aug
1921, Towards Universal Man, p. 267.
world with the dust raised by political passion, he said. Let us seek universal truth for 'India's awakening is a part of the awakening of the world.' Earlier he had written: 'Our present struggle to alienate our heart and mind from the West is an attempt at spiritual suicide ... Let us be rid of all false pride and rejoice at any lamp being lit in any corner of the world, knowing that it is a part of the common illumination of our house.' His attack brought Gandhi hurrying to Calcutta, but discussions between the two men revealed (in the words of a contemporary) 'a difference of temperament so wide that it was extremely difficult to arrive at a common intellectual understanding.'

These differences of culture and temperament certainly stood as barriers between Gandhi and the bhadralok, but there were other, less unimpeachable, reasons for their reluctance to follow his lead. This had been brought home to Andrews on a visit to Calcutta in September 1920, when he had met a friend, Promothonath Chaudhuri, 'bitter beyond words & crying out against his countrymen for their folly in following any one who is an Ascetic, as though wisdom must necessarily come from fasting & starving & hunger-striking.'

1 "The Call of Truth", speech at a public meeting in Calcutta, 29 Aug 1921, Towards Universal Man, pp. 270-3.
2 Tagore to Andrews, 13 Mar 1921, Letters to a Friend, p. 136.
3 Quoted Towards Universal Man, p. 377.
But though my intellect went with Promotho Babu & I could never follow Mr Gandhi in his extravagances [Andrews recalled later], I could not help contrasting the other side: for there was Promotho Babu ... and others in the Camac Street Club with every single luxury of a London Club-life around them, - playing bridge & taking their strong glasses of whiskey & brandy. Say what one would to justify it, they were parasites, living on immense fees taken from others. And if one had to choose, was not their judgment, - their moral judgment, - far more warped by luxury & luxurious living than Mr Gandhi's by starvation.¹

There was more than politics and poetry to the good life which the bhadralok were defending!

Their memories of the anti-partition agitation was another difficulty with which Gandhi had to contend in his effort to win Bengal for non-co-operation. 1905 was uppermost in bhadralok minds as they faced the decisions of 1920. 'I find our countrymen are furiously excited about Non-co-operation,' remarked Tagore in September. 'It will grow into something like our Swadeshi movement in Bengal.'²

'In Bengal we have passed through the stage of non-co-operation,' wrote Banerjea a month later. 'We practised it in the days of the swadeshi movement and the anti-partition agitation. We were non-co-operators before the rest of India thought of it.'³ As this suggests, there was a certain satisfaction in the thought that the rest of India was now following a path which Bengal had trodden fifteen years before,

¹ Andrews to Rabindranath Tagore, 5 Oct 1920, Andrews MSS.
² Tagore to Andrews, 18 Sep 1920, Letters to a Friend, p. 95.
³ Bengalee,* 26 Oct 1920.
but there was also an element of pique at the temerity of an outsider like Gandhi in bringing forward as his own inventions and under labels of his own choosing, the old methods of boycott, swadeshi and national education.

Nor were the bhadralok leaders at all certain that they wished to retrace their steps. The campaigns of the partition period had been exhilarating but in retrospect the risks that had been taken seemed very grave. For a cause as dear to bhadralok hearts as the unity of Bengal, those risks had been worth while, but were they similarly justified for a 'political chimera' such as Gandhi's swaraj?

It had to be admitted that the practical achievements of the partition period (as distinguished from the fillip given to Bengali 'nationalism') had been inconsiderable, while the effects of British retaliation had been serious. Public life in Bengal in the years following 1908 had suffered severely from the suppression of samitis, the imprisonment and deportation of political suspects, and the extended activities of the C.I.D. police. Bengal had pushed out its chin once and had been punched hard. It was still suffering from the after-effects and it was naturally reluctant to invite another blow.

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1 An expression used in a manifesto opposing non-co-operation, which was published by five leading Bengali Extremists on 29 Sep 1920. (Servant, 29 Sep 1920).
The Bhadralok and the Masses

What carried even more weight in the thinking of the bhadralok leaders was the social repercussions of the anti-partition agitation. In trying new methods of direct action in 1906-1907 in an effort to involve more people in their agitation against the British, they had stirred up a hornet's nest of regional, communal and class dissension. To their acute embarrassment, their bhadralok followers had responded with an enthusiasm which they could not control and their leadership had been discredited by this failure, which alone was sufficient to make them chary of ever repeating such an adventure. Even more disturbing was the political reaction (and a hostile reaction at that) which they had evoked from social groups which previously had had no part in politics. The bhadralok had always assumed that politics was their preserve, one of the proper functions of their class, and they were perturbed by this intrusion from below. The moral which they drew from the affair was that an incautious appeal for wider support might endanger their political, and even social, dominance. This reinforced their preference for the elitist and socially-secure forms of political action, such as legislative council politics and terrorism, to which they were accustomed.

Seen against this background, their reluctance to support the non-co-operation movement can be readily understood. It was bad enough that Gandhi should insist upon their discarding 'safe' political methods in favour of direct action, but it was adding insult to injury that he
should emphasise that it was the exclusive character of those old methods to which he objected. His aim was to take politics to the masses, and, by involving them in the nationalist movement, give them political education. He wanted to lead a people's movement. All of which was anathema to the bhadralok politicians. They had no taste for popular politics. Their attitude towards the lower orders being one of benevolent disdain, they set no store by democracy, either constitutional or agitational, as Gandhi advocated. Politics was a gentleman's preoccupation and so it should remain.

It must be recognised that, apart from their aversion, there were real difficulties in the way of their leading a mass movement. The great bulk of the peasantry, who comprised 75 per cent of Bengal's population, were Muslims, and, even with the low-caste Hindus who made up the rest, the bhadralok had little in common. As we have already observed, the manual labourer in Bengal was separated from his superiors by a great social gap which the 'respectable people' had striven for generations to widen by means of education. The peasantry shared nothing of the bhadralok culture and their values were neither understood nor appreciated by the English-speaking urban professional men who were engaged in politics. In Bengal, as in most other parts of twentieth-century Asia and Africa, there was a great problem of communication between the small westernised intelligentsia of the
cities, eager to build a nation free from European imperialism, and the rural masses, traditionalist and illiterate.  

In an editorial published on the eve of the special Congress session in Calcutta in September 1920, the Bengali declared: 'We Bengalis are opposed to non-co-operation. For a period of 10 years, from 1906 to 1916, we played that game. And we are not prepared to take back what we rejected on deliberation then. Even Gandhi has admitted that to act up to this resolution would mean rebellion and revolution, and we are not ready to proceed to such a course.'  

This passage provides the clue to another reason for the bhadralok leader's reluctance to follow Gandhi to mass politics: 'this resolution would mean rebellion and revolution, and we are not ready to proceed to such a course.' Mass politics would almost certainly lead to violence, and violence against the foreigner might quickly change to violence against the socially privileged. The bhadralok leaders were afraid of the social consequences of a disturbance of the established political order. Andrews saw this. 'I want you all, who are absent,' he wrote, 'clearly to understand that the real thing is not the issue "Cooperation v non-Cooperation", but far more the question of "Fear v Non-Fear"'.

2 Bengali, 11 Sep 1920.
3 Andrews to Rabindranath Tagore, 15 Oct 1920, Andrews MSS.
The bhadralok were afraid because they had much to lose. A minority of only five per cent, they held most of Bengal's land and a large part of its wealth. Their domination of all levels of the education system, gave them almost exclusive access to the professions and Government service. They controlled the press. They played a leading part in all forms of civic and village affairs. Politics was their business. They gave Bengal its literature, music and art. They were its cultural and social leaders. In city and countryside they were indeed the respectable people. All this they stood to lose from any social upheaval. 'Scratch a Hindu and you will find him a conservative,' remarked Surendranath Banerjea. Certainly Banerjea's Hindus - the bhadralok - were conservatives and well might they be.

It must be recognised that their fear was largely a fear of the unknown. They did not understand the masses and they felt no confidence in their ability to lead or even control them should the existing order of political and social relationships be shaken. Their fear was blind but it was not unreasonable. A leap into the political unknown could well be a leap into revolution and anarchy. In a society like the Indian in which there was no system of communication extending vertically through the community; in which there were few universally accepted social values; in which there was no general knowledge of the functions of the state; and in which there were great economic inequalities,

1 Nation in Making, p. 397.
the line between order and disorder was thin. It was a perilous undertaking to rock the ship of state, even if it were officered by unwanted foreigners. Gokhale had understood this. Distressed by the violence in Bengal in 1908, he had written: 'It is not difficult at any time to create disorder in our country - it was our portion for centuries - but it is not so easy to substitute another form of order for that which has been evolved by Englishmen in the course of a century.' In 1920 this was the *bhadralok* leaders' reply to Gandhi when he called for non-co-operation to put an end to the British Empire in India.

The events of the years immediately preceding 1920 had given the *bhadralok* little reason for confidence. The war of 1914-18 had had a profoundly unsettling effect on Bengali society and this social unrest was aggravated in the immediate post-war years by economic difficulties. A succession of natural disasters in 1918 and 1919, including the great influenza epidemic, led to an extraordinarily sharp rise in the prices of foodstuffs and cotton goods, and early in 1920 a severe slump brought to an end a five-year boom in Calcutta trade and industry.

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1 Gokhale to Vamanrao Patwardhan, 15 May 1908, Gokhale papers.
2 *Nayak*, 9 Sep 1920.
4 *Census of India, 1921*, vol. V, pt. i, p. 34.
Already there had been serious labour trouble in Bombay;¹ there were disturbing rumours of peasant unrest in the United Provinces;² and strikes among the migrant industrial workers of Howrah and Hooghly-side were becoming distressingly frequent.³

Events in Russia in 1917 had left the bhadralok extremely sensitive to any potential threat to property from this quarter. Indeed their reaction to the Russian revolution had laid bare their basic social conservatism. They had welcomed the success in March of Kerensky and his Provisional Government in deposing the Czar as an exemplar for India's political emancipation,⁴ but their delight had turned to dismay with the violent attack on the propertied classes which followed the Bolshevik revolution in November. They were afraid that a similar disaster might befall India.⁵

The Muslims and the Masses

The Calcutta Muslim riots of September 1918 had shown how much inflammable social material was now available for political incendiaries, and the concern of the bhadralok at this development had been manifest

¹ Bangali,* 29 Jan 1919.
² NP, 1920 passim.
⁵ NP, 1918 passim.
in the support accorded by the Hindu newspapers to the Government in its use of force to suppress the disorders.\(^1\) This incident had also underlined the fact - a distressing fact for the bhadralok - that in Bengal it was Muslim rather than Hindu politicians who were best able to make use of a mass appeal. Although the Muslim leaders had to overcome the same problem of class distinction, and, to a lesser degree, differences of caste, sect and culture, they could speak directly to their co-religionists (in a way the Hindus could never do) in the name of Islam. There was a fraternity amongst Muslims such as was unknown to Hindus. The best ground for an appeal was, of course, religious - Islam in danger - (again cool comfort to the Hindus) and in the post-war years the perfect issue was to hand in the Khilafat movement.

Late in 1919, Khilafat committees were established in various parts of Bengal 'to circulate news on the Moslem world'.\(^2\) The official peace celebrations in December provided an opportunity to incite communal feeling against the British. 'So far as we are associated with the "Victory", it means defeat for Moslems,' declaimed the Mohammadi angrily. 'The bier of Moslem nationality is being carried out - are we to rejoice thereat?'\(^3\) With the return to Calcutta in January 1920 of Abul Kalam Azad, a young Urdu-speaking Muslim journalist who had been interned for four years at Ranchi, the movement took a radical

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\(^1\) NP, 21 Sep 1918.

\(^2\) Mohammadi,\(^*\) 7 Nov 1919.

\(^3\) Ibid, 5 Dec 1919.
turn. Azad and his followers went among the Muslim workers in the mill towns of West Bengal spreading propaganda about the British attitude to the Khilafat. When moderate appeals failed to stir up general anger, resort was had to provocative rumours, such as that the Government had ordered prayers to be said on Sunday instead of Friday and had proscribed the Koran.¹

The dangerous possibilities of such an exploitation of religious fanaticism and ignorance were evident to the bhadralok leaders, and, when Gandhi urged them to support the Khilafat movement in order to cement Hindu-Muslim unity, they angrily protested against encouraging such a campaign. Andrews reflected their mood when he wrote: 'The truth is that the "Khilafat" appeals to the very worst side of Islam—that religious arrogance, which is every whit as bad as racial arrogance.'² The bhadralok found it objectionable that Gandhi should insist upon coupling a communal issue of this kind with non-co-operation and according to men like Azad a place of prominence in the movement.³

More remarkable than this Hindu opposition, was the antipathy towards Azad's campaign displayed by Bengali Muslims. They made no secret of the fact that they regarded Azad, and the Urdu-speaking

² Andrews to Rabindranath Tagore, 9 Aug 1920, Andrews MSS.
Calcutta group which supported him, as foreigners. Ill-feeling between the leaders of the Urdu and Bengali speaking communities which had flared up on various occasions in the past, had recently been aggravated by accusations in the Urdu press that the Bengali Muslims were so parochial that they had lost touch with their co-religionists elsewhere. It was ironical, in view of the Hindu alarm at the appeal to religious sentiment, that what offended the Bengali Muslims was Azad's stand alongside Gandhi as an apostle of inter-communal amity. 'Hitherto the whole history of India since the advent of the Mussalmans in this country is a history of a continued antagonism of the two communities and we need be very cautious in clasping too eagerly the hand of fellowship stretched forward so very gracefully by the other community,' warned Ali Chaudhuri.

Although unwilling to join Azad in his campaign among the industrial labourers, the Bengali Muslim politicians were not blind to the potential advantages of securing some form of mass support and they were experimenting with organisations which might win them a following among the Muslim peasantry. As early as December 1917, Fazlul Huq and a group of fellow lawyers and journalists had formed the Calcutta Agricultural Association and at the beginning of 1920 another body, the Bengal

1 NP, Nov-Dec 1919.
2 Views on Present Political Situation, p. 12.
3 Moslem Hitaishi,* 21 Dec 1917.
Joatdars and Raiyats' Association, was founded, with office-bearers drawn from Calcutta and the towns of Eastern Bengal.¹ The talk of constitutional reform, in particular the possibility of an extended franchise, had awakened for the first time an interest in politics among sections of the Bengali peasantry² and it was almost certainly in the hope of taking advantage of this new awareness that these organisations were formed. They achieved nothing of immediate importance but they were significant as the first attempts in Bengal to establish political contact with the raiyats. They were the precursors of the peasant organisations formed by Muslim politicians in the mid-twenties, which provided a backing in the following decade for Fazlul Huq's Kisan Proja Party in the Legislative Council.

These were disturbing developments for the bhadralok. It was bad enough that the peasantry should be taking an interest in politics but it was far worse that it should be the Muslim leaders who were able to benefit by it. The bhadralok politicians were at a serious disadvantage. Unlike the Muslim professional men, who had the opportunity to keep in touch with at least the larger agriculturalists through their District communal associations, they had no regular institutional contact with the peasants.³ Moreover, as a rentier and landholding class, their

¹ GI, Reforms Office, Bundle 1920-1, Jun-Dec Dep(3), Deposit 34, Jun 1920.
² Nayak; 17 Feb 1920. GB, Political, 8A-10(1), B65, Nov 1917.
³ GB, Political, lists of office-bearers of recognised associations, revised annually.
interests and those of their tenantry were too obviously opposed for
them to come forward as champions of the peasant interest. However
hurtful it may have been to their nationalist pride, they had to face
the fact that they were regarded by the lower orders as representatives
of the upper 'exploiting' castes.

In the decade preceding 1920, there had been a remarkable develop­
ment in the organisation, among the lower castes in Bengal, of caste
sabhas,1 which had given them a new sense of self-reliance. During the
reforms discussions - to the embarrassment of the bhadralok politicians -
these low castes had rejected all suggestions that high-caste men
might speak on their behalf.

The Namasudras were the most adamant. This agricultural caste,
the largest in Bengal, had had the assistance of British missionaries
in the establishment of schools, hospitals and dispensaries, and in the
formation of District Unions in Eastern Bengal where it was most
numerous. A few of its members had secured sufficient education to
enter the professions and in 1912 they had established the Bengal
Namasudra Association with its headquarters in Calcutta, but their
attempts to interest their castemen in politics had been unsuccessful
until the talk of constitutional reforms captured their attention.2

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1 GB, Political, 8A-10(1), B65, Nov 1917. Census of India, 1921,
2 GB, ibid.
The Calcutta group then started a Bengali monthly journal of political and social discussion under the challenging title of *Pataka*, "The Banner", and they organised caste meetings throughout the province to consider the attitude which their community should adopt towards the reforms.¹

Initially they had to overcome widespread suspicion that they intended to sell out their community to high-caste politicians, and they were at pains to establish their bona fides in this regard. Writing to the Government of Bengal in December 1913, Mukunda Behari Mallick, the president of the Association, emphasised that he and his fellows were opposed to the Montagu-Chelmsford proposals because their implementation would mean increased power for high-caste men. Is the past loyalty of the Namasudras, he asked 'now to be rewarded by asking them to seek the redress of their grievances at the hands of an unsympathetic oligarchy of a few limited castes specially of Brahmins, Kayasthas and Baidyas'? His people, he said, were alarmed at the apparent readiness of the British to give way before 'a vociferous and small band of organised castes pretending to represent the interests of the masses'.²

² Mallick to Governor's Secretary, 31 Dec 1918, GB, Appointment, 6R-36(18), B376-625, Apr 1919.
For the bhadralok nationalist politicians such talk was extremely embarrassing, to say the least, and, while they could save face by explaining away the meetings of protest against self-government as machinations of the British, they could not dismiss so easily the democratic notions which were now abroad among the Namasudras and other low-caste groups. Democracy was a revolutionary concept in a caste-ordered society, and that revolution would be hastened once inferior groups realised how much they stood to gain. As an early number of the Pataka had pointed out in 1916, if in future the governance of India were to depend upon the counting of heads, power would go to the biggest castes instead of the highest as in the past.

... we Namasudras have now realised what we are, and how great is our strength calculated to chill bhadralok blood. A caste with a population of 25 lacs cannot remain asleep for ever. We had been put to sleep by the blind Hindu kings who ruled over Hindu society. Today we have woken up from that slumber through the grace of the mighty British, who believe in the equality of men and not in caste.

For the time being, the bhadralok were protected from the most dire consequences of such democracy by a severely restricted franchise (which they were determined to maintain, as we shall see) and the Namasudras' demand in 1920 for the reservation for their caste of one third of the Non-Muhammadan seats in the Bengal Legislative Council

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1 E.g. Bengalee, & Amrita Bazar Patrika, 7 Nov 1917.
could be nothing more than a gesture. Nonetheless for the exclusive high castes, the writing was on the wall, and the bhadralok quailed as they read it.

The hatred between Brahmans and non-Brahmans in Madras - the spirit of enmity in Bengal among many of the Namasudras against the higher castes - underlying all this is not there the instigation of strangers - of conquerors? asked the Nayak bitterly. Unless our society is revolutionized and the social bonds relaxed, business cannot flourish and money cannot be earned easily. That is why steps are being taken to demolish the barriers between the different castes. When we get the Montagu Reforms, the spirit of strife and quarrel and enmity among us will be aggravated and a terrible social revolution brought about!

**Nationalist and Social Radicalism**

All that has been said about the attitudes of the bhadralok politicians towards the masses, points a lesson of general application: that nationalist radicalism is not to be equated with social radicalism. It would seem to be a statement of the obvious to observe that the desire of colonial nationalists to rid their country of imperial domination is not, of necessity, accompanied by any desire to reconstruct the social order; yet the failure to grasp this point or, at best, to state it explicitly, has been a frequent source of the misunderstanding of nationalism.

There could be no more striking illustration of this than the confusion, which prevails over the reasons for the Bengali reaction to

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1 GI, Reforms Office, Bundle 1920 August A(6), A54-119, Aug 1920.
2 Nayak,* 22 Aug 1919.
Gandhi's non-co-operation proposals. Blindly following the lead of Subhas Chandra Bose, commentators have applied the term "Right wing" to the Moderates and others who favoured council entry, and "Left wing" to the Extremists and terrorists. By the logic of their metaphor they are then convinced that Gandhi's non-violent non-co-operation movement must be of the "Centre", and it is to their astonishment that they discover that, while the Bengalis favoured both council entry and terrorism ("the Right" and "the Left"), they were most reluctant to accept non-co-operation ("the Centre").

It is evident that these writers have been led astray in their interpretation by their failure to distinguish between nationalist and social radicalism. The terms "Right and Left wing" which they employ have socio-economic connotations acquired from their European usage. If these terms are to have any meaning in this context (and their value is doubtful) both council entry and terrorism must be regarded as "Right wing", for they were esteemed by the bhadralok as élite activities, and non-co-operation as "Left Wing", for it was regarded as socially hazardous.

Gandhi himself was aware of the importance of this distinction between nationalist and social radicalism. 'In fighting the Government

1 Indian Struggle, pp. 39-40, 46 & 55.
2 See e.g. Reports on the Working of the Reformed Constitution, 1927, p. 178.
the motives of co-workers can be mixed,' he explained. 'In fighting the devil of untouchability I have absolutely select company.'

Here in a nutshell is the explanation of the bhadralok reaction, which we have been seeking. Gandhi was not simply offering a fight against the Government. He was also calling for an attack on the devils in Indian society, and the conservative bhadralok were convinced that these devils should be left well alone lest all hell be let loose.

Looking back from this vantage point, we can see the precept which governed every action of the bhadralok political leaders, Moderates and Extremists alike, in the years of reform, 1915-1920: the preservation of the political and social dominance of the bhadralok. Whatever the form of the constitutional settlement, whatever the political methods required, the bhadralok ascendancy was to be maintained.

At first there was no apprehension that there would be any need for exertion to achieve this. No matter which group of politicians emerged victorious from the nationalist dogfight, the bhadralok position would surely be secure. But this confidence was shaken by the realisation that there were social, as well as political, repercussions from the constitutional reconstruction. The delay in reaching a settlement; the hopes and fears aroused; the concessions gained by some groups; the loss of faith in British goodwill; the nature of the politicians' appeals; the failure of communal negotiations; the use of violence as

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a political tool—these were not simply questions of politics, on which
depended the future of one party or another. In the extended period
of uncertainty, these issues assumed a social significance as
determinants in the changing relationships of classes and communities.

'When we get the Montagu Reforms, the spirit of strife and quarrel
and enmity among us will be aggravated and a terrible social revolution
brought about!' The Nayak was right in its belief that the reforms
would precipitate social change and its characterisation of this as
'a terrible revolution' was a true reflection of bhadralok consternation.
The new assertiveness of the lower classes and the attempts by Muslim
politicians to exploit this for communal ends, awakened them with a
jolt to the fact that their class ascendancy was unchallenged no longer.
For the first time, it seemed possible that their voice might be
drowned by the clamant demands of other social groups.

Horrified by such a prospect, their leaders hastened before the
constitutional enquiry committees of 1918–19 with proposals to protect
the bhadralok position. A restricted franchise based on a property
qualification should be maintained, they insisted, 'in order to secure
competent voters and manageable electorates'. The towns which were
their stronghold, particularly Calcutta where they formed 50 per cent
of the Hindu population, should be given considerable over-representation,

Evidence Taken before the Reforms Committee (Franchise), vol. II,
p. 383.
'because men of political capacity and public spirit and intelligence were to be mainly found in the towns. If the towns were not given separate seats, the town candidates would be overwhelmed.' For a similar reason, they argued that no residential qualification should be required for electoral candidates.

They rejected on principle the demand for separate communal electorates and opposed every concession suggested for the Muslims. 'They on no account should be allowed to have the balance of power in their hands,' wrote a member of the Bengal Legislative Council, Shib Shekhareswar Ray. 'Such a state of affairs would not only spell disaster to the cause of good Government in the country, but would seriously jeopardise the interests of the non-Muhammadans.' Nor should the Hindu lower-castes be given special representation.

There is a tendency in some quarters to make a fanciful line of cleavage between the masses and the educated community. Surendranath Banerjea explained to the Joint Select Committee. The educated community are the natural protectors of the masses, and I desire to emphasise that fact.... We are the natural protectors of the masses, and have always been so, because they are our people - the bone of our bone and the flesh of our flesh....

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1 Evidence Taken before the Reforms Committee (Franchise), vol. II, p. 390.
3 PP, 1919, (203), vol. IV, evidence, pp. 70-1.
5 PP, 1919, (203), vol. IV, evidence, p. 68.
Underlying all these bhadralok demands was the determination to secure the interests of the privileged classes. This conservatism is revealed clearly if a comparison is made with the Government of Bengal's counter-proposals (as outlined earlier in this work), which show the bhadralok politicians for what they were: most reluctant democrats.

The Appeal to the Small Bhadralok

'In all this,' wrote the Government of India in its first despatch on constitutional reforms, 'we feel that we are moving with a spirit which is stronger than our calculations; and we accept whatever lies ahead.' The bhadralok leaders were also moving with a spirit stronger than their calculations, and, in spite of their protests, they too had to accept what lay ahead, whether as a result of the Government of Bengal's radical franchise proposals or Gandhi's will to mass politics. Reluctant democrats, they were swept helplessly along.

This gives us a clue with which to approach the last major problem posed by the events of that crucial year, 1920. Why, after opposing Gandhi for twelve months (more particularly at the Calcutta Congress in September), did the bhadralok politicians capitulate at Nagpur in December? The answer, basically, is that Gandhi had undercut them by capturing the support of the poorer, semi-educated 'small' bhadralok. Here the Bengal Extremists were hoist with their own petard, for, in

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1 Government of India's Despatch of March 5th, 1919, p. 5.
their early efforts to force a way into the reforms debate in 1916 and 1917, it was to this group that they had appealed, and, in so doing, they had aroused a political enthusiasm upon which Gandhi was later to capitalise.

The poorer bhadralok, as an aspiring but frustrated sub-class, looked with an intense jealousy upon their successful superiors, the English-speaking Government servants and professional men. The enmity was encouraged in the schools and university colleges by under-paid and discontented teachers, and it was played to by the vernacular press, which found its most attentive readers among the semi-educated, under-employed urban lower middle-class. These papers developed stereotyped lines of criticism, with a terminology which is highly misleading if read out of this context. When, for instance, they spoke of the 'babus' they referred to those objects of righteous scorn, the successful bhadralok; "the people" or "the mass" were their approving readers, the small bhadralok. Their criticism was usually levelled at the "babu's" selfish disregard for "the people"; their "Anglicisation" and divorce from "true Bengali Hindu society"; and their concern with British institutions, titles and honours. Two passages will serve as an illustration.

Dainik Chandrika, 30 December 1914
This is the Congress of the Babus. These irreligious, luxury-loving beggars are the creation of English education. The country and society have nothing to do with them. The mass do not know them, neither do they care for the mass. By virtue of their begging through the Congress they secure high posts, start subsidised papers and try to win fame and respect in the country.
Basumati, 17 April 1915
... whatever our Babus do, they do for the furtherance of their own self-interest and not for the benefit of the people at large. The Congress and conferences and what not keep these agitators perpetually before the public eye and bring them something for their pockets also. And that is all that our "patriots" care for.

For the Extremists - leaders in search of a following - the discontented but politically-unattached small bhadralok offered a great opportunity, especially as the means of appealing to them were to hand, ready-made. Play to their prejudices, focus their enmity upon the Moderates, and they were yours. Looking back, we find that this is precisely what C.R. Das did in his Provincial Conference speech of April 1917, which won the acclaim of the vernacular press and launched him on his political career. Delighting his listeners with his frequent allusions to the familiar teachings of Swami Vivekananda, he spoke out boldly against the errors of "babu" politics.

We have many dangers and difficulties in the path; but our chiefest danger is this that we have become largely and unnecessarily Anglicised in our education, culture and social practices. The mere mention of "politics" conjures up before our eyes the vision of English political institutions; and we feel tempted to fall down before and worship the precise form which politics has assumed under the peculiar conditions of English history .... Only we neglect the one thing essential. We never look to our country, never think of Bengal or the Bengalees, of our past national history, or our present material condition. Hence our political agitation is unreal and unsubstantial - divorced from all intimate touch with the soul of our people .... We boast of being educated: but how many are we? What room do we occupy in the country? What is our relation to the vast masses of our countrymen? Do they think our thoughts or speak our speech? I am bound to confess that our countrymen have little faith in us. And what is the reason of this unfaith? Down in the depths of our soul, we, the educated people, have become Anglicised: we read in
English, think in English and even our speech is translated from English. Our borrowed anglicism repels our unsophisticated countrymen; they prefer the genuine article to the shoddy imitation.

In this way, the Extremists quickly won the allegiance of the small bhadralok and this support was of great advantage to them in the local Congress meetings of late 1917 and 1918, when they needed a numerous and noisy backing to outvote and outshout the Moderates. There was danger, however, in what they were doing. The nature of their appeal, especially the terms they were using, gave them a false appearance of social radicalism, which might expose them to a charge of hypocrisy should there arise a demand for radical action. In fact the Extremist leaders were as much a part of "Babudom" (as the Nayak described the Anglicised society of the successful) as were the Moderates, and, should there be an attack upon that society, they were bound to turn in its defence — which, of course, is what happened when Gandhi appeared on the scene.

Here was a man who spoke of 'the mass' and 'the people' without any mental reservations; who attacked Anglicisation root and branch; and who would sever all ties with British institutions. He offended the bhadralok leaders and they turned against him, but, in so doing, they lost the support of their own lower middle-class, who saw in this yet another example of 'babu' betrayal.

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1 C.R. Das: About Bengal, pp. 4-5.
The Babus openly advocate democracy to obtain cheap notoriety, while they secretly associate with Government, with a view to securing titles and high posts carrying fat salaries [sneered the Nayak]. When their object is accomplished they identify themselves with Government. This is the reason why one who is an Extremist today becomes a Moderate tomorrow. Mr Gandhi's non-co-operation movement strikes at the root of this turncoat policy, and this is why the Babus are opposed to it.¹

With their excitement running high at their new share in politics, the small bhadralok were in no mood to tolerate diffidence. If the 'babus' lacked the courage to lead them against the British, the Mahatma certainly did not, and enthusiastically they declared for him. They became avid readers of his speeches and writings, and the Servant, a Calcutta daily established to support non-co-operation, was soon out-selling the older newspapers.² The cautions of the bhadralok leaders went unheeded. 'No one is listening,' wrote Andrews: 'all is clamour and noise & strife.'³

The politicians were now faced with a painful choice. Should they stand by their principles at the risk of committing political suicide, or should they ride with Gandhi on the rising wave of popular enthusiasm? Fazlul Huq, presiding at the 1920 Provincial Conference in April, had given a word of advice on the matter:

It is of course open to us to appeal to the people to give up views which we think to be wrong but if the people insist on

¹ Nayak,* 24 Dec 1920.
² Andrews to Rabindranath Tagore, 8 Dec 1920, Andrews MSS.
³ Same to same, 3 Aug 1920, ibid.
adhering to well defined views on public questions, it is no longer open to us to break away from the people and form by ourselves a small coterie of prudent politicians and representing views whose merit lies not in being popular but only in being acceptable to the Executive Government .... Leaders of the people must always have the courage to face the people and if they find that they can no longer lead, they must either give up their politics or be prepared to be led.

As the year passed and Gandhi's following grew, many of the Bengali politicians decided that they would have to consent to be led. 'The whole country is with Mr Gandhi, but the politicians are holding back. Yet one by one they are obliged to declare themselves,' reported Andrews early in September. 2

By that stage, Gandhi, a master of political tactics, had manoeuvred his opponents into a corner. In April and May he had arranged for the Central Khilafat Committee and the all-India Congress Committee to discuss non-co-operation, and it was announced that a special session of Congress would be held in September to decide for or against his scheme. 3 In the meantime, he went ahead with his own preparations and on 1 August began personal non-co-operation. 4 This forced the provincial Congress Committees to reach some decision, and, with the knowledge that overt opposition to Gandhi would bring down

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1 3 Apr 1920 at Midnapore, Azizul Huq collection.
2 Andrews to Rathindranath Tagore, 6 Sep /1920, Andrews MSS.
upon them public wrath, they could do nothing more than search for some form of compromise. The Bengal Committee decided for non-co-operation in principle but urged that the legislative councils should be boycotted from within. The Amrita Bazar Patrika had argued the case in the previous month:

We think that even if non-co-operation were to be the general policy adopted by the country, a better course for the people would be to contest the elections wholesale, to capture as many seats as possible, and then to stand aside in a body, leaving to the bureaucracy the odium of making the new scheme a failure by their obstinate persistence in a policy of evil.

All the leading Bengal Extremists were candidates for the first elections for the new legislatures to be held at the end of the year and the uncertainty as to the policy which the Congress would adopt was a handicap to them in their canvassing. Worse still, their advocacy of council entry - even if the purpose were to obstruct from within - put them perilously close to the Moderates, and that was to court political disaster.

They went to the September Congress in this awkward, compromised situation, while Gandhi, well aware of his strength, went full of confidence. The main debate on non-co-operation took place in the

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1 MP, Aug 1920.
2 Amrita Bazar Patrika, 2 Jul 1920.
3 'The three stalwarts of "Cooperation" now, are Sir Narayan Chandavarkar, Surendranath Banerjea & Mrs Besant! That is now in India enough to damn any movement.' (Andrews to Rathindranath Tagore, 6 Sep 1920, Andrews MSS.)
Subjects Committee. For three days the Bengalis struggled vainly to swing the majority against Gandhi, who was obdurate in his insistence that Congress give immediate support to every item of his programme. When his resolution came before the full session on the 8th, Bepin Chandra Pal moved an amendment to accept the principle but delay the implementation of non-co-operation. His concern, he explained, was to avoid a failure on a national scale such as had occurred in Bengal during the swadeshi campaign of the partition period. In the voting on the following day, Pal's amendment was rejected and Gandhi's resolution carried by a large majority, against the vote of every leading Bengali delegate.1

What were they to do now? Should they withdraw from the Congress and go ahead with their preparations for the elections? Should they remain in the Congress in the hope that they could reverse the decision at the annual session in December? Or should they forget their qualms and accept non-co-operation? They were in a quandary but they could not dither for long, for they were under pressure from the Gandhians to declare themselves.

Let the Bengal Leaders be definite and speak out their mind in clear unequivocal language wrote the Hindusthan on 9 September. Let them say that they will not be able to adopt the non-co-operation of Gandhi. Let them say that they are unable and not prepared to make the enormous sacrifices which the adoption of non-co-operation involves. We really pity those who cannot forego the temptation of being cheered with clappings of the hands.

After a week of agonised debate, the main group in the Bengal Congress, under the leadership of Das and Chakravarti, decided to adopt the second course: they would bow to the majority decision for the present but would work for its reversal at the end of the year. This meant, however, that they would be unable to contest the elections and on 15 September they issued a manifesto withdrawing their candidature.¹

It is significant that, of the 23 signatories to this manifesto, not one was a Muslim. Unlike their co-religionists elsewhere who were in the van of the non-co-operation movement, the Bengali Muslim politicians were doubtful of the wisdom of boycotting the institutions of Government.

The Hindu Moderates, under their political guru, the Hon'ble Mr Surendra Nath Banarji in a body are determined to give a fair chance to the Reforms by entering into the Councils warned Ali Chaudhuri². In such a case, if the Mussalmans keep themselves aloof from the precincts of the Council chamber it will neither remain vacant nor will the Government be paralysed thereby but its only disastrous result would be the total extinction of the political existence of the Mussalmans.²

Abul Kalam Azad, however, was as actively engaged in persuading Muslim candidates to withdraw from the elections and his large following of vociferous Khilafatists was, in itself, an argument which few politicians could ignore. Fazlul Huq, with his earlier maxims about leadership conveniently forgotten, was a big enough figure to

¹ Servant,* 15 Sep 1920.
² Views on Present Political Situation, p. 23.
speak openly against non-co-operation - he could even hurl public
abuse at Azad and his party ('the wisest amongst them do not possess
the brains of a barndoor fowl'\(^1\)) - but for smaller men such opposition
would have been foolhardy in the extreme.\(^2\) One by one the Muslim
Leaguers and the Muslim members of Congress withdrew their nominations.

The Victorious Surrender

In the twelve weeks that remained before Congress met again at
Nagpur, there was much confused activity among Bengal Congressmen and
Khilafatists. Azad's party was busy discouraging Muslim voters from
going to the polls,\(^3\) while Das, Chakravarti and Pal travelled extensively
in Eastern Bengal in an attempt to rally their dispersed supporters.\(^4\)
The popular excitement over Gandhi's activities, which had been mounting
steadily throughout the year, had reached such a pitch that it had
engulfed many who earlier had been sceptical. 'It is good to be alive
in these days,' wrote Andrews delightedly on 1 November, 'even if one
has not the heaven, which Wordsworth speaks of, of being young.'\(^5\)

\(^1\) Letter to the editor, Englishman, 24 Aug 1920.
\(^2\) 'I returned from England in 1920 and thought of entering politics, but
the Non-co-operation movement and Khilafat was very strong just then.
Although I didn't agree with those groups, I realised that the public
was opposed to council entry; so I decided not to contest the elections.'
(Sir Khwawja Nazimuddin in interview with author, Dacca, 10 Feb 1962.)
\(^3\) GI, Reforms Office, Bundle Jan-Mar 1921 B(5), B34-99, Mar 1921.
\(^4\) Amrita Bazar Patrika,* 9 Nov 1920.
\(^5\) Andrews to Rabindranath Tagore, 1 Nov \(^\{1920\}\), Andrews MSS.
In this atmosphere there was no place for equivocation and the cry 'For or against?' became insistent. 'Are you a whole-hogger? If so you are a non-cooperator. Do you contend that some of the items in the programme are calculated to do more harm to the people than to the bureaucracy? Well, damn you, you are no non-cooperator but a renegade.'¹

This mood augured ill for the success of the revisionist party at Nagpur, but it was determined not to let the issue go by default and it was as active as its opponents in organising supporters for the trip to Bihar. The result was an extraordinary migration. '... whilst many of the prominent politicians were present,' reported the Government of India, 'the Bengal contingent included hundreds of ex-detenus and the intelligentsia, which dominated earlier Congresses, seems to have been swamped in a mass of semi-educated persons swept up from all parts of India.'²

Within the Bengal delegation there were a number of warring groups manoeuvring for ascendancy, and feeling between them was so embittered that two meetings held on 26 and 27 December to elect the province's representatives on the Subjects Committee, both ended in ugly free-for-all fights. Order was restored only when Gandhi intervened in person.³

¹ Amrita Bazar Patrika,* 24 Nov 1920.
² GI, Home Political, Deposit 3 (Confidential) & K-W, Jul 1921.
³ N.C. Banerji: At the Cross-Roads, p. 146. Bengalee,* 30 Dec 1920 & 1 Jan 1921.
Das had come to Nagpur determined to offer a stout resistance to non-co-operation but it was now clear that he could not even carry the whole Bengal contingent with him if he opposed Gandhi. With a grand gesture he turned defeat into victory. Having secured Gandhi's private assurance that he would be left free to pursue his own political propaganda, he made the dramatic announcement that he would move the main resolution in support of non-co-operation.¹

With one stroke Das had dished his rivals. Provided he could carry his own group with him — and his personal influence was sufficient to enable him to do this — he now had a chance to unite the whole Bengal contingent under his leadership. He had stolen his opponents' platform, and, by securing Gandhi's endorsement, had climbed a step above them. They remained merely provincial politicians, while he had secured a national standing. Most important of all, he could now return to Bengal with a reunited battalion at his back and a job of work in hand. Even had he been successful in persuading the Congress in favour of council entry, he would have been unable to provide action for his party, for the first elections were over and the Moderates esconced in the councils for a three year term. With non-co-operation, he had a task for his eager followers — and a popular task at that.

¹ P.C. Ray: Life & Times of C.R. Das, p. 159.
CHAPTER VI

THE MODERATES' FAILURE

The Council and the Politicians

At this stage the reader may feel constrained to point to the title of the thesis and protest that in the preceding three chapters his attention has been directed away from legislative affairs. Certainly the Council proceedings have contributed little to that narrative. This is a true reflection of their relative unimportance to Bengal politics in the years 1917 to 1920 but this is not to say that the Council as an institution was unimportant. It has been the argument of these three chapters that the Council was so important that its reconstruction precipitated a major political and social crisis. Had it been regarded as unimportant, the suggestion of reforms would not have excited such exaggerated hopes and fears throughout Bengali society; the Moderates would not have staked their political future on its satisfactory reconstruction; and, most significant perhaps, the Extremists would have had no hesitation in rejecting the Montagu-Chelmsford constitution.

In fact the Bengal Legislative Council, for all its shortcomings and the abuse which was heaped upon it as a consequence, was the focal point of bhadralok politics - as Gandhi discovered to his chagrin
when he attempted, like the Pied Piper of Hamelin, to lead the Bengali Extremists away to the joyous land of non-co-operation. They could hear the promise in his tune but were reluctant to leave the familiar political haunts of their people. They followed Gandhi, but with many a regretful backward glance at the land they were leaving to their political and social rivals.

The situation at the beginning of 1921 was not unlike that of 1909 or, for Bengal, 1913. Again there was a new constitution and renewed hope of a stabilised political order. Again the Government and one section of politicians were eager to work the reforms to achieve this stability and to build for themselves a commanding position in the new order. Again there was a group outside the Council determined to prevent this.

There were, however, significant differences. The promise of future self-government had now been made by the British and under the constitution of 1919, as a first instalment of responsibility, the Council had been given greatly extended powers, including control over the administration of a number of departments of the provincial Government.¹ These advances encouraged the Government and the Moderates

¹ The transferred subjects, as they were called, were: local self-government, medical administration, public health, sanitation, vital statistics, pilgrimages, education, public works, agriculture, civil veterinary department, fisheries, co-operative societies, forests, excise, registration of deeds, documents, births, deaths and marriages, religious and charitable endowments, development of industries, stores and stationery required for transferred departments, adulteration of foodstuffs and other articles, weights and measures, and libraries and zoological gardens. (PP, 1920, [Cmd. 8917], vol. XXXV, p. 560.)
to hope that the workings of the new Council would be free from the frustrating limitations which had done so much to discredit the Morley-Minto legislatures.

Against this had to be placed the greater strength of the opposition outside the Council. There was no comparison between the small disorganised group of Extremists, dispirited by police persecution, which had made a series of haphazard verbal attacks on the members of the old councils, and the non-co-operators, full of shining zeal for a great cause, united in a campaign of destruction under an acknowledged national leader whose charisma enabled him to appeal even to the mass of the peasantry at times of crisis.

It is the purpose of this chapter to trace the efforts made by the Government and the various groups of participating politicians to get the new institutions of legislation and government working satisfactorily in the period 1921 to 1923, against the background of this hostile nationalist agitation - the attempt to tune the constitutional orchestra in spite of 'the savage jazz-band outside', to borrow a phrase from David Lloyd-George. The story of the non-co-operation movement, which will appear here only incidentally, will be told in full in the following chapter as a prelude to the Swarajists' triumph at the 1923 elections and their domination of the second Montagu-Chelmsford Council.

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The Character of the Relationship

Surveying the political prospect in January 1921, Tej Bahadur Sapru, Law Member of the Government of India and a leading Moderate politician, wrote:

I believe that one of the most important determining factors in the situation will be the character of the relationship which is established between the Government and the Legislative Assembly and the Council of State, and in the provinces, the manner in which the Ministers work and are allowed to work. If at the end of the forthcoming legislative session the country finds that the new Councils have given a good account of themselves, and have exercised a more decisive influence than their predecessors, there is, I feel, every chance of a corresponding change in public sentiment towards the Government making itself manifest.¹

The importance of this observation is that it was made, just as the reformed constitution was inaugurated, by one who was intimately in touch with the two parties most vitally concerned with the new institutions: the Government and the Moderates. It gives an insight into the attitude with which they approached their task. The assumptions underlying Sapru's comment are significant. He believed that if the Government and the Moderate nationalists concentrated their attention upon the reformed legislatures, if they evolved a relationship which allowed the Indian Ministers and M.L.Cs. a decisive and demonstrable influence in the government of the country, and enabled them to implement measures which would secure wide public approval, they could effect a shift of opinion in political society at large in favour of

¹ Minute, 25 Jan 1921, GI, Home Political, Deposit 3 (Confidential) & K-W, Jul 1921.
constitutional methods and co-operation with the British. Presumably he hoped that this 'change in public sentiment' would result in the collapse of non-co-operation and the reunification of the National Congress to work the reformed legislatures after the second general election in 1923.

Sapru had put his finger on one spot on the blueprint of the reconstructed political system and said: this is the vital point. Work this satisfactorily and the system as a whole will be a success. By implication he was saying that other parts of the system were of less importance. The Government need give less attention to other institutions than to the legislature. Its handling of nationalist agitation, violent or non-violent, outside the legislature was not of equal importance to its relations with the nationalists inside. The work of the Moderates in the Council was more important than their work in other public or political bodies. Their victory at the next elections would be secured by their achievement in the Council chamber and not primarily by their activities in their constituencies. Although we must not dismiss the possibility that Sapru was wrong, it is incontestable that his attitude was shared by most Government members and Moderate politicians. As we follow the story of the reformed Council in Bengal from 1921 to 1923, we shall see that they acted on these assumptions.
The Governor and his Ministers

The most important initial event for all participants in the new institutions was the Governor's selection of Ministers, for the men he chose would form the link between the Government and the Legislative Council, and the principles by which he made his choice would determine the character of the relationship which was established. Ronaldshay has left no statement of the principles upon which he acted and we must piece together what scattered clues we have. Firstly, we know that there was consultation among the heads of the provincial Governments and between them and the Government of India on the policies to be adopted towards the reformed institutions.¹ Therefore we may profitably examine the relevant proceedings of the Government of India. These, we find, were concerned with the problem of restoring political stability. It was recognised that political order had been endangered by the extended period of constitutional reconstruction, during which there had been no satisfactory institutions to contain political energies, and that this danger had been realised in the divisions which had developed within the National Congress, the strength which the non-co-operation movement had acquired and the unmitigated abuse directed at the Government. The Government of India considered it essential to get the reformed institutions working with whatever material was to

¹ E.g. conference of heads of Governments held at Viceregal Lodge, Delhi, 22 Jan 1920. (GB, Appointment, 6R-2 (1-8), A3-10, Apr 1920.)
hand, and to keep them working, for these institutions would relieve its isolation and exposure to criticism; they would offer a centre of political interest to rival the non-co-operation movement; and, in time it was hoped, they would gain sufficient stature to convince the non-co-operators that they could not afford to stand aloof.

Ronaldshay appears to have accepted this reasoning. Addressing the final meeting of the old Legislative Council on 1 September 1920, he emphasised that the reformed constitution would be worked no matter who opposed it and he suggested that those who did would soon find themselves lamenting their foolhardiness.

We sometimes hear it stated that the reforms are not worth having. Well, there is no compulsion upon anyone to take part in them against his own wishes. Let those who think that they are not worth having stand aside. There are even some who seem to think that they can wreck the Reform Scheme. I think that such persons have an altogether exaggerated idea of their own importance. I believe that the time is not far off when they will discover that they are but flies upon the wheel of the chariot of political progress, which they are powerless either to wreck or to stay upon its onward course.

While dismissing the non-co-operators with such nonchalance in public, Ronaldshay was careful to keep open his private lines of communication with them, for he recognised that they commanded wide public support and, if possible, he wished to persuade them to participate in the new institutions. They rejected his overtures and

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1 GI, Home Political, Deposit 3 (Confidential) & K-W, Jul 1921.
2 BLCP, 1 Sep 1920, vol. LII, p. 948.
3 Essayez, p. 135.
he then turned to the Moderates, with the explicit intention that they should serve as a counterpoise.\(^1\) There could be no question of their refusing to participate in the formation of the new Government for they were committed to the reformed constitution, having fought for the reforms for five years and finally having withdrawn from the Congress to support them. The British, for their part, realised that such devotion to the constitutional ideal should not go unrewarded\(^2\) and that their obligation to the Moderates could best be discharged by appointing their leaders as provincial Ministers.

With this as his criterion, Ronaldshay had a straightforward task. 'I had no difficulty', he recorded, 'in selecting as my chief Minister, my old critic, Babu Surendranath Banerjea'.\(^3\) He was also willing to accept for the second ministerial post Banerjea's nominee, Provas Chandra Mitra, Secretary of the National Liberal League who had earned the Government's gratitude by braving public obloquy to serve on the Rowlatt Committee. To maintain a communal balance amongst his Ministers as he had done in his Executive Council with Rahim's appointment, Ronaldshay chose Ali Chaudhuri for the remaining position. Chaudhuri was an East Bengali, which the Government considered an

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1. Chief Secretary, GB, to GI, 19 Feb 1921, GI, Home Political, Deposit 3 (Confidential) & K-W, Jul 1921.
2. W.M. Hailey, minute, 23 Mar 1921, ibid.
advantage, and he had recently published a forthright attack on non-co-operation.¹

The Ministers' Aspirations

For the Ministers, their appointment was both a goal attained and an opportunity for further achievement. Chaudhuri's aspirations were communal. He had fought hard to secure advantages for the Bengal Muslims in the reformed constitution and then to persuade them that they could further their communal interests by entering the new institutions. As the Nawab of Dacca had done ten years before, he argued that the Government held power independently of the two great Indian communities and that it could be influenced to use that power to the Muslims' advantage.² His ministerial appointment gave him the opportunity of exerting this influence personally. He saw himself in a position similar to that which the Dacca Nawab had occupied under Carmichael's Administration: able to talk privily with the executive and, at the same time, gain information which would assist his community in determining its course of action. In the new order he would have an additional role: that of political broker. By trading the votes of his communal bloc in the Legislative Council he would be able to secure direct concessions for his community from his fellow Ministers and Executive Councillors.

¹ In a pamphlet entitled Views on Present Political Situation in India. See Nation in Making, p. 338, on Chaudhuri's appointment.
² Views on Present Political Situation in India, pp. 34-5.
If the vision which Banerjea and Mitra had of their task was not as clear as Chaudhuri's, it was also not as limited. As lifelong campaigners for constitutional advance, they felt a sense of personal achievement in the new powers which had been secured in 1919 and they took up their portfolios happy in the knowledge that at last they could turn from agitation to construction. By a positive achievement they might prove to the British, on the one hand, that Indians could govern themselves, and to the non-co-operators, on the other, that the Moderates had been justified in supporting the reforms.¹

For Banerjea in particular January 1921 was a great milestone. He was an old tired man of 72, who had travelled a long way and taken many hard knocks from the Government and, latterly, from a younger generation of Indian nationalists. But now it all seemed worthwhile. He was to be the first Indian 'chief minister' of Bengal, with a protege as one of his colleagues and a knighthood to boot. It was a great triumph for a man who had been dismissed ignominiously from the I.C.S. and who had spent most of his days at daggers drawn with the alien rulers of his country.

He was in good heart as he approached his new work. Revealing himself as a true son of bhadralok Bengal, he asked for the portfolios of Education and Local Self-Government but was told that secretariat arrangements would not permit of this combination. So he chose

¹ Nation in Making, pp. 312-3.
Local Self-Government with Public Health, for his ambition was to bring down a Bill to amend Curzon's Calcutta Municipal Act, in opposing which he had staged his famous walk-out from the Corporation in 1899. The reforming Act was to be his *magnum opus*: the proof that the day had come when, by constructive constitutional endeavour, Indians could rectify the wrongs from which they had suffered for so long. ¹

The 1920 elections had apparently given him what he needed: a Council composed largely of Moderates. It was his good fortune that the non-co-operators had abstained from the contest for they were extraordinarily popular. As it was they had shown their strength by putting up five low-class candidates in the Chittagong and Noakhali electorates, having them returned by large majorities and then holding this up as proof of the disrepute of the reformed Council. ² If this somewhat cynical demonstration were disregarded, as also the success of the Khilafatists in dissuading many Muslim urban voters from going to the polls, ³ the election results could be considered favourable to the Moderates.

¹ See his speech when introducing the Bill to the Legislative Council on 22 Nov 1921, BLCP, vol. V, pp. 131-2.
³ GI, Reforms, ibid.
The new Council comprised 139 members, of whom 26 were nominated or ex-officio members, and 18 Europeans and Anglo-Indians. Of the remaining 95 elected seats, the Muslims had 39 and the Hindus 56. Banerjea had the satisfaction of seeing 26 of these 56 Hindu seats filled with fellow-members of the Indian Association and Moderate party, and another 16 with British Indian Association members. It seemed reasonably certain that the Ministers would command a majority but there was a group among the new members which openly sympathised with the non-co-operators and talked of obstruction within the Council. No one could offer more than a guess as to its potential strength.

It will be appreciated by the Government of India that it is extremely difficult to describe precisely or in a small compass the political leanings of public men at the present time explained the provincial Chief Secretary in a report to the Reforms Office in Delhi on 3 February 1921. There are no clearly defined political parties, and individuals are swayed considerably by their own personal predilections and opportunities. The term Moderate has been applied to those who, so far as is known, are not adherents of the Congress as now dominated by Messrs. Gandhi and the Ali Brothers, but within this category there are many who have subscribed to, and are still in sympathy with many of the Congress party views prior to their most recent developments. Again, especially on the case of the less-known men, there may be marked changes in their opinions after the influences operative in the councils are brought to bear.

The political complexion of the Council was somewhat obscure, but there was no doubt about its social composition. Despite the

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2. GI, Reforms, Bundle Jan-Mar 1921 B(5), B34-99, Mar 1921.
extension of the franchise, there was a reassuring similarity between the successful Hindu candidates at this election and the membership of the Morley-Minto councils. High-caste men again took most of the seats, with zamindars and lawyers predominant. Almost two-thirds of the Hindu members were university educated and approximately the same proportion had experience in local government. It appeared, moreover, that the decisive factor in elections was still local influence, from landholding, caste, family, connection, wealth or personality. It was significant that the one Hindu candidate who campaigned on a platform of land reforms in an attempt to win the votes of the newly-enfranchised cultivators, had been thoroughly trounced by the local maharaja.  

The contests for the Muslim seats revealed many of the old characteristics: a bewildering number of candidates and in West Bengal the manipulation of the electoral regulations by influential Calcutta families, with the Suhrawardy connection proving most adept. In Eastern and Northern Bengal, however, there was a significant development. Of the 19 Muslims elected from rural constituencies in these areas, ten came from cultivating families and stood as representatives of 'the agricultural interest'. This was a straw in the wind.

2 132 candidates contested the 39 seats. (PP, 1921, Cmd. 12617, XXVI, pp. 25-6.)
3 GI, Reforms, Bundle Jan-Mar 1921 B(5), B34-99, Mar 1921.
4 Ibid.
Addressing a meeting of Indians in London in 1909 Banerjea had said: 'Next to the approbation of his own conscience, the highest reward to which a public man aspires is the applause of his fellow-countrymen'.

For Banerjea and his Moderate followers there was no applause in 1921. For once the local Hindu and Muslim press was united and its sympathy was wholly with the non-co-operators. It poured its scorn upon the 'charade' of the elections.

Any Moderate or "Jo hukum" who has taken into his head to be elected, has sent his nomination paper and, after "due scrutiny" of it, has been declared elected! The election has been to them just like a stroll in the "maidan". And whom do these worthies represent? None but themselves. The supposed electors have not elected them. They have perhaps never heard of their "representatives".

The formation of the new Government brought even louder howls of derision. Here, it was said, was the proof of the hollowness of British protestations of a new respect for Indian opinion. The appointment of a reactionary communalist like Chaudhuri and a discredited time-server like Mitra could only be intended as an affront to political Bengal. As for Banerjea, with his comfortable billet and his knighthood, the best that could be done was to bid him a sad farewell from the nationalist camp. 'Surrender Not Banerjea' of the partition period

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1 S.N. Banerjea: The Trumpet Voice of India, p. 43.
2 NP, 1921, passim.
3 Amrita Bazar Patrika,* 3 Dec 1920.
4 NP, Jan 1921, passim.
was now 'Sir Surrender'. "The Lost Leader". I am sending you, Mr Editor, a copy of the poem, a no more appropriate greeting than which, I believe, could be addressed to the erstwhile leader of Bengal.

"Just for a handful of silver he left us,
    Just for a riband to stick in his coat —". ¹

The effect of this attack upon the Ministers - and this was true for the Moderates as a whole - was to force them on to the defensive from the beginning. When all their energies were required for the problems of initiating the reforms, they were obliged to devote time and effort to the profitless business of self-justification. And this was a cross that they had to carry for the duration of their term of office.

Financial Difficulties

On 11 January 1921 Ronaldshay convened the first meeting of his new Government. To the dismay of the Ministers, the Finance Minister J.H. Kerr presented a draft budget which showed an estimated deficit of more than two crores of rupees. He revealed that the provincial finances were in a desperate condition.

This was partly the result of the war, which had reduced the flow of British capital to India, had caused enormous inflation and had left the Government of India with a heavy deficit. In the same period the provincial Governments had been instructed to suspend all

¹  Amrita Bazar Patrika, 30 Dec 1920.
major development schemes and the salaries of civil servants had been pegged. Thus with the return of peace there was the need for extra expenditure to make up this leeway but in the immediate post-war years there was a succession of poor harvests and finally a trade slump, which hit Bengal particularly hard because of the importance which the export of jute, tea and coal had assumed in its economy.¹

Even before the war the Bengal Government had found it increasingly difficult to meet the growing demands upon the provincial revenues because the Permanent Settlement denied to the public purse any share in the increment in land values. For this reason Bengal had come to rely far more than any other province upon income tax and customs duties.

In 1920, however, the Meston Committee, which was formed to consider the financial changes which should accompany the introduction of the reformed constitution, recommended that these sources of revenue be given to the Government of India and that the provinces be left solely with the land revenue. Considering the contribution which each province should make to meet the Imperial deficit, it took account of the relatively low yield of the land revenue in Bengal and for this reason it set the initial contribution of the province at only six and a half per cent of the deficit. It insisted, however,

that there was great scope for expansion in the Bengal revenues and it imposed a sliding scale to raise Bengal's contribution to 19 per cent in seven years. The Government of Bengal objected strongly to these recommendations and in view of its protest the Joint Select Committee suggested that the provinces should retain the benefit of any increment in income tax. This proposal was accepted by the Government of India but the concession proved of little real advantage because of the trade recession.

Confronted with this dismal prospect, the Ministers immediately talked of resigning for they could see all too clearly the alternatives facing them: either to impose new taxation, a sure way of provoking the wrath of the propertied classes, or to retrench. This would mean abandoning developmental schemes on which they had pinned their hopes of gaining credit for their administration of the transferred departments and it would also mean that the number of jobs available for distribution as patronage would be reduced. In either case the success of the reforms seemed to be in jeopardy.

Exercising all his natural geniality, Kerr persuaded the Ministers to take a less pessimistic view of the situation. He explained that the province had a credit balance of nearly three crores, the result

of the freezing of provincial funds during the war, and that this could be used to tide the Government over the first year. In the meantime he suggested that every effort should be made to persuade the Government of India and the Secretary of State to modify the Meston award.¹

The Ministers accepted his proposal. They agreed to enlist non-official support for the Government's representations and to sponsor a resolution in the Legislative Council. They had no difficulty in securing backing for this from their fellow M.L.Cs., for there was general anger at the way in which Bengal had been treated in the financial settlement,² and when Surendranath Ray resolved on 9 February that the attention of the Government of India be drawn to the Joint Select Committee's recommendation that Bengal receive special consideration, there was not one dissentient voice in the chamber.³

The Ministers and the Council

What the Ministers had not reckoned with were the demands which were then made for economy in the Government. At first there were one

¹ Essayez, p. 136.
² This was reflected in protests from the British Indian Association (BIA, Publications, vol. XII), the Indian Association (IA Committee meeting proceedings, 1 Oct 1920), the National Liberal League (Englishman, 19 Oct 1920), and the non-official members of the old Bengal Legislative Council (BLCP, 1 Jul 1920, vol. LII, pp. 697-708).
or two misguided suggestions for a general reduction in the number of public employees but such a proposal was anathema to the bhadralok and it was rejected out of hand. '... we have come up with motions against the best interests of the country, against the educated community, against pleaders and against the Subordinate Judges and Munsifs. What is this? It is worse than anarchy'.\(^1\) The same tenderness, however, was not felt for the high officials and there was a spate of resolutions to reduce the number of Executive Councillors and Ministers, and to cut the latters' salaries.\(^2\) These had the support of the press.\(^3\)

The most distressing feature for the Ministers was the difficulty which they experienced in organising an opposition in the Council to these resolutions. They found that their success in securing their portfolios was resented by many of their senior colleagues. The Suhrawardys, for example, considered that one of their family should have been appointed instead of Chaudhuri,\(^4\) and Surendranath Ray, for so long Banerjea's right-hand man in the legislature, was angered by the

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\(^1\) BLCP, 16 Mar 1921, vol. I, no. v, p. 175.
\(^4\) Nation in Making, p. 339.
latter's nomination of Mitra as Education Minister. As a sop he was offered the position of Deputy-President of the Legislative Council. He accepted this but refused to take any salary, emphasising that he, for one, recognised the need for economy.

It was soon evident that the old informal contacts between councillors which had sufficed for the conduct of non-official business in the Morley-Minto legislature, were unsatisfactory in the reformed Council, with its enlarged membership and extended powers. As the Government observed later, the trouble lay partly in the unreal expectations of the ordinary M.L.C.: 'Each individual member except for a few experienced hands is out to run Bengal in his own way and to interfere in every detail of the executive or judicial administration and in particular of the "nation-building departments".' The existence of an extremist group of 25-30 Hindu members, whose sympathies lay with the non-co-operators and who were determined to obstruct the Government, and the reluctance of the great majority of the Muslims to co-operate wholeheartedly with the Hindus, were added difficulties,

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1 Information supplied by Biren Ray, Surendranath Ray's nephew, in interview with the author, Calcutta, 10 Mar 1962. It is significant that Surendranath Ray and Dr A. Suhrawardy voted for the reduction of the Ministers' salaries in the Legislative Council on 11 Feb 1921. (BLCP, vol. I, no. ii, p. 270.)


5 Ibid, p. 351.
but the crucial problem was the absence of organisation among the main body of Hindu Moderates - in Capital's words: 'a rabble of freelances whose personal and parochial jealousies are a bar to concerted action'.

The Ministers' experience in the old councils and on local bodies, where their personal influence had been sufficient to give them control, had not prepared them for this situation and at first they were at a loss for an answer. Banerjea, suggesting that the appointment of Council Secretaries might be of some assistance, underlined this ineptitude:

My information is that parties are being formed today to be broken up the next day. Babu Surendra Nath Ray has, I understand, been deposed from the leadership of a party which he said he claimed as his own. Babu Radha Charan Pal tried to step into his shoes. Mr D.C. Ghose tried to throw oil upon the troubled waters. Everything seems to be in a fluid condition, and one or two Under Secretaries devoting themselves to the task of party organisation would help to evolve order out of chaos and form a strong party organisation for Government.

The attempt to cut their salaries, coming as it did before they had had time to find their feet, sapped the Ministers' confidence and gave them an uncomfortable feeling of isolation from the Council. As a result they turned for support to the officials, whom they implored to take up cudgels for them.

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1 Capital, 17 Mar 1921.
2 Minute, 26 Mar 1921, GB, Appointment, 6R-36(1), A1025B, May 1921.
I regard the attempt to reduce the salaries of the Ministers as an extremist movement inspired by a section of the extremist Press /Banerjea told his colleagues/. They tried to boycott the Councils; and now that the attempt has failed, the attack is levelled against the moderate leaders who have been appointed Ministers .... I hope the Government will oppose the motions and that Members of the Executive Council will speak in support of the Government view. It will show the solidarity that exists between the two wings of the Government, official and popular. It will inspire public confidence in the future of responsible Government for Bengal by demonstrating the sense of unity and the spirit of co-operation that prevail in the counsels of the Government as a whole.  

The Executive Councillors accepted Banerjea's argument and the heavy artillery was rolled out to shoot down the resolutions when they were put to the Council on 10 and 11 February.  

Ronaldshay, however, disliked using the official bloc in this way. He insisted that support for the Ministers should be organised in the Council and he encouraged S.R. Das, Standing-Counsel to the Government, to act as a ministerial whip. Das accepted the task and set about arranging conferences of members to discuss forthcoming business, but he had great difficulty in overcoming the suspicion with which he was regarded by many M.L.Cs. as a 'Government man'. There was still a widely held conviction that the proper duty of a Council member was to agitate against the Government and, with the non-co-operators winning such acclaim for their open defiance of the

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1 Minute, 1 Feb 1921, GB, Appointment, 18L-5(1-5), A180-4, Jul 1921.
3 Ibid, no. v, p. 173.
Administration outside the Council, it seemed essential to keep attacking inside if all initiative were not to be lost.¹

The Extremist group encouraged this thinking and from the beginning were on the alert for an issue on which they could unite the non-officials to defeat the Government. The voting on the budget seemed a likely opportunity and they chose the police grant for a trial of strength. On 17 March, before a packed Chamber, Wasimuddin Ahmed, Muslim member for Pabna, moved that the demand for this department be reduced by Rs. 23,32,700 to the budget figure of 1920-21. He was offering the Government an opportunity, he said, to demonstrate its respect for the opinions of the M.L.Cs. and thus refute the non-co-operators' assertion that the reformed Council was a puppet show. The abolition of some of the senior ranks in the police force would be a popular move and, at the same time, it would effect a worthwhile saving of funds.

The Extremists had chosen their ground well for even the old hands would join in an attack on the police. Surendranath Ray declaimed:

For the last 8 years my friend Maulvi Fazl-ul Haq and myself have condemned the increased expenditure on the police, but nobody heard us. It was a cry in the wilderness. We were on the alert, but as our mouths were stopped on account of the anarchist movement we could not say anything. Now that there is nobody who can say that the anarchists are still flourishing in the country, we have every right to ask the Government not to increase but to reduce the grant.

¹ 'If they did not go to the length of bearding the lion like their countrymen outside they might at least tweak his tail now and then.' (Drummond, pp. 119-20.)
Wheeler was infuriated by this unconcealed attempt to embarrass the Government. 'This is, if I may say so, one of the most irresponsible resolutions which I have heard moved in this Council, and again, if I may say so, I have seldom heard a series of more irresponsible speeches', he thundered. His words were wasted. The motion was carried by 51 votes to 42.¹

Ronaldshay regarded this resolution as a strictly unconstitutional invasion of the powers of the reserved half of the Government and he considered himself justified in exercising his statutory right to restore the grant. He realised, however, that such action would discredit the Moderates and give the non-co-operators another handle with which to beat the Council. So he decided, against the advice of Wheeler and Kerr, to try to manipulate the Council proceedings and have the grant revoted. He drafted a series of questions for S.R. Das to put to the Government and the replies which Wheeler should give.

Das: Will the Hon'ble the Member in charge of the Police Department be pleased to state what action will be necessary, if effect is given to the recent vote of this Council reducing the Police grant by Rs. 23 lakhs?
Wheeler: If effect is given to the vote referred to as it stands, it will be necessary to abandon all new schemes, and immediately to reduce either the pay or the numbers of the Force, or both.
Das: Would Government be prepared to maintain the Force at the strength and on the pay and terms of service proposed by them, when the Budget was submitted, until the Council has had further time to consider the matter?

Wheeler: It would obviously be improper for Government to incur expenditure upon a scale which was inevitably and palpably in excess of the sum voted, and, should they do so, the audit authorities would most certainly, and properly, comment adversely upon their action. Moreover, if such an action was taken in the earlier months of the year, subsequent reductions would necessarily be still more drastic.

It was arranged that C.W. Rhodes, a Bengal Chamber of Commerce representative, should then move for an adjournment to discuss the grave situation revealed by these replies.¹

The business came before the Council on 1 April and all went according to plan. The Government had been active in the preceding ten days enlisting support among the M.L.Cs. and the adjournment debate was characterised by a more conciliatory tone.² This gave the Governor the excuse he wanted to avoid certifying the police demand and before the middle of the month he had persuaded the Council Standing Committee on Police to recommend a supplementary grant, which was carried through the Council on 21 April.³

'On the whole I think that we may congratulate ourselves upon having got round a rather awkward corner satisfactorily', wrote Ronaldshay to Montagu a week later.⁴ He had avoided a direct clash between the Government and the Council which, at that early stage,

¹ Essayez, pp. 140-2. BLCP, 1 Apr 1921, vol. I, no. vi, p. 32.
² BLCP, ibid, pp. 125-48.
⁴ Essayez, p. 143.
would have endangered the workings of the institution and he had, he hoped, enabled the Moderates to retreat without losing face. He was unduly sanguine. In fact his device was so transparent that it was treated with derision by the non-co-operationist press. 'Are we to call this trickery by the name of co-operation?' asked the Nayak. 'Do you mean to achieve the salvation of the country through these means? If that be so, we must frankly say that non-co-operation is a thousand times better than this servile form of co-operation'. 'Shamelessness, thy name is "Council membership",' declared Swatantra.¹ At the same time, scorn was heaped upon the Ministers for their apparent inability either to influence the reserved side of the Government or to control the Council. '... as cockroaches are to birds our "Reform" Ministers are to the English and Dominion Ministers', sneered the Amrita Bazar Patrika.² In the Nayak's opinion Bannerjea was 'now nothing but a black edition of Sir Henry Wheeler' and Liberty spoke of the Ministers as 'mercenary partisans'.³

The Testing Time

Writing to Sapru from London on 1 June 1921, Evan Cotton, a member of the India Office Advisory Committee, ventured the opinion that the

¹ Nayak,* 23 Apr 1921. Swatantra,* 23 Apr 1921.
² Amrita Bazar Patrika,* 10 Mar 1921.
³ Nayak,* 22 Mar 1921. Liberty,* 16 Apr 1921.
reformed institutions would shortly face their severest trial. 'I do feel that while the reforms have been attended with remarkable success, the danger point has not yet been passed', he said. 'Mid year will see the testing time: when Ministers have matured their plans and the question of providing funds becomes insistent. Finance has always been present to my mind as the great difficulty in the way. I should be sorry therefore if the public attention were in any way distracted'.

The Ministers also realised that although the conclusion of the Budget session gave them a breathing space they could not afford to remain idle. In particular they had to consolidate their position in the Council if they were not again to be forced into a humiliating dependence upon the officials. Bannerjea therefore set about organising a legislative party, with S.R. Das as his chief whip, and an M.L.Cs.' club - the Constitutional Club - as a rallying point. The Extremists refused to participate. Ali Chaudhuri was willing to lend the support of his Muslim followers, but made it clear that they remained, first and foremost, a communal bloc. The European and Anglo-Indian non-officials pledged their allegiance to the Ministers, and the balance of the Hindu members, 30 or so in number, expressed their willingness to co-operate with Bannerjea and Mitra, although they were reluctant

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1 Sapru papers.
to extend this to Chaudhuri. They were also chary of becoming involved in a formal party organisation, for this suggested a public commitment to the Government and that was no way of advancing one's political career in the atmosphere of hostility then prevailing. Consequently the Constitutional Club was no great success and in the Council the Ministers could be assured of support only for the less controversial questions concerning the transferred departments.

The non-co-operators also regarded mid-year as a testing-time and their determination was to distract public attention from the Legislative Council. In the early months of 1921 they had been stirring up labour trouble and they achieved their greatest success in April and May when they persuaded a large group of Assam tea labourers to leave the gardens for their homes in Bihar and the United Provinces. The majority of these coolies became stranded at Chandpur, a steamer-station on the river Padma in Eastern Bengal, and they suffered severe hardship before arrangements were made for their forward transport. There was general anger at the Government's handling of the situation and the non-co-operators secured much publicity for their work among the distressed.

The Moderates came badly out of the affair. For the two months, May and June, when it dominated the news headlines, the Council was

not in session and the issue was fought out between the officials and the non-co-operators. The latter were quick to draw attention to the Moderates' absence and to point the moral that they were no longer of any significance.

When the Council met again in July they were faced with the awkward choice of either joining in the popular attack on the Government and thereby enhancing the non-co-operators' victory, or echoing the Government's strictures on the non-co-operators and being written off by their countrymen as lackeys of imperialism. They vacillated between the two—alternately criticising the Government and the non-co-operators— with the result that they got the worst of both worlds. Each side dismissed them as tools of the other, and they were even upbraided by the Calcutta European press, which up until this time had commended them for their support of the reforms.

Elated by this success, the non-co-operators pressed home their advantage. They kept the agitation in Eastern Bengal going through strikes on the railways and in Calcutta they organised a series of demonstrations and hartals. In October the Congress leader in Chittagong, J.M. Sen Gupta, and a number of his followers were arrested and brought to Calcutta for trial. Nothing could have been more

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2 GB, Political, 12-C-72(1), A27, Jul 1921. NP, Jul 1921, passim.
3 Englishman,* 3 Jun 1921.
embarrassing for the Moderates than the sight of their rivals, bedecked with the martyr's garlands, being cheered triumphantly to gaol — and well the non-co-operators knew it. These are the fruits of the reforms, they said, the products of a mixed brown and white bureaucracy: a costlier administration, an unending prospect of new taxation and, worst of all, repression.¹ 'There are only two parties in India just now and not more', declared the Dainik Basumati. 'One is the nationalist party and the other the traitors'.²

The disorders continued and after serious violence in Calcutta in November 1921 the provincial Government applied the Indian Criminal Law Amendment Act and the Prevention of Seditious Meetings Act. Wide-scale arrests were made in the second week in December. Now the Moderates were in serious trouble. The enforcement of this repressive legislation offended their nationalist sentiment but how could they voice their anger without appearing to be merely spokesmen for the non-co-operators? When on 19 December a Calcutta member, Surendranath Mallick, moved for an adjournment to discuss the matter, Wheeler had no hesitation in accusing him and his supporters of irresponsibility. R.M. Watson-Smyth, a Bengal Chamber of Commerce representative, was more outspoken. 'Government has now taken action and its authority has been challenged, and the time has come when we must declare ourselves on one side or the other', he said. 'We have come to the

¹ Amrita Bazar Patrika,* 30 Oct 1921.
² Dainik Basumati,* 5 Nov 1921.
parting of the ways .... Hatred, unfortunately, is at the bottom of a great deal of this movement against the Government. Racial hatred, the blind hatred of the East for the West. This brought angry denials from the Indian non-officials and Burdwan, rising late in the debate, felt the need for a rallying speech. He was confident, he said, that the spirit in the country was not as bad as it was represented and that many responsible men approved of the action that had been taken. 'I, for myself, wish to state clearly that what has been done by the Government of Bengal has had my fullest support'. A voice: 'What about the Ministers?'

This interjection touched a sore point. It was significant that none of the Ministers had taken part in the debate. They held their peace for of all the Moderates they were in the most wretched position. Repressive legislation was no more agreeable to them than to their fellow nationalists but in the light of the information about the riots that was available to them as members of the Government, they saw the question in a different perspective. With the whole of political Bengal up in arms at the Government's action, however, it would have been suicidal for them to speak out as Burdwan had done; yet they could not join in the attacks without being disloyal to Ronaldshay and the Executive Council. They were not constitutionally responsible for the actions of the reserved half of the Government but in the popular view they were implicated in what had been done.

Their position was made especially difficult by the practice prevailing in the Government of Bengal of joint consultation between Executive Councillors and Ministers on all important questions of policy. This system had been initiated by Ronaldshay, with the best of intentions and the full approval of the Ministers, to assist in the creation of a spirit of mutual confidence within his Government. The responsibility for a decision lay solely with one or other half of the Government, but by encouraging free discussion between both sides Ronaldshay hoped to build a team spirit. He considered it vital to keep the reformed institutions working and this system, although it offended against the strict division of functions, seemed to assist in doing that. Ronaldshay was pleased with the result. 'The relations between the two halves of my Government have been excellent', he told Montagu in April 1921, 'and I have invariably discussed matters of importance round a table at which Members of the Executive Council and Ministers sat. Sweet reasonableness has been the outstanding feature of all such discussions'.

Initially the Ministers were well pleased with an arrangement which brought all administrative issues within their cognisance but it was soon public knowledge that they participated in the discussion of reserved subjects and, when unpopular decisions were taken, they were considered blameworthy. Their only loophole was the fact that

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28 Apr 1921, Essayez, p. 143.
no vote was taken at the joint meetings. The final decision on
reserved subjects rested with the Governor and Executive Council.
This one remaining means of escape, however, was closed by Ronaldshay's
successor, the Earl of Lytton.

Another Man with a Mission

Lytton came to Bengal in March 1922 fresh from the India Office,
where, as Under-Secretary for two years, he had been inspired by
Montagu's enthusiasm for the reforms. In taking up the governorship
he had a strong sense of mission. 'At that time I felt that the
moment was critical in the history of India, and that it was all-
important to get the Reforms started on the right lines', he wrote
in his memoirs. 'I believed that I might render valuable service in
this capacity, and the call seemed to me one which I could not refuse'.

He felt that he was making a great sacrifice in interrupting at the
age of 45 a distinguished political career which could be expected to
give him a position in the Cabinet at an early date. His intention
was to return to England as soon as he had accomplished his task.

Although he had no experience of India, he had a clear vision
of what that task involved: the preparation of Bengal for a further
transfer of power by the development of the parliamentary system and

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1 Pundits & Elephants, p. 8.
2 Ibid, pp. 8 & 9-10.
the provision of opportunities for Indians to influence all decisions of Government.¹

With the first end - the development of the parliamentary system - in view, he brought Evan Cotton out from England to succeed the ailing Shamsul Huda as President of the Bengal Legislative Council. Cotton came of a family which had served the Company and Crown in India for more than 150 years. Following in the footsteps of his father, Sir Henry, he had given up a successful career at the Calcutta Bar in 1906 to work in England for Indian constitutional reforms. He had lived off interest from investments and devoted his time to lobbying on behalf of the Indian National Congress. From 1910 he had also served on the London County Council. As a member of the India Office Advisory Committee he had assisted Montagu with the work involved in implementing the new constitution and from 1920 he had been Honorary Secretary of the Indian Reforms Committee, 'a British Organisation in support of the Moderate Party in India'.² Eager as he was to return to India and holding opinions similar to Lytton's own, he seemed the very man to assist the new Governor in his liberal undertaking.³

¹ Pundits & Elephants, pp. 21-3.
² Quoted from the Committee's letterhead. (Sapru papers).
³ 'The Morning Post has been holding up its hands in horror at the notion that the British, who came to India as conquerors and remained on as sahibs, should continue as servants. But that, and none other, is the inner meaning of the reforms which have come into being: nor is there anything in the appellation of "servant of India" of which an Englishman need feel ashamed'. (Cotton: "Parties and Policies in India", Contemporary Review, vol. CXIX, 1921, p. 176.)
In pursuing his second aim - the provision of opportunities for Indians to influence administrative decisions - Lytton was following a line marked out by Montagu. 'I am quite sure now, that we have got to go in for Indianization', Montagu had written in July 1921. 'We have got to realize that self-government does not merely mean political reform, but the substitution of an indigenous administration for a foreign administration'. It was this spirit of Indianization that Lytton intended to promote and he would give evidence of his intention by taking his Indian Ministers into his full confidence. He would conduct his Government as a unit, treating both Executive Councillors and Ministers as members of a single Cabinet. Henceforth there would be joint decision as well as joint discussion on all matters of substance. And determined that his intention should be publicised, he informed the members of the Legislative Council of his decision in his reply to their address of welcome on 31 March 1922.

The comparison with Carmichael is remarkable. Here again was a British Liberal with a sense of mission, coming full of goodwill and determined to press ahead faster than a strict interpretation of the constitution would allow because of his conviction that Bengal

was ready for a further transfer of power. Unfortunately there were the same heartbreaking disappointments in store for him and, like Carmichael, he was to leave Bengal a disillusioned man. In his memoirs he wrote of his decision to accept the appointment as Governor:

'Had I known then what I came to know later - that the discontented Indian Nationalists, whom I hoped to win by sympathy, did not want a sympathetic Government, but either a Government of their own making or one which they could abuse as tyrannical - I would never have gone to India. Had my decision been different it would have been no worse for India and certainly very much better for myself'.

Disappointments

His troubles began even before he reached Calcutta. On embarking for India at Marseilles he learnt that Montagu had been forced to resign from the India Office following a dispute with the Cabinet. Lytton was unhappy at the prospect of working with his successor, Lord Peel.

As a further blow to his optimism he found that his initial efforts to win public support in Bengal were regarded with suspicion. Replying to the address of welcome from the British Indian Association, for instance, he described the reformed constitution as a bridge over

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1 Pundits & Elephants, p. 9.
2 Ibid, p. 20.
which India might walk to the promised land of self-government.¹ This provoked what to Lytton seemed a churlish retort from the Amrita Bazar Patrika under the heading 'Bridge or trap?': 'The mirage of a bridge is thrown over the river. And the majority of our countrymen fear that they will be drowned in trying to cross it. A few have made the attempt and are sinking in their full view'.²

When Lytton turned his attention to the details of administration, he was appalled by the state of the provincial finances. As expected the deficit for 1921-22 had exceeded two crores thereby depleting the provincial balances. The Government of India had remitted the provincial contribution for the year but it had refused to reconsider the Meston award and continued complaints from Bengal had provoked a sharp reprimand from the Viceroy in December 1921.³ The prospect of reducing expenditure on the transferred departments, so vital to the success of the reforms; of imposing new taxation; and of conducting a running fight with the Government of India over the Meston award was almost too much for Lytton and for some months he talked despondently of resignation.⁴

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¹ 30 Mar 1922, BIA, Publications, vol. XIII.
² Amrita Bazar Patrika,¹ 1 Apr 1922.
³ In address to Bengal Mahajan Sabha, 14 Dec 1921. (Sapru papers.)
He was also distressed by the antipathy towards his policy of Indianization displayed by British I.C.S. officers, inside and outside his Government, and by the end of his first year in Bengal he had reached the conclusion that further constitutional advance would have to await the growth of a new spirit among the officials.¹

The implementation of the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms had been accompanied by wholesale resignations from the services, especially of senior I.C.S. officers,² and with a growing problem of recruitment in England, grievances over salaries and resentment at the attacks made by Congress politicians, morale in the services was particularly low in 1922.³ From the officials' viewpoint nothing could have been more untimely than the new Governor's publicised determination to give Indians increased say in Government policy. Their sentiments were faithfully represented in the submission of a Bengal District Superintendent of Police to the Royal Commission on Superior Public Services in 1923: 'The bitter attacks made upon our Service by Members of the Councils and in the Nationalist Press, the grossly biased and lying reports regarding "Police oppression", ... all these compel me to believe that we are unlikely to be given fair play, should we be placed

¹ Pundits & Elephants, pp. 33-4.
under the control of any Body likely to be influenced by the voice of the audible minority'.

From the members of the Bengal Executive Council, who had previously kept their grumbles to themselves, Lytton's policy provoked open objections. They complained that 'the "decisions of joint meetings" have substantially influenced the "orders of the Executive Council" in a way that they were not intended to do' and they protested at the amount of their working time that was wasted 'in the present state of fusion between politics and administration'. Their disagreements with Lytton came to a head over a suggestion from the Government of India to reduce the size of the provincial Executive Council. They thought this a reasonable proposal but they were angry when Lytton suggested that it would be a nice gesture to submit the matter to the Legislative Council for consideration. 'I consider it a very dangerous practice to allow the Legislative Council to have a finger in the pie with regard to appointments by the Crown, and I would strongly deprecate that procedure', wrote Burdwan as senior member of the Executive Council. The two British members were of the same opinion and Lytton had to drop the idea.

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1 D.R. Hardwick, Officiating Superintendent of Police, Noakhali, memorandum, 1 Dec 1923, GB, Appointment, 8P-26(Part V), B881-976, Feb 1924.
2 GB, Appointment, 6R-38(1-2), A5-6, Jul 1925.
3 Ibid, 18L-88(1-2), A24-25, Sep 1922.
His Ministers fully approved of his policy but after a time even they were forced to admit that their difficulties had been increased. The practice of joint decision left them wide open to attack in the legislature and, at the same time, they were subjected to increasing pressure from the Executive Councillors to give public support to the measures of which they had approved in private.¹

The refusal by the members of the Legislative Council to recognise the distinction between reserved and transferred subjects greatly annoyed Lytton,² and dissolving the first reformed Council in August 1923 he told them that this had been their chief shortcoming. 'There is no very marked difference of attitude towards that portion of the Executive which is responsible and that which is still irresponsible', he said. 'Both are indiscriminately classified as the Bureaucracy and regarded as a fair target for invective'.³ His complaint was unreasonable in view of his own determination to disregard dyarchy and, by the time he left Bengal in 1927, he had realised that the error was his own. He wrote in his memoirs:

Looking back at the end of my five years, I thought that I had probably made a mistake in treating my Government as a single unit and making no distinction between the Reserved and Transferred Departments. I had hoped by so doing to give my Ministers a voice in the whole policy of the Government and to make the Legislative Council feel that they too were concerned

¹ E.g. GB, Appointment, 6R-43(4-150) of 1921, A234-380, May 1922.
² Pundits & Elephants, p. 38.
with the policy of Government as a whole. The only result, however, was to identify the Ministers with a Government that was disliked, and to weaken instead of strengthening their position.¹

**University of Calcutta**

Lytton's difficulties with the Executive and Legislative Councils were his most serious but they received less public attention than a dispute in which he was involved with the University of Calcutta. This was a significant affair for it arose from a clash between the Montagu-Chelmsford Government and legislature - new institutions exercising new powers - and the Vice-Chancellor and Senate of the University - old institutions trying to consolidate their powers.

The dispute revolved around the commanding figure of Sir Asutosh Mukherjea, the most outstanding and controversial personality in bhadralok society. Mukherjea's life had been ruled by two loves: the High Court and the University. His devotion to the former had been rewarded with a judgeship and to the latter with the position of Vice-Chancellor. He had been given this appointment first in 1906 after his unsuccessful but outstanding campaign against Curzon's Universities Act, and he served for an unprecedented term of eight years, during which time he was instrumental in widening the university's range of activities, particularly in the field of postgraduate teaching which was his chief preoccupation.

¹ *Pundits & Elephants*, p. 180.
Autocratic by nature, he made many enemies and when, after his replacement as Vice-Chancellor in 1914, he continued to use his influence to control the development of the post-graduate departments, a party was organised in the Senate to oppose him. It was unsuccessful in preventing his having all post-graduate teaching consolidated under the university's control and this development received the approval of the Calcutta University Commission which reported in 1919.\footnote{Hundred Years of the University of Calcutta, p. 193.}

The Commission also recommended that jurisdiction over the university be transferred from the Government of India to the Government of Bengal and this was effected in March 1921, with the Governor of Bengal replacing the Viceroy as Chancellor and the provincial Minister of Education assuming responsibility for university affairs.

At the same time, Mukherjea was invited by Ronaldshay to serve again as Vice-Chancellor. This perturbed his opponents and, in search of a course of action, they hit upon the idea of attacking his administration through the Legislative Council, which now had authority over the university. They were able to enlist allies amongst the Eastern Bengal members who feared that Mukherjea's expansionist policies would drain finance from the new University of Dacca, which had also been transferred to the control of the Government of Bengal.\footnote{BLCP, 17 Mar 1921, vol. I, no. v, pp. 214-43.} In August 1921 Rishindranath Sarkar, a High Court lawyer and member for
Bankura West, moved for an enquiry into the financial administration of the university, alleging grave irregularities in the expenditure on the post-graduate departments. After a heated debate lasting two days in which charges of personal malice were made, the motion was carried by a narrow margin.  

This brought a vigorous counter-attack from Mukherjea and his supporters. At meetings of the university Senate and in articles in the Calcutta Review, which had just been taken over by the university, they accused the Legislative Council and the Government of partiality towards Dacca University and a desire to ruin the old centre of learning. The Education Minister, Mitra, was angered by what he considered unjust criticism and, introducing the education budget in the Council on 1 March 1922, he described the financial administration of the university as 'deplorable'. In his opinion its deficit of nearly five lakhs was due to 'thoughtless expansion' of post-graduate studies.

Mukherjea took this as a personal affront and let it be known that he had no intention of agreeing to the Government's interference in university affairs. He was supported by the Senate which entered into an acrimonious correspondence with the Education Department on the subject of university finance. A crisis was reached in August

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1922 when the Government offered the university monetary assistance on condition that there be no further expansion of its activities until it was solvent once more. This was too much for Mukherjea. 'There is a sinister, perfidious campaign against this University', he told the Senate. 'Take it from me that as long as there is one drop of blood in me, I will not participate in the humiliation of this University .... We shall not be a part of the Secretariat of the Government'.

The Government's reply was to frame two Bills, one for the creation of a board to take control of secondary education from the university and the other for the reform of the university itself. Lytton, who took very seriously his *ex officio* position as Chancellor, told Mukherjea of his personal interest in the legislation and asked for his support, but the Vice-Chancellor replied that he could not acquiesce in what appeared to be an effort to destroy the university's independence. There followed a lengthy correspondence and a number of interviews between the two men, with neither willing to give an inch, and finally in March 1923 Lytton told Mukherjea, whose two-year term of office was almost up, that he and Mitra would not reappoint him as Vice-Chancellor unless his opposition ceased.

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1 8 Dec 1922, quoted, Hundred Years of the University of Calcutta, pp. 288–9.

In taking this action Lytton had made a grave mistake. He could reasonably expect to have the support of Mukherjea's powerful enemies in an attack upon the person of the Vice-Chancellor, but in threatening the independence of the office he was bound to arouse the hostility of the bhadralok as a class. The bhadralok were jealous of their control of the University of Calcutta, for the preservation of their cultural identity depended upon their continued monopoly of higher education. Moreover, as one of the few avenues of constructive public activity available to them in their circumscribed colonial society, university politics had assumed an extraordinary significance. For these reasons the Vice-Chancellorship was considered one of the most important and respected public offices in Bengal and the bhadralok would not countenance an attack upon its powers by an English Governor.

Mukherjea realised that Lytton had taken a false step and he penned a thumping rejoinder:

You complain that I have hitherto given you no help. I maintain that I have constantly offered you my help and advice which, for reasons best known to you alone, you have not accepted .... I am not surprised that neither you nor your Minister can tolerate me. You assert that you want us to be men. You have one before you, who can speak and act fearlessly according to his convictions, and you are not able to stand the sight of him. It may not be impossible for you to secure the services of a subservient Vice-Chancellor, prepared always to carry out the mandates of your Government, and to act as a spy on the Senate. He may enjoy the confidence of your Government but he will not certainly enjoy the confidence of the Senate and the public of Bengal. We shall watch with interest the performances of a Vice-Chancellor of this type, creating a

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new tradition for the office.

I send you without hesitation the only answer which an
honourable man can send, an answer which you and your advisers
expect and desire: I decline the insulting offer you have made
to me.¹

Unshaken by this broadside, Lytton offered the Vice-Chancellorship
to Bhuprendranath Basu. Mukherjea then read the Governor's letter and
his own to the university Senate and the uproar which followed the
publication of the two letters in the press was extremely embarrassing
for the Government. Lytton and Mitra were held to have come badly
out of the affair² and its effect was to contribute to the discredit
of all connected with the reformed Government and Council in the
opinion of the bhadralok at large.

Corporation of Calcutta

While Mitra was in trouble with the university, Banerjea was
struggling with problems of local self-government. In his first
months in office he had offended his departmental officials and added
to the number of his political enemies by appointing relations and
friends to positions at his disposal in local bodies.³ This was a
minor issue, however, compared with the storm which blew up over the
reform of the Calcutta Corporation.

¹ Mukherjea to Lytton, 26 Mar 1923, quoted, Hundred Years of the
University of Calcutta, pp. 298-300.
² NP, 14 Apr 1923.
Hitavadi,* 15 Apr 1921. Amrita Bazar Patrika,* 24 Nov 1921.
The legislation to effect this reform had been in preparation for some years before Banerjeea took up his portfolio but he immediately set to work to mould the secretariat's product into a shape conformable to his nationalist ideals. He was particularly concerned to reduce to a minimum communal and other special representation on the Corporation.\(^1\)

The Bill which he introduced to the Legislative Council on 22 November 1921 provided 13 reserved seats in general electorates for the Muslims and 12 seats in special electorates for the Europeans.\(^2\) Banerjeea explained that he had avoided separate communal electorates because they were a hindrance to 'the upbuilding of a united Indian nationality'. 'In their own interests, I would ask the representatives of the Muhammadan community to discourage the system', he said.\(^3\)

There was no debate at this stage but 20 Muslims and one low-caste Hindu member voted against the motion as a protest against Banerjeea's neglect of the principle of the representation of minorities through separate electorates.\(^4\) The succeeding motion for the circulation of the Bill, which was moved a week later, brought down the wrath of the minorities upon the head of the Minister. Muslims, Marwaris and

\(^1\) GB, Legislative, 1-74, Dec 1923.

\(^2\) The European electorates were the Bengal Chamber of Commerce, the Calcutta Trades Association and the Calcutta Port Commission.


\(^4\) Ibid, pp. 133-4.
Europeans all demanded recognition of the principle of separate communal electorates. The Muslims were particularly incensed, accusing the Hindus of a plot to destroy the political existence of the Muslim community. 'It is a pity that in the first year of the Reforms the Muhammadans have been compelled to feel what swaraj in India will be', declared Syed Nasim Ali. Exercising great tact, Banerjea assured his opponents that the question of communal representation would be reconsidered if the public so demanded and he persuaded them to agree to the motion without a division.

The public discussion of the Bill which followed was characterised by a narrow sectional spirit, with each community striving to increase its representation at the expense of others. For the first time in Bengal there was evidence of overt Hindu communalism, and Muslim anger was aggravated by a campaign against cow killing led by a member of the Corporation, Amulya Dhone Addy. Addy was also an M.L.C. and his inclusion on the select committee to consider the Bill brought the charge from the Muslims that Banerjea was packing it with opponents of communal electorates.

The committee's report was not presented until February 1923 and in the interim communal relations had deteriorated. The alliance

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2 GB, Legislative, 1-74, Dec 1923.
3 BLCP, 3 Jul 1922, vol. VIII, pp. 87-108.
between the Congress and the Khilafat party, which had given Hindus and Muslims a common ground, had been strained by Gandhi's sudden decision in February 1922 to end civil disobedience. With his imprisonment in the following month, one restraint upon Hindu communalism was removed and the old fears of Hindu raj were revived in Muslim minds. The collapse of the Khilafat movement at the end of the year, following the overthrow of the Caliph in Turkey, added to the general tension. In Bengal there was trouble between Hindus and Muslims over appointments to Government jobs.¹ The Hindu majority in the select committee on the Municipal Bill refused to consider the provision of communal electorates and, at the same time, accepted a proposal of Addy's to give the Corporation power to restrict the slaughter of cattle in the city.²

For the Muslims this was the last straw and when the Council again took the Bill into consideration in February 1923 they marshalled all their forces against it. The activities of the Hindu communalists had also upset the low-caste Hindus and the Europeans, and their representatives decided to support the campaign for communal electorates. The Government was divided on the question, with Rahim and Chaudhuri insisting upon the officials being allowed a free vote. Finally a small group of bhadralok M.L.Cs. announced that, in the interests

¹ E.g. see BLCP, 25 Aug 1922, vol. IX, pp. 159-70.
² GB, Legislative, 1-74, Dec 1923.
of communal harmony, they too would support the Muslims' claim for separate electorates.¹

Defeat stared Banerjea in the face. To save what he could of the principle he held so dear, he accepted a compromise suggested by a European member: the Muslims would have separate communal electorates for the first nine years, after which they would have only reserved seats in general electorates.²

This was regarded by the great majority of the bhadralok as an outright victory for the Muslims, and Banerjea was reviled as a traitor to his own principles. Even the Indian Association and his old newspaper, the Bengalee, condemned him.³ It was a tragedy that his last and greatest work should have been marred by those communal antagonisms with which he had struggled throughout his political life. His service as a Minister, which was to have set the seal upon a great career, had brought him disappointment and unpopularity.⁴

The dissension aroused by the Municipal Act was not simply Banerjea's private tragedy. It was also evidence that the lines separating the communal groups in the Legislative Council were now

³ IA Committee meeting proceedings, 3 Mar 1923. Bengalee, 23 Feb 1923.
⁴ See Nation in Making, pp. 348-9.
drawn hard and fast. The suspicion which prevailed between the three main sections - Hindus, Muslims and Europeans - hindered the smooth working of the institution and poisoned the main stream of public life. Communalism had even divided the Government against itself. The compromise on Muslim representation, to which many of the Hindu M.L.Cs. had assented, was bitterly resented by the bhadralok as a whole, with the effect, once again, of discrediting the reformed Council and Government.

A Revelation of Weakness

The despondency which filled the hearts of the members of the first Montagu-Chelmsford legislatures as they approached their last year's work is reflected in a letter which Sapru received in June 1922 from Sir Devaprasad Sarvadhikari, a Bengal representative in the Indian Legislative Assembly. 'You must have realised that moderates - real moderates - are having a bad time of it and will have worse', wrote Sarvadhikari. 'They are no favourites of the Government & the officials, nor of the people. Any protest against Government & official action mark them down as "not different from Extremists". They are disorganised among themselves and mutual jealousy is not the least of the weaknesses of some'.

30 Jun 1922, Sapru papers.
One man in Bengal who was determined not to give way to this despondency was S.R. Das, now provincial Advocate General. In the latter half of 1922 he made another effort to rally support for the Government in the Legislative Council and outside he organised a Constitutional Party to work for the reforms. He had surprising success in enlisting among his followers a group of ex-terrorists, men who had been interned during the war and who now assured him that they had seen the error of their old ways. His work was commended by Lytton who gave it his full support until he was informed by his police officers in mid-1923 that the Constitutional Party was a cover for a terrorist conspiracy. The conspirators had shrewdly reasoned that nowhere could they be safer than in an organisation headed by the Advocate-General. To his mortification, Das discovered that far from influencing others as he had intended, it was he who was being used.¹

His fate was shared in lesser degree by his fellow M.L.Cs. By 1923 they too were being used. They had been so thoroughly discredited in the public estimation, they were so divided amongst themselves and their morale was so low that they had no resources with which to resist the pressures put upon them by the non-co-operators, who had a large popular following. Most of the members saw no prospect of re-election to the new Council at the end of the year unless they

¹*Pundits & Elephants*, pp. 57-8.
made their peace with the non-co-operators and many concluded that their best course was to put themselves at the disposal of their local Congress leader. As a result there was a sizeable and growing section of the Legislative Council acting under orders from the non-co-operators: asking questions and moving resolutions at their behest; speaking and voting as they instructed.¹

This display of pusillanimity gained the Councillors nothing. By selling their souls they had further injured their public reputation and destroyed the Government's confidence. The humiliating position to which they were reduced is illustrated by the actions of Khan Bahadur Rahamatjan Chaudhuri, Muslim representative for Faridpur North, in connection with the Council enquiry into the Charmanair affair in July 1923.

Charmanair, a village near Shibohar in the Faridpur District of Eastern Bengal, was the scene of a struggle between a gang of dacoits and a police party in the early hours of the morning of 17 May 1923. Only three of the gang were captured and, before they could be taken away, the police were unexpectedly set upon by the villagers, severely beaten and tied up. They were not released until further police arrived later in the day. Initial attempts to discover why the villagers had behaved in this extraordinary fashion were frustrated by the fact that many had gone into hiding and for that reason a sudden descent

¹ GB, Political, 12C-126 of 1922, B506-10, Jan 1923.
upon the village was made by 48 constables and twelve officers on 5 June.

In the house to house search which followed there may have been brutality and there was certainly rough handling of both men and women, with frequent intrusions into purdah quarters of Muslim homes. This was regarded by the village men as an outrage upon the modesty of their womenfolk and a few days later the local Congressmen took up the matter. They sent telegrams to the Provincial Congress Committee and the Calcutta press, alleging murder, rape and torture by the police. This caused a great stir. The District Magistrate, G.P. Hogg, conducted a personal enquiry at Charmanair, which convinced him that the allegations were grossly exaggerated but, in spite of the publication of his findings, the charges against the police found wide credence.

On 4 July there was an adjournment debate in the Legislative Council on the affair and, writing a few days later to his Divisional Commissioner, Hogg commented on the part played by the local Muslim member:

Before Khan Bahadur Rahamatjan Ghoudhuri, M.L.C. went down to Calcutta for the last Council meeting, he came to see me. I took advantage of the opportunity to give him a few details about Char Manair, and in particular told him the real facts surrounding the principal allegations. My idea, of course, was that he might be able to correct any false rumours that might reach him.

This morning the Khan Bahadur called on me and I casually remarked that he had spoken in the Char Manair debate. He asked to be "excused", and told me that two Mahommedans, one giving the name of Lal Meah, from some village in Shibchar Police Station had called on him in Calcutta and told him he would get no votes in the next election unless he said
something. Some Shibchar students, now in Calcutta, also came to him (on a separate occasion), and gave him the same intimation. Mr J.N. Maitra, M.L.C. also asked him to say something.

The Khan Bahadur's words included the following, - which I jotted down on a slip as they were made:—

"I know I have committed an offence against you, - but it was only for fear of not getting votes and nothing else. I was not only requested to say something, - but threatened that I could expect no votes next election.

Only for fear of this, I said something, but moderately".

As a matter of fact, his speech was very moderate. It is pathetic, more than anything else, to reflect that he had not the nerve to make any use of the information which was in his possession, particularly as he was convinced of the falsity of the charges.

Lytton's comment when he read this report was: 'A most lamentable revelation of weakness!'\(^1\)

A Failure and a Success

In the general election held four months later the Khan Bahadur received no reward for his action. He was resoundingly defeated by a stalwart non-co-operator.\(^2\) Most of his fellow councillors fared as badly and, looking for an excuse, they naturally blamed the reformed constitution. Mitra was voicing their general opinion when he complained in June 1924: '... our party tried to work dyarchy loyally, but dyarchy killed our party'.\(^3\) Whether or not the form of the constitution was the vital factor, the Moderates were justified in believing that

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\(^1\) GB, Police, P4A-5, B3-18, Oct 1923. (East Pakistan Record Office).

\(^2\) PP, 1924, \(\text{Cmd. 21547}\), vol. XVIII, p. 528.

\(^3\) PP, 1924-5, \(\text{Cmd. 23627}\), vol. X, p. 632.
membership of the Council had discredited them. They had been unable to demonstrate complete control over the Government which would have enabled them to return to the electors with the boast that they were masters of the situation and, in discharging their responsibility as legislators to assist the Ministers in carrying on the administration, they had injured their reputations as nationalists. The articulate section of political society in Bengal still demanded of its nationalist politicians agitation against the Government, and the Moderates' efforts in the Council on this score had paled into insignificance alongside the spectacular displays of the non-co-operators.

For the Ministers the record of the first reformed Council was no more satisfactory than it was for the ordinary member. Looking back from the end of 1923, their original hope of vindicating their acceptance of the reforms by an outstanding administrative achievement and thereby establishing their party in a commanding position, seemed rather absurd. At every turn they had met obstacles. Their developmental programmes had been stunted by the shortage of funds and their legislation had been twisted out of shape by sectional pressures. They had been unable to control the Council with their old methods and their efforts to develop a satisfactory organisation had failed. They left office with the knowledge that their work had contributed to communal enmity and that they were held in contempt by many of their compatriots.
Sapru's hope of 1921 that at the end of the first session 'the country' would find that the new councils had 'given a good account of themselves' had obviously been disappointed. But the question arises: need this necessarily have meant electoral defeat for the Moderates? What was 'the country' of which Sapru spoke? What was the section of political society with which the Moderates were discredited by their actions in the Council? Simply it was the urban educated classes, the newspaper readers, the bhadralok. These were the people who were heard in politics but the important fact was that under the 1919 constitution they were not the only people who voted, and many of those who did had no concern with what happened in the Legislative Council in Calcutta.

A District Officer writing from Chittagong as late as 1929 testified to this:

The vote is regarded, perhaps, as a sign of respectability and so far from being a privilege, as one amongst other inexplicable duties imposed upon them by Government. They exercise their votes not in favour of a policy, but to satisfy the demands of friendship or the insistence of canvassers, though they have, perhaps, some vague impression that the candidate selected may be able to secure some favours for themselves and their localities in the way of exemption from taxes or improved local conditions. The more highly educated, of course, have a better idea of the potentialities of the Council and of their votes, but even with them the determining factor is personal friendship; they are not sufficiently interested in politics other than local to follow the debates in the Council and to appreciate the attitude adopted by their member.¹

¹ GB, Appointment, 1E-22(1-13), A5-17, May 1930.
Seen in this light the Moderates' defeat at the 1923 elections appears less the result of their ineffectual performance in the Council than of their failure to realise that there were two levels in the politics of the reformed order: the level of the bhadralok and the level of the new mass electorate. By concentrating their attention on the Legislative Council they had disregarded this second level and ensured their own downfall. A few men like S.R. Das had seen the danger of neglecting the constituencies and had urged their fellow M.L.Cs. to get to work outside the Council,¹ but their admonitions had been disregarded for most members shared Rahamatjan Chaudhuri's belief that an occasional demonstration in the legislature would satisfy their electors.²

All this points to a lack of understanding among the Moderate nationalists of the complexity of the task of working the reformed institutions. It was not simply a question of making a good showing in the Council or reaching a satisfactory modus vivendi with the British as Sapru had suggested. To win elections, nationalist politicians required not only zeal and a good record but organisation and discipline, inside and outside the legislature. They needed money for local publicity and canvassing. They needed a leader who could appeal

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¹ E.g. Das' letter to the Englishman,* 12 Feb 1921.
to the wider electorate; they needed to respect the symbols and terms of the new mass politics.

The politicians were not alone, however, in their failure to comprehend the extent of their task. Lytton had also revealed a lack of understanding, most notably in his clash with the university. This incident had underlined the continuing importance of institutions other than the Legislative Council. The frustrations and disappointments which Lytton had encountered in his first two years in Bengal had left him disillusioned. It seemed that neither his officials nor his legislative councillors appreciated his crusading spirit, and his idealistic design had been spoilt by the hard facts of Bengali political life. By the time he dissolved the Legislative Council in August 1923, his faith was so badly shaken that he was prepared to assent to the officials' proposition that the institution was most useful as a consultative body. 'Looked at from the point of view of the Government', he said, 'the existence of a responsible element has been of the utmost value, as it has provided us with the means of testing the acceptability of our measures'.

For the officials alone the sky was not completely black. They had had their difficulties with an unrealistic Governor, inexperienced Ministers and a recalcitrant Legislative Council, but these had not been unexpected. What was more important was the fact that the

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stockade which Ronaldshay had helped them throw up around the bureau-
cracy had held against the assaults of the politicians. Although the
Moderates had proved to be a disappointingly irresolute set, they had
provided the human raw material necessary to work the constitution,
and the officials were proud of having kept the reformed institutions
functioning throughout the period.

Indeed this was a significant achievement. Despite the stresses
and strains of internal dissension, and the severe battering to which
it had been subjected by the non-co-operators, the Council had survived
to shield the Government from the hazards of rule by ordinance, and,
equally important, to provide the nationalist movement with an al-
ternative to mass action. As we shall see, this was an alternative with
C.R. Das and his Swaraj party in Bengal were glad to accept after the
collapse of non-co-operation in 1922. The Government had been right
to emphasise the importance of keeping the reforms working, and the
decision of the leading section of Congress to contest the 1923
elections was its reward.
CHAPTER VII

HE WHO RIDES A TIGER

The Questions

Surveying the results of the general election for the second reformed Council, the Statesman of 1 December 1923 wrote: 'Bengal has declared itself Swarajist. In every kind of Bengali constituency the Swarajists have triumphed. Even the Muhammadan electorate, which was considered to be a safe asset for Government, has been rent asunder'.

How did the non-co-operators gain sufficient strength to inflict such a humiliating defeat upon the Moderates? This chapter offers an answer to that question and to its corollary: why, after abjuring council entry in 1920, did C.R. Das form the Swaraj Party to contest the 1923 elections?

Uncertainty

Das returned from the Nagpur Congress in January 1921 to be greeted in Calcutta with excitement and enthusiasm. To symbolise his conversion to non-co-operation he gave up his law practice, donated

1 Statesman,* 1 Dec 1923.
his property and possessions to the nation and donned khadi. These gestures of self-sacrifice, so markedly in contrast to the behaviour of the newly-appointed Moderate Ministers,¹ fired the popular imagination. Das' followers gave him the title of Deshbandhu, 'friend of the country', and the vernacular press acclaimed him as the new Advaitacharyya, 'the protector of Bengalis and the saviour of Bengal'.²

Despite their apparent self-assurance, Das and his immediate colleagues faced the new year with considerable uncertainty. It had been a bold move to turn away from the secure and well-trodden paths of council politics to the unfamiliar jungle of direct action with its demand for a new style. The Bengali leaders had now grasped the concept of mass support for the nationalist movement and they were aware of popular discontents, social and economic, but they were unsure of how to communicate with the masses or how to make political capital from their grievances. Das had no prepared plan of action, for his volte face at Nagpur had surprised him almost as much as it had surprised his opponents. There were many ideas but no agreement among the other members of the provincial Congress hierarchy.

¹ They were busy with the festivities connected with the visit to Calcutta of H.R.H. the Duke of Connaught and were guests at a Government House garden party on 1 February. (Essaye, pp. 138–9) As the non-co-operationist press frequently noted, they also enjoyed the Rs. 64,000 salary which accompanied their new office. (E.g. Liberty,* 13 Mar 1921.)

² Nayak,* 21 Jan 1921.
The Montagu-Chelmsford Council had been elected and a Government formed, with the leaders of the Moderate party participating. For the non-co-operators there was an element of menace in these new institutions for their potential was unknown. They might prove to be a source of power and influence for their members and the British would undoubtedly try to use them in some way against the non-co-operation movement. Das and his men had the uncomfortable feeling that possibly they had thrown away a chance.

The leaders of the other sections of political society were equally uncertain. The Moderates were ill-at-ease in the enlarged legislature, 'rather like a set of children anxiously learning a new drill' as an I.C.S. officer described them, and the Calcutta European community was talking hysterically of the danger of a second Mutiny. The Government of Bengal was also alarmed now that non-co-operation had been accepted by the local Congress leaders. It lacked confidence in the ability of the Moderates, a 'timid and lethargic' group, to counter the movement and it insisted that the Government of India should take immediate action to destroy its central organisation.

The Government of India was reluctant to accept this counsel. It knew that even Gandhi was unsure of himself in the new medium

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1 C.H. Bompas to J.G. Drummond, [79217], quoted Drummond, p. 109.
2 Andrews to Rabindranath Tagore, 21 Dec [79207], Andrews MSS.
3 Chief Secretary, GB, to GI, 19 Feb 1921, GI, Home Political, Deposit 3 (Confidential) & K-W, Jul 1921.
of mass politics and it thought it best to wait and watch the nature of the relationship which developed between the Congress leaders and the people. The events of the preceding twelve months had destroyed its confidence in its ability to gauge changes of attitude 'in the vast under-world of India' and it feared that hasty action against the non-co-operators might precipitate a revolution. It had no desire to put an end to the general state of uncertainty by martyring the nationalists.¹

Publicity and Reorganisation

It was left to the non-co-operators to make the first move. 'When unsure of yourself, ridicule your opponent'. They accepted this as their maxim and poured their scorn on the reformed constitution and the Moderates, that 'handful of flatterers of Government'.² Das knew that the most direct and certain way to influence bhadralok opinion was through the Bengali and English-language press, and he made it his first objective to secure its firm backing. He established a Congress News Service to supply the papers with information about non-co-operation³ and he made preparations for the publication of a Bengali paper of his own.⁴ The success of his press campaign may be judged from the

¹ GI, Home Political, Deposit 3 (Confidential) & K-7, Jul 1921.
² Swatantra, 3 Feb 1921.
³ GB, Police, F-4A-5, B3-18, Oct 1923.
⁴ The Banglar Katha which brought out its first edition on 30 Sep 1921.
following report from P.H. Waddell, District Magistrate of Bakarganj, dated 9 June 1921: 'The people in the town read nothing but violent journals like the Amrita Bazar Patrika and the Servant. Even the Bengalee is avoided as being moderate, and anyone who asks for it is looked upon with suspicion. These violent journals publish nothing in favour of Government, so that the public never learn the true facts'.

At Nagpur Gandhi had insisted that Congress should be reorganised with stronger executive committees to direct its national and provincial affairs and with active branches extending to the villages. Das undertook this reorganisation in Bengal. It was to his advantage that his lieutenants came from a generation which had had little experience of the old Indian political associations and therefore had no fixed idea of the 'proper form' of political organisation. They had followed his example in giving up their employment and he was thus able to use them full-time in his new organisation.

He established an office in Calcutta to direct non-co-operation and he divided the city into four districts, with district commanders to supervise canvassing for funds and propaganda for the spinning campaign. He encouraged his followers in the mofussil to form District committees, or, where they already existed, to organise the local

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1 GB, Political, 125-4(1-43), A11-53, Oct 1921.
2 Young India, 1919-1922, pp. 833-9 & 842-5.
3 GI, Home Political, Deposit 63, Jun 1921.
bhadralok youth and with its _backing_ oust the older office-bearers. The Superintendent of Police, Pabna, described the methods used in his District: Kumud Nath Sarkar 'soon infused a spirit of defiance among the so-called volunteers towards the authority of the Government and in no time he found himself raised to the rank of President of the local Congress Committee with two principal assistants in Pravash and Naresh Chandra Lahiri .... The whole committee was at this time re-organised - the elderly members of the same apparently making room for the younger ones'.

Das personally visited the main _mofussil_ towns accompanied whenever possible by local men who had won a reputation in Calcutta. He talked to leading members of the professions, urging them to give up their jobs and support the new District organisation. He held frequent outdoor meetings which attracted large crowds eager to see the great _Deshbandhu_. With impassioned speeches and symbolic donations for the Swaraj Fund, these gatherings were an exciting change from the monotonous routine of _mofussil_ life. The novelty of an active Congress

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1. GB, Political, 12C-126 of 1922, B506-510, Jan 1923.
2. A District Officer reported that one Congressman, Sarat Kumar Ghosh, 'a visionary fanatic', was such an impelling speaker that 'Even I.B. Inspectors have been moved to tears when taking down his speeches'. (P.H. Waddell to T. Emerson, 5 Jun 1921, GB, Political, 12S-13, B300-352, Sep 1921.)
organisation at the District level also captured public interest and gave the rural bhadralok, in particular, a new feeling of involvement in the nationalist movement.

The Congress leaders tried to persuade the Muslims to unite their Khilafat committees with the new District Congress committees but they refused, insisting that the two organisations existed for different purposes.¹ They had resented the Bengali Hindus' refusal in the previous year to support their movement and, although they were willing to work with the non-co-operators, they were determined to leave themselves room for manoeuvre by keeping their organisation intact.

At this time they were also consolidating their position by infiltrating the executives of the local Muslim anjumans, whereas the Congressmen were concentrating all their energies upon their party reconstruction. This left the Moderates in command of the established bhadralok bodies: the Ratepayers', Peoples' and District Associations.² Although for the time being these lost their influence, they were later to provide a base from which the Moderates could reassert themselves in local affairs.

¹ GI, Home Political, Deposit 63, Jun 1921.
² GB, Political, lists of office-bearers of recognised associations, revised annually.
The Boycotts

Gandhi had given another lead to the non-co-operators with his call for the triple boycott: of councils, courts and schools. Once Das had overcome his doubts about the first item he had no hesitation in accepting the other two, for in implementing this programme he would be required to address himself only to the bhadralok.

His own self-sacrifice was a powerful example and Subhas Chandra Bose was speaking for scores of Bengalis of his generation when he wrote in February 1921: 'If C.R. Das at his age can give up everything and face the uncertainties of life – I am sure a young man like myself, who has no worldly cares to trouble him, is much more capable of doing so'.¹ In the early months of 1921 the students and lawyers of Bengal responded magnificently to the Congress call to join non-co-operation. Strikes involving five colleges in Calcutta were followed by similar demonstrations in all but three Districts of the Province and more than ten per cent of the students in Government schools and colleges were withdrawn. There were numerous resignations among the teaching staff.² In some Districts all lawyers suspended practice and the work of the courts was severely handicapped everywhere except in Calcutta where the legal profession was strangely unresponsive.³

¹ Subhas Chandra Bose to Sarat Chandra Bose, 16 Feb 1921, Indian Pilgrim, p. 129.
The recruits were organised into volunteer brigades, quasi-military formations which owed their inspiration to Mazzini's Red Shirts of the Risorgimenti and which had first been used in the partition agitation. Where their organisation was efficient, they were commanded by a District captain and four vice-captains supported by two subordinate officers in each thana and with a regular budget and funds. Eleven hundred volunteers were enrolled in Calcutta in February 1921 and by May there were 19 regular corps in various parts of the province.

The volunteers were put to work spreading propaganda, collecting donations, boycotting Government officials and co-operators, running arbitration courts and national schools to replace the British institutions, and assisting in village reconstruction.

It was a spectacular achievement which had the Government thoroughly frightened but it could not be sustained. The planning of the national schools and arbitration courts had been inadequate and one by one they collapsed. Spinning, learning Hindi and labouring among the villagers, activities by which Gandhi set great store, had no attraction for the sophisticated bhadralok youth and there was growing dissatisfaction among them at the lack of opportunity for more heroic

1 GI, Home Police, B112-114, May 1906.
4 GI, Home Political, 170, 1921.
means of demonstrating their patriotism.¹ After the first flush of enthusiasm had gone, the students and lawyers had second thoughts about the wisdom of deserting the Government institutions which were so important to their class and by mid-year most were back in their schoolrooms and courthouses.²

In this first phase, the non-co-operation movement was strongest in the towns of Eastern Bengal where the Hindu leaders had found themselves equipped with a mass following by the pro-Khilafat mullahs. The *bhadralok* were ill-at-ease in this unaccustomed situation, but, in search of a course of action, they were able to draw upon experience gained in the partition period. At that time, influential Hindus (landholders and professional men) in Eastern Bengal had used their social position to impose sanctions upon the opponents of *swadeshi*. The victims had been denied the use of facilities such as shops and wharves under the control of a local magnate and, frequently, they had been treated as outcastes, losing the services of the washerman, the priest and the barber.³

¹ Andrews to Rabindranath Tagore, 13 Mar 1921, Andrews MSS.
³ GI, Home Police, A140-148, May 1906, & B112-114, May 1906. The 1911 census report noted the growth of the power and influence of the local *zamindar* in Bengal and observed that he was taking over many of the functions of the caste *panchayats*. (Census of India, 1911, vol. V, pt. i, p. 488.)
With a much larger following the non-co-operators in 1921 were able to extend these activities. Reluctant contributors to the Swaraj Fund were intimidated and even Government officials were boycotted. In a number of towns the volunteer brigades picketed the markets, refusing access to Government servants and supporters, and selling tickets to others, the money going into party funds. The non-co-operators gained such a hold on some areas that the local British officers were forced either to arrange for their daily requirements to be brought in from neighbouring Districts or to suffer the humiliation of going in person to the market.

The disadvantage of social boycotts and picketing was that they inconvenienced so many innocent parties. The barber and the priest, for instance, suffered as much as those who were denied their services; the shopkeepers were out of pocket because of the interruption in trade; and the general public, no matter how fervently nationalistic, were bound to resent having to pay a tribute to the Congress party whenever they used the market. Consequently there was support for the Government when it organised counter-measures.

In some places the non-co-operators' activities also aggravated existing social animosities. For example in Faridpur District there

1 GI, Home Political, Deposit 1, Sep 1921.
2 GB, Political, 12S-13, B300-352, Sep 1921.
3 Ibid. Gandhi was opposed to the political use of social boycott for this reason. (See Young India, 1919-1922, pp. 299-302.)
was a long-standing rivalry between the two main peasant communities, the Muslims and the Namasudras. In 1921 the Namasudras opposed non-co-operation and when the Muslims excluded them from one of the main markets because of their refusal to forego foreign merchandise they established their own shops. The old market suffered as a result and feeling between the communities was embittered. From this time onwards there were frequent riots between the two groups, until punitive police were stationed in the District in the late 1920s in an attempt to restore order.¹

In the Midnapore District of West Bengal the non-co-operators scored a remarkable success by taking advantage of a faction fight. In January 1921 the first elections were held in the District for Union Boards, new local bodies provided by the Bengal Village Self-Government Act of 1919.² The electors were uncertain as to what they were voting for but they had a vague idea that they were electing representatives to arbitrate village disputes and thus save lawyers and court fees. They were dismayed when they discovered that they had in fact assisted

¹ GB, Police, P.5R-2(4-12), B95-103, Mar 1926.
in the formation of new bodies empowered to levy taxes. They were convinced that the *bhadralok* would use these to swindle them.¹

A local non-co-operator, Birendra Nath Sasmal, saw his opportunity. He organised meetings at which he warned the people that the Act opened the way for crushing taxation and other oppressions by the Government. Oppose now or forever be taxed, he said.

To win the all-important support of the educated classes he utilised a factional rivalry. In the Contai subdivision, to which he belonged, the *bhadralok* were divided into two groups: the locals; and people from outside districts who had established themselves in practice in the Contai courts or in other professions. The Legislative Council and Union Board elections had been fought out between candidates from these two groups and the 'immigrants' had triumphed. Sasmal, who was a member of the dominant Mahishya caste,² now took the leadership of the locals and carried them with him in his attack on the Union Boards.

¹ S.N. Ray, Joint Magistrate, Midnapore, 1 Nov 1921: 'I went into the Contai bazaar. I soon had a crowd round me vigorously showing their disapprobation of Union Boards. They had not had good crops for years, they could hardly afford to pay for their food and clothing in the present state of the market and now they were asked to pay more taxes. They could not possibly countenance a sevenfold increase of taxes. It was all very well to say that it rested with them to decide whether they should raise taxes or not, but the "Babus" were going to raise it all the same'. (GB, Local Self-Government Dept., Local Self-Government (Local Boards) Branch, L2U-5(1-7), A36-49, Jul 1922.)

² The Mahishyas were an agricultural caste of good status, many of whose members had entered the professions. It was most numerous in the Midnapore District.
The people were persuaded to refuse to pay taxes under the Village Self-Government Act and the members of the Boards were "encouraged" to reconsider the wisdom of their operating the Act. By late June the Contai bazaar and the walls along the village roads carried inflammatory posters threatening the members with violence. Resignations soon followed and those who held out had social and religious boycotts applied to them. Some were even prevented from securing labour to reap their paddy.

Having brought the operation of the Act to a standstill in Contai, Sasmal turned his attention to other parts of the Midnapore District with similar success and by November the Government was forced to admit that it would be better to withdraw the Act than fight Congress on such shaky ground.¹

All these activities brought fame to the non-co-operators. Never before had British authority been challenged so openly and with such impunity, and the insolence with which Das and his party treated Englishmen delighted their compatriots. However there were evident disadvantages about the methods they had used. The boycott of courts and colleges had demanded too great a sacrifice of the bhadralok, and its corollary, the organisation of arbitration boards and national schools, required of the Congress leaders a genius for construction

which they did not possess. '... the difficulty does not lie in breaking, - any fool can do that!' remarked Andrews to Rabindranath Tagore, 'it lies in rebuilding, and only poets can do that! And today we have far too few poets, - and far too many fanatics! ... Now the whole movement is reaching that constructive stage & men like C.R. Das are not able to do the building'. Social boycotts and picketing had unwelcome side-effects and even where the non-co-operators worked with the grain, as in Sasmal's case, and not across it, one section of society was left as an enemy of the non-co-operation movement.

Labour Agitation

One course of action which avoided all these pitfalls was the provocation of labour disturbances. The industrial workers in Bengal were Muslims and low-caste Hindus, and most were migrants from neighbouring provinces. Strikes could therefore be organised with the expenditure of comparatively little bhadralok effort and no matter what their outcome it was not likely to disturb the politically-important strata of Bengali society.

The conditions for industrial labour were poor. During the war, wages had not kept pace with the inflationary rise in prices. In the same period there had been a rapid expansion in industry but this had

1 2/30 Jan 1921, Andrews MSS.
been arrested suddenly by the post-war trade recession. The workers had real grievances but they needed leaders and an organisation to give expression to them. These the non-co-operators were willing to supply.

Starting in the industrial complex around Calcutta where the ground had been prepared by the Khilafat agitators, and then moving into the mining areas of West Bengal, they formed trade unions and encouraged the workers to press for the amelioration of their conditions. As a result there were dozens of strikes throughout the province in the early months of 1921. The main victims were British firms who were the largest employers of industrial labour in Bengal, and they naturally turned for assistance to their compatriots the officials. The effect was to implicate the Government and this enhanced the non-co-operators' success for they could claim that they were striking at both pillars of British imperialism: trade and rule.

They realised that nothing was better calculated to alarm the Government, especially at a time of political crisis, than stoppages in the transport and communications services. They found that they could cripple Calcutta by bringing the tramway workers out on strike

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1 Census of India 1921, vol. V, pt. i, p. 34.
3 There were 108 strikes in Bengal between January and October 1921. (BLCP, 23 Nov 1921, vol. V, pp. 182-3.)
but this had the disadvantage of inconveniencing too many bhadralok.¹

More satisfactory were stoppages affecting the railway and steamship services.

The great advantage of this trade union work for the non-co-operators was that it enabled them to stand forward as leaders of a mass movement. In one place at least they had broken through the barriers to communication and they now had some justification for their symbolic use of the concept of 'the masses'. The Banglar Katha, Das' new Bengali weekly, made the point in one of its early numbers in October 1921:

No one is able to stop this world-wide awakening of the masses, for this is not a meaningless controversy, but the effort of a self-forgetful race to know itself. These strikes of the tea-garden coolies and mill-operatives, this rising of the raiyats against the exactions of the zamindars - is not there at the bottom of all these an impatient effort of an irrepressible force to burst out of its confinement? The people are starving, Government is penniless to give them food and clothing, and we have no voice in the matter of our trade and commerce. This is the root-cause of the present labour problem. Bengal has slept for ages. She must be roused from her sleep. This is our resolve.²

There were risks in what the non-co-operators were doing. They had neither the organisation nor the experience to ensure that the labour unrest which they were fomenting could be stopped short of violence. For the same reasons they were unable to protect the workers

¹ A tram strike always brought loud protests from the Calcutta press. (See e.g. NP, 12 & 26 Nov 1921.)
² Banglar Katha,* 21 Oct 1921.
against the hardships which accompanied the strikes and as their primary objectives were political they were too often neglectful of the real interests of labour.

Gandhi was aware of these dangers and he warned his fellow Congressmen against exploiting the workers' grievances:

... there are not wanting labour leaders who consider that strikes may be engineered for political purposes. In my opinion, it will be a most serious mistake to make use of labour strikes for such a purpose. I don't deny that such strikes can serve political ends. But they do not fall within the plan of non-violent Non-co-operation. It does not require much effort of the intellect to perceive that it is a most dangerous thing to make political use of labour until labourers understand the political condition of the country and are prepared to work for the common good. This is hardly to be expected of them all of a sudden and until they have bettered their own condition so as to enable them to keep body and soul together in a decent manner.¹

Andrews was also perturbed by the effects of the agitation. He had always taken a keen interest in Indian labour, in India and in the colonies,² and, convinced in 1921 that the workers were suffering unduly, he intervened to protect them. He explained to Tagore early in May: 'I had to finish all these strikes on the Railways which have caused untold miseries and have been entirely due to the ferment of the non-cooperation movement & are one of its bad effects'.³

The more he saw of the situation in Bengal, the more he was convinced

² He had made a number of trips to various parts of Africa and Fiji, on behalf of the Congress, to study Indian labour conditions. (See Chaturvedi & Sykes.)
³ 10 May 1921, Andrews MSS.
that the bhadralok politicians were using the masses instead of working for them. Speaking in Calcutta at the end of May, he called upon 'the educated leaders' to take stock: 'It will not be enough to excite the poor in their distress into a meaningless strike. That may add more to their misery. I speak sadly because I have been dealing with strike after strike during the last few months, which have brought very little but misery and starvation to the poor'.

The Chandpur Affair

He made this appeal during the Chandpur affair, an incident which we must study in detail for it was here that the Bengal non-co-operators scored their most spectacular success against the Government by an unconcealed exploitation of labour grievances.

In the first half of April 1921 a group of Congressmen from Calcutta moved into the tea garden areas of Assam and started an agitation for higher wages among the tea coolies, who were suffering severe hardship because of a slump in the industry. Towards the

1 Quoted Bengalee,* 31 May 1921.
3 Capital, 6 Jan & 26 May 1921.
end of the month there were strikes on many of the gardens, and, because the planters refused to meet their demands, the coolies accepted the non-co-operators' offer to arrange transport for their return to their homes in Bihar and the United Provinces. In the following three weeks six to seven thousand workers, including the entire labour-force of some gardens, left Assam and trekked more than 100 miles to Chandpur, a steamer station on the river Padma in Eastern Bengal, to find that the Congressmen had failed to keep their promise to provide transport for the onward journey.

Faced with a growing crowd of half-starved and exhausted coolies, among whom disease might quickly spread, the Divisional Commissioner, K.C. De, authorised their shipment at the Government's expense to Goalundo, whence they could be moved by rail to their homes. This offended the tea planters who sent representatives post-haste to appeal to the Government of Bengal, then in summer residence at Darjeeling, not to assist in the removal of their labour-force. The Government accepted their plea and censured De for his action. No more free passages were to be granted.

The exodus from Assam continued and by the middle of May there were 3000 coolies and their families stranded at Chandpur. Cholera was reported among them and on 19 May De came up from his headquarters at Chittagong to review the situation. That evening a large mob of

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1 Andrews, report in Bengalee, 22 May 1921.
desperate coolies attempted to rush a steamer which was preparing to sail for Goalundo and a number narrowly escaped drowning. De decided that if order were to be maintained and the spread of disease checked, the coolies would have to be shifted from the railway station, where they were camped in insanitary conditions, to a football field outside the town. They refused to move. A troop of Gurkha armed police was therefore brought to Chandpur from Dacca and on the night of the 20th the coolies were chased out of the station yard. A number were injured in the scuffle and in the ensuing stampede to the football field.

The following day Andrews arrived on his way to the tea gardens. When he discovered how serious matters had become at Chandpur, he decided to go to Darjeeling in an attempt to persuade the Government to revoke its order prohibiting the repatriation of the coolies. He was met with a cold refusal and returned to Calcutta convinced that the Government was listening only to the tea planters.¹

In the meantime the 'Gurkha outrage' at Chandpur had captured the press headlines. Wildly distorted accounts were printed, with frequent comparisons being made with the Jallianwala Bagh tragedy of 1919.

At Chandpur, the blood of inoffensive and unarmed Indian labourers was shed in consequence of the incompetence of short-sighted officials; and starving labourers, both male and female, were prevented from leaving the spot and met

¹ Andrews, speech in Calcutta, 29 May 1921, quoted Bengalee,* 4 Jun 1921.
with an untimely death. But this dark cloud has a silver lining. It has united the educated community and the poverty-stricken labourers in a bond of sympathy and fellow-feeling.\(^1\)

With public anger running high, the non-co-operators saw their opportunity. If they could keep the coolies at Chandpur and fix the blame for their sufferings firmly upon the Government they would have the British in a very nasty spot. They were fortunate that the non-co-operation movement in the Chittagong Division was exceptionally strong. Its leader was J.M. Sen Gupta, a Calcutta High Court lawyer who had given up his practice in March 1921 and returned to Chittagong to stir up labour trouble.\(^2\) As president of the Railway Employees Union he was able to call for an immediate strike on the Assam Bengal Railway in protest against the Gurkha outrage. On 24 May all train services in Assam and the Chittagong Division were stopped. This cut the link between the tea gardens and Chandpur, and left almost 1000 coolies stranded along the line. Four days later the steamship crews struck, thereby closing the coolies' only other route out of Chandpur.

Andrews, who was campaigning in Calcutta for funds to repatriate the coolies, was horrified by this callous disregard for their suffering, but his appeals to the non-co-operators went unheeded. 'A few

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\(^1\) *Dainik Basumati*, 27 May 1921.

thousand coolies might be sacrificed if India's 320,000,000 could obtain Swarajya', he was told at a meeting of Congress leaders on 29 May.¹

On the same day the District Magistrate of Faridpur, G.P. Hogg, writing from Goalundo, advised his Government to take a stand against the non-co-operators. The aim of the strike, he said, was to force the Government to repatriate the coolies at its own expense. He admitted that if that were not done the coolies would suffer but he could see no way of avoiding this without giving in to Congress.

The consequences of surrender at this stage are obvious. The non-cooperators would claim a great victory. They have a wide-spread organisation which has been looking after the different contingents of coolies at every stage of their journey, and, to put it briefly, they would claim that they have, in a sense, replaced the Govt. That is to say, they will have imposed their will on the Govt. and on the public, and would be, with regard to this particular matter, a sort of "de facto" government.²

Wheeler arrived from Darjeeling on 30th and he accepted Hogg's estimate of the situation. The Government would stand firm on its decision not to provide the coolies' fares.

He was followed into Eastern Bengal by C.R. Das and a large group of Calcutta Congressmen who went from town to town organising hartals in an effort further to dislocate the administration. Andrews was

¹ C.F. Andrews: "Letters on Non-co-operation", The Indian Problem, p. 98.
² G.P. Hogg to J. Donald, 29 May 1921, GB, Political, 12S-13, B300-352, Sep 1921.
already back from Calcutta attempting unsuccessfully to persuade the steamer and railway employees to return to work. He was obstructed by both the non-co-operators and Wheeler, who resented the criticism which he had levelled at the Government after his Darjeeling visit. With the assistance of Pakenham Walsh, the Anglican Bishop of Assam, and S.R. Das, he opened a public subscription to assist the coolies and by 7 June he had obtained the guarantee of sufficient funds to send off the first group from Chandpur. The only route open was the railway line via Mymensingh to Bahadurabad 250 miles north on the Brahmaputra. The non-co-operators immediately started a new strike among the steamer crews at the rail head and once more blocked the coolies' exit. A day or so later, however, a private steamer was found to make the journey from Chandpur to Goalundo and by the middle of the month all the coolies were on their way home.

For C.R. Das and his party the affair had gone admirably. The Government had played into their hands by attempting to maintain its prestige at the coolies' expense. It had published two long communiques to give its version of events but Bengal was in no mood to accept official accounts and the non-co-operationist press could write as it wished. The Congressmen were praised for their heroic opposition to the Government, for their self-sacrificing relief work among the sick and dying at Chandpur, and even for providing the
final transport for the coolies. The affair could not have been better timed for the non-co-operators, for it distracted public attention from the drift of lawyers and students back to their old occupations.

Das was brimming with confidence. He announced that the railway and steamer strikes would continue and he proudly asserted that their purpose was 'national' not economic. This angered Andrews who considered it offensive that the bhadralok leaders should talk so glibly of defending national honour and the people's rights. 'Honour is very cheap when another person has to maintain it!' he remarked bitterly. Speaking at a meeting in Calcutta on 16 June he appealed for a more responsible labour policy. A few days later he wrote to Gandhi and asked him to use his influence with the provincial Congressmen:

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1 This episode has a piquancy reminiscent of the account in The Ugly American of the delivery of rice to Sarkhan. (W.J. Lederer & E. Burdick: The Ugly American, pp. 34-7). Hogg to Donald, 10 Jun 1921: "The position thus was that while Mr S.R. Das paid for the tickets, according to my information, the non-co-operators were allowed to retain practical control of the transport. And at Goalundo there were loud cries of 'Chittaranjan Das ki jai', etc., while Mr S.R. Das' share in the transaction was completely ignored". (GB, Political, 12S-4(1-43), A11-53, Oct 1921.)

2 Press statement, 16 Jun 1921, quoted, GI, Home Political, Deposit 64, Jun 1921.

3 Andrews to Rabindranath Tagore, 23 Feb 1922, Andrews MSS.

4 GI, Home Political, Deposit I, Sep 1921.
East Bengal is on the very border line of violence ... it is highly emotional, quick tempered, hot and passionate. These strikes in such inflammable material are like straw to a fire, and I have been greatly anxious about an explosion. What I felt was that only you could really preach ahimsa. I have done my very best and they have given me such treasures of love. Time after time the passion has died down as I have spoken about you. They do really understand that in my presence no word even of violence must be uttered. But when I am not at their meetings or leave after speaking I have constantly heard that the old passion flames up.

The terms offered by both the steamship and railway companies are honourable terms. But ... there is a strike mania. At a meeting I held about Chandpur (in Calcutta) the whole meeting was against me except three or four, who were such co-operators as Krishna Kumar Mitter and one or two Marwaris.1

Gandhi came to Bengal in August but he was too late to prevent the violence in the eastern Districts which Andrews had feared.2

An Attack from Within

In the meantime, however, Das' leadership of the provincial Congress had been challenged. Ever since Nagpur there had been a group within the B.P.C.C.3 which had followed Das with reluctance, suspecting that he was not a convinced disciple of Gandhi. The group was confirmed in its suspicions by his encouragement of labour disturbances and when in June he openly admitted that he was using

3 The abbreviated form of Bengal Provincial Congress Committee. Similarly, A.I.C.C. has been used for All-India Congress Committee.
the strikes in Eastern Bengal for political gain, its leader, Jitendralal Banerjea, resigned from the B.P.C.C. in protest.¹

The rebels were supported by the Calcutta Marwaris who were devoted followers of the Mahatma. As employers they were opposed to the strikes. Up to this time they had been the main contributors to the Swaraj Fund but they now accused Das of misappropriation of the money and withheld their contributions.²

In mid-July the Gandhians made a bid to oust their opponents from the provincial Congress executive but they failed.³ Counter-attacking Das filled every office with his supporters. He also established a series of central boards to give him tighter control over the party's activities.⁴ As director of publicity he appointed a new recruit, 24 year old Subhas Chandra Bose, who had just resigned from the I.C.S. and returned from Cambridge University to join non-co-operation.⁵

Throughout the following three months there was a vigorous debate in the Bengal press between the Gandhians and the Das group. The

¹ GI, Home Political, Deposit 46, Jun 1921. H.N. Das Gupta; Subhas Chandra, pp. 4-5. Jitendralal Banerjea, letter to Servant, quoted Statesman, 8 Jun 1921.
³ Englishman, 15 Jul 1921.
⁴ H.N. Das Gupta; Subhas Chandra, pp. 36-7.
⁵ Indian Struggle, pp. 79-83.
Servant was the main spokesman for the former. It demanded the subordination of the provincial Congress to the national leadership.¹

In the papers which supported Das there were frequent attacks on Gandhi and the Marwaris, and there was a marked spirit of provincial exclusiveness. The Nayak was in the van as usual:

... many young Bengalis and adults still cherish the painful memories of the treatment which Burra Bazar people and Hindustanis accorded to Bengalis during the partition agitation;² and to add to all this, whatever Mahatma Gandhi is doing, is but an imitation of what Bengal once did. He has shown no sympathy for what happened in East Bengal and Chittagong. Consequently, the Hindus and Muslims of Bengal, youths and adults alike, are indifferent to the present political movement; and, we are afraid, Bengal will not - cannot - take kindly to the cult of boycott, Swadeshi, Khadri and Gandhism.³

It was at this time that Das brought out his new weekly, with the significant title, Banglar Katha, 'Voice of Bengal'. The first edition made it clear that he was appealing to provincial sentiment:

'Whether Hindu, Muslim or Christian a Bengali is a Bengali for all that. He has a distinct temperament of his own and a distinct religion. He has a place in the world and a mission to perform. A Bengali must become a true Bengali'.⁴ It was a line tailored to bhadralok tastes.

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¹ E.g. Servant,* 26 Jul 1921. Dainik Basumati,* 30 Sep 1921.
² The bhadralok resented the fact that most traders, including the Marwaris, had refused to join in the boycott of British goods in 1906. (GI, Home Public, A124-C, Jul 1906. Ibid, B81, Jun 1907.)
³ Nayak,* 2 Aug 1921.
⁴ Banglar Katha,* 30 Sep 1921.
The Hartals

With their hold on the Congress secure, Das and his party looked about for a new course of action. At the end of July the A.I.C.C. had given swadeshi precedence over other Congress activities, and, although the Bengalis were unenthusiastic about the spinning campaign, they accepted the committee's direction, reasoning that the boycott of foreign manufactures would offer good opportunities for anti-Government demonstrations. They decided to concentrate upon Calcutta for it was there that they could attract most attention.

Das chose Subhas Chandra Bose, the new hero of Bengali youth, to lead the first band of volunteers in the picketing of shops selling imported cloth. There were soon groups patrolling all the main trading areas. At the same time Das' wife, Basanti Devi, toured the city exhorting Bengali women to demonstrate their support for the national struggle by offering their gold jewellery for the Swaraj Fund. There were house-to-house collections of rice for distribution to 'needy middle-class families'. Most exciting of all were the symbolic bonfires of imported cloth lit on the intersections of main thoroughfares to shouts of Bande Mataram and Deshbandhu Das ki jai.

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1 J.S. Sharma: Indian National Congress, p. 479.
3 GI, Home Political, Deposit 24, Oct 1921.
It was dangerous to offer such open encouragement to lawlessness in a city like Calcutta but neither the Congressmen nor their allies, the Khilafatists, were in any mood to account discretion as the better part of valour. The behaviour of the volunteers became increasingly aggressive and shopkeepers complained of intimidation. The Marwari Chamber of Commerce appealed to Gandhi for protection but he was powerless to help them.

The movement reached its climax in November with the call from the A.I.C.C. for a campaign of civil disobedience. On 4th there was a fierce riot in Howrah, when the mob battered a police sergeant to death and was fired on as a result. The tramway workers were already out on a month-long strike and on 17th, the day the Prince of Wales arrived in Bombay to start a tour of India, there was a total hartal in Calcutta. All shops were closed and no public or private transport was allowed to move in the streets. The police lost control of the city to the volunteer brigades but they, in their turn, found that they were unable to manage the gangs of factory labourers who had been brought into the city from the outlying mill towns by the Khilafatists. Assisted by goondas, these gangs looted shops,

2. *Young India, 1919-1922*, pp. 933-6.
4. *NP, Nov 1921.*
molested pedestrians and at Kalighat in South Calcutta fought a pitched battle with the police.¹

The Government of Bengal saw the spectre of red revolution. The Prince of Wales was due in Calcutta in a month's time. Unless order could be guaranteed, his visit would have to be cancelled and the non-co-operators conceded a complete victory, which could conceivably mean the end of British authority in the province. The time had come for action. On 19 November the Government declared the volunteer brigades illegal and prohibited public meetings in Calcutta. The offices of the Congress and Khilafat parties were raided.² With official approval the Bengal Chamber of Commerce and the British Indian Association formed a Citizens Protection League to supply armed assistance to the police.³

There was great excitement in the Bengal Congress. The Gandhians were afraid of further violence and they argued that civil disobedience should be suspended. Das himself was aware of the danger but there could be no question of drawing back at that stage, for his followers' blood was up. 'We had been spoiling for a fight in Calcutta and the official notification therefore was thrice welcome to us', wrote Bose in The Indian Struggle.⁴

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⁵ Indian Struggle, p. 94. See also H.N. Das Gupta: Subhas Chandra, pp.43-5.
Das had to act carefully to prevent the situation getting out of hand. His tasks, as he saw them, were twofold: to get some control over the Khilafatists and to delay for as long as possible another mass demonstration. He persuaded both the Congress and Khilafat committees to appoint him as provincial dictator and he then announced that only token resistance would be offered to the Government’s ordinances. Each day from 1 December small groups of volunteers were sent out to hawk khadi and to enlist support for a planned hartal on 24th, the day the Prince of Wales was due to arrive in the city. For a week the police made no move to interfere with the Congressmen and Das’ followers grew increasingly restive. On the 8th, however, a group of women led by Basanti Devi were arrested and, as they refused to give bail, they were taken to the Presidency Gaol. Ronaldshay quickly intervened and had them released on the pretext of giving them 'time for further reflection’, but the damage had been done. There was an outcry at this 'victimisation of innocent women' and the volunteers began openly provoking the police.

Ronaldshay called Das for an interview and offered to make concessions if the hartal on 24th were called off. He touched the Congress

1 Indian Struggle, p. 95.
leader on the raw by insisting that in taking action against non-co-operation he had followed the advice of the representatives of the people in the legislature. When Das protested that they were not the people's representatives, Ronaldshay replied that as Congress had not contested the elections it could not challenge their representative character. It was an extraordinarily shrewd argument to use against a man who initially had supported council entry and who was now struggling to control the movement with which he had become involved instead. But Das was in no position to consider a compromise with the Government. 'He who rides a tiger is afraid to dismount'. His reply was that the hartal would be enforced.

On 10 December Das and his chief lieutenants were arrested. In the following twelve days hundreds of non-co-operators throughout Bengal were thrown into prison and by the time the Prince of Wales arrived on Christmas Eve almost all resistance had been broken.

The Loss of Confidence

The arrests had been made just in time to avert a catastrophe in Calcutta. The non-co-operation movement, which the politicians had laboured so hard to start, had gathered a momentum of its own and was now perilously close to running out of control. Andrews wrote to Tagore:

1 H.N. Das Gupta: Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das, pp. 70-1.
2 Essayez, p. 154.
Here is Christmas Day and I am on my way to the Congress, and the noise of battle and strife is already meeting me all along the way. Civil disobedience treads upon the very brink of violence the whole time; and yet there are things which are truly heroic - a new spirit infinitely beyond the servile spirit of the past.

My own mind is torn. I have to speak out at Ahmedabad, but it is very difficult indeed to know what to say. I must speak against these veiled violences - these intimidations, social boycotts, burnings .... I think of Aurobindo Ghose saying: "It is useless to speak: the people have gone mad". Is silence best when one is tired out and one's faith dim?\(^1\)

Gandhi was also perturbed by the course of events and he decided to shift the emphasis of the movement once more, this time to the refusal of taxes. This would divert attention from the cities, where non-violence had failed, to the villages.\(^2\)

In Bengal, Das' party had never displayed enthusiasm for work outside the towns but now that its members were in prison the Gandhians could take over the provincial Congress machinery and use it for a campaign among the peasantry. With the assistance of those Khilafat workers who were still at large, they began agitating against the payment of the chaudiari tax and land revenue.\(^3\)

The peasants were attentive pupils, for economically they had had a bad year and politically a very active one. Indeed they had their own ideas as to where the line should be drawn in the payment of


\(^2\) Young India, 1919-1922, pp. 279-82, 947-52, & 1153-6.

\(^3\) NP, Jan 1922.
revenue. To the dismay of the politicians, many peasants were soon refusing all rent, whether to the Government or to individual landlords. In some districts there were also outbreaks of violence against the zamindars.¹

The bhadralok were appalled by these developments. The disaster which they had always feared seemed imminent: an uprising by the rural masses which would destroy the economic and social superiority of the educated classes. They would be overwhelmed by sheer weight of numbers and their culture swept away. The political movement had gone too far. Gandhi had stirred up a social revolution. In the early months of 1922 the Bengal Hindu press was full of foreboding:

Tippera Guide, Comilla, 24 January 1922
The spirit of non-co-operation has spread into the lower stratum of society. The non-co-operation movement has assumed threatening proportions and the storm of unrest is blowing over the villages. Unless the leaders are released, it is difficult to say how long the movement will retain its non-violent nature. We are fearful of the future of our district from accounts which we are getting from the interior.

Herald, Dacca, 9 February 1922
If the proportion of private owners of land be taken to be 10 per cent., it would be much more in Eastern Bengal, then the campaign of non-payment of taxes would at once mean a fight between this 10 per cent. on one side and the 90 per cent. on the other. On one side will be skill, resource and accumulated strength and on the other shall be numbers to swamp the other side. And there will set in the country a regular civil war.

¹ NP, Jan 922.
Nayak, Calcutta, 11 February 1922
This is the great blunder made by the ruling class. If the masses can once lift their heads, then you, English ruling class, will sink and, along with you, we, the classes, will sink to the bottomless deep. Mahatma Gandhi is playing with the masses. These masses are beyond all reason and argument, all debate and dispute.

Atma Sakti, Calcutta, 5 April 1922
Playing with the Mob
A social revolution without political freedom will be injurious to a dependent country. Those who in their eagerness to build up the nation and systematise national strength are inciting the masses to agitate for political freedom, seem to forget that, if at their suggestion the masses succeed in humbling the power of the foreign ruler, they will not stop simply by completing the work wanted by the educated classes. Who will deny that if the ire of the masses is once roused against the social oppressions, etc., to which they have been subjected for centuries, it will consume the whole community like a volcanic eruption!

Gandhi was also losing confidence. The peasants seemed no more ready for satyagraha than the townspeople had been. Worst of all it was often the Congress workers who incited them to violence. On 5 February 1922 at Chauri Chaura in the United Provinces a band of volunteers led a mob in an attack on a police station. The buildings were set alight and 22 policemen killed. Gandhi immediately called a meeting of the Congress Working Committee at Bardoli in Gujerat and announced that civil disobedience was to be suspended until such time as non-violence could be ensured. Congressmen were instructed to concentrate on the constructive programme: spinning, a temperance

1 All from NP. Cf. Young India, 1919-1922, pp. 981-3.
campaign, village work and the uplift of the depressed classes.¹

Justifying his action, Gandhi emphasised that Congress had failed in many places other than Chauri Chaura. 'In Calcutta Jamnalalji tells me there is utter disorganisation, the volunteers wearing foreign cloth and certainly not pledged to non-violence'.²

The reaction in Bengal to Gandhi's decision was curiously ambivalent. The bhadralok were relieved that the dangers of mass politics had been recognised and that Congressmen had been directed to hold the people in check.³ Their politicians could rejoice in the knowledge that someone else had taken the difficult decision to suspend the movement - that Gandhi had leapt off the tiger first. There was nothing to be gained, however, in admitting even to oneself that one had stayed on more out of fear than of boldness, and among the political prisoners in the Alipur Central Gaol there was a display of anger at Gandhi's 'weakness'. What right had he to destroy the national movement for which they had sacrificed their freedom, merely because he had lost his nerve?⁴ 'If you unmoored your boat and came rowing along to face the storm, why are you afraid now that the storm has burst?' demanded the Banglar Katha.⁵

² Gandhi to J. Nehru, J. Nehru: A Bunch of Old Letters, pp. 23-4. Jamnalalji was a Marwari, Seth Jamnalal Bajaj. See also Young India, 1919-1922, pp. 993-1002.
³ E.g. see Amrita Bazar Patrika,* 14 Feb 1922.
⁴ Indian Struggle, p. 108.
⁵ Banglar Katha,* 17 Feb 1922.
And what sort of a substitute for civil disobedience was the constructive programme? If the volunteers were not to leave the movement in disgust, they had to be offered something more exciting than spinning or popularising prohibition. 'They are asking, what they are to do now that all activities have been stopped and how they will stand with the ignominy of defeat on their heads', wrote the Mohammadi. The Bengal Muslims were particularly angry for they had acquired a taste for mass action and some of their leaders had realised how much the community stood to gain from an attack on the existing social order. Finally, there was a general feeling that Gandhi's criticisms of Bengal were an insult to provincial honour. '... the Bardoli resolution is humiliating to the prowess of Bengalis'. The press turned upon Gandhi, his "Gujerati politics" and his bania supporters, the Marwaris. It was suggested that it was no coincidence that the latter favoured the constructive programme. 'How the Marwaris are profiting by the khaddar movement!'  

What next?

The Government of India considered that the time had come when it could safely strike at Gandhi. Previously it had been restrained

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1 Mohammadi,* 22 Feb 1922.
2 Ibid.
3 NP, Feb-Jun 1922.
4 Hindusthan,* 14 Jul 1922.
by the knowledge that even if his arrest did not provoke outright revolt, it would almost certainly alienate the Moderates who might then withdraw their support from the reformed institutions, leaving the Government isolated and exposed to attack.¹ In its judgment that danger was past for Gandhi had lost much of his influence. He was arrested at Ahmedabad on 10 March 1922² and the mildness of the protests against this action proved the Government's point.³

Among the Bengal Congressmen a debate had begun on what should now be done. With all the leading nationalists in prison and the non-co-operation movement in ruins, the outlook was bleak. The Gandhians insisted that the first essential was for Bengalis to recognise that the failure was their own. They had not heeded Gandhi's injunction to work with the masses nor had they learnt self-control. The provincial Congress should now devote itself to the constructive programme. Its members should humble themselves and go out into the villages. 'Ours is a spiritual struggle and like true worshippers we must purge ourselves of all failings and imperfections before we are privileged to enter the Temple of Liberty'.⁴

¹ GI, Home Political, 489, 1922.
² Ibid.
⁴ Servant,* 18 Feb 1922.
This view was contested by another section of the party which maintained that it would be retrograde for the province to follow Gandhi. '... in view of the stage of attainment that the life of the Bengalis have reached, they will have to fall back if they have to follow the dictates of the Mahatma'. This group argued that Bengal had supported non-co-operation in a temporary state of overexcitement and that now that good sense was returning it would realise that it could gain its objectives only by terrorism. 'Bengalis cannot give up the creed of fire'. The samitis which had worked so heroically in the partition period should be revived. 'Forming these organisations is now the only work in the country; and, the more they become well established, the more will they be able to improve the country. The real thing is that the country must be free ... Many paths will come and go in order that the nation may gain experience, but it will not be possible for the nation of the Bengali to stick to the wrong path in their attempt to show reverence to an individual'.

C.R. Das offered a third course: to enter the legislative councils and destroy the reforms from within. The idea of council entry had never been discarded by a group among the Bengal non-co-operators. As early as March 1921 Bepin Chandra Pal had suggested that the Nagpur resolution should be reconsidered. Speaking as

1 Nava Sangha,* Chandernagore, 23 Jul 1922.
2 Ibid.
president of the Provincial Conference at Barisal, he warned his fellow Bengalis not to accept outside dictation, for this would destroy provincial individuality. Already, he said, a mistake had been made in asking lawyers to suspend practice. There was also a misconception about the legislative councils. Indians certainly did not want the British parliamentary system. 'But we are to some extent helpless in this matter. We are at the mercy of the stranger within our gates. Any British charlatan can, therefore, make any experiment with our fate and future. This is the tragedy of our present unfortunate position'.

The remedy, as Pal saw it, was to persuade the British to amend the preamble of the Government of India Act to include a promise of self-government for India at the end of ten years. To achieve this concession, Congress had to be willing to compromise with the British and it had to reach a compromise quickly because it had promised the nation swaraj within twelve months. Moreover, the people had to be persuaded that swaraj had this limited meaning.

It will spell disaster to our cause if we allow the masses to interpret this declaration in any other sense. That will be bound to create a reaction against the whole movement when the year is out, and they see that the British are still in possession of their country .... it will create deep and widespread discontent that may either lead people back to their old hopeless indifference and listlessness, or killing their faith in non-violent non-co-operation, drive them towards violent revolutionary ways as the only possible way to their political redemption.¹

He was a brave man who would criticise Gandhi's programme at that juncture, and, although there were many in the Bengal Congress who agreed with Pal, none would support him publicly. He resigned in disgust from the B.P.C.C. and the A.I.C.C., and later entered the Indian Legislative Assembly at a by-election.

That there was no disagreement in principle between Pal and the Das group was demonstrated in April 1921 when the latter carried a motion in the B.P.C.C. reversing a decision of the Barisal conference to boycott local bodies. These institutions were a source of local power - they had provided more than half the elected members of the Bengal Legislative Council at the 1920 general election - and the Das group saw no reason to leave them, as well as the Council, to the Moderates.

That Das also shared Pal's belief in the need for compromise to secure constitutional concessions was revealed after his imprisonment in December 1921. The mass arrests in the second week of that month had offended the Moderates so seriously that the Government of India

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1 The whole Bengali press was against him. (NP, Mar-Apr 1921.)
2 GI, Home Political, Deposit 46, Jun 1921.
3 Navayuga,* 14 Apr 1921. Herald,* 21 Apr 1921.
4 On 17 December the Indian Association and National Liberal League jointly issued a manifesto protesting against the arrests and calling for a round table conference, with the Government and all Indian parties represented. 'We feel absolutely convinced that in the event of the Government refusing or failing to allay this increasing unrest by withdrawal of the present policy, all sections of the community will be driven into this struggle, putting aside for the time being all differences of political opinion'. (Statesman,* 17 Dec 1921. Bengalee,* 17 Dec 1921.)
had decided that it would have to come to terms with the non-co-
operators to prevent the collapse of the Montagu-Chelmsford constitution.
It therefore sent emissaries to Gandhi and Das with the offer of a
round table conference to discuss constitutional advance, on condition
that the hartal of 24 December was called off.

Das saw in this an opportunity to turn the non-co-operation
movement to positive gain and he was willing to accept the offer, with
the proviso that all prisoners arrested for civil disobedience should
be released immediately. He convinced the other inmates of the Alipur
Gaol that he was right by pointing out the need for a demonstrable
achievement by 31 December, the day for which swaraj was promised.\(^1\)
He had less success with Gandhi who mistrusted British intentions.
The Mahatma challenged the Government to prove its good faith by
stating what constitutional concessions it would make and by releasing
immediately all political prisoners. This was asking too much and
the offer was withdrawn.\(^2\)

There was general disgust in the Bengali camp at Gandhi's failure
to take advantage of the opportunity\(^3\) and Das considered it a good
time to reopen the question of council entry. He canvassed the idea
among his fellow prisoners and soon had a group of supporters. When


\(^3\) H.N. Das Gupta: *Subhas Chandra*, p. 48.
J.M. Sen Gupta was released from prison in January 1922, he was charged with the task of talking with Motilal Nehru, a leading United Provinces Congressman who was known to favour council entry, and of organising support for the new scheme.¹ With the collapse of civil disobedience after the Bardoli resolution and Gandhi's arrest, the Das group was willing to put the idea to the public. Basanti Devi presided at the Provincial Conference held at Chittagong in April 1922 and in her address she suggested that Congressmen should set out to capture all seats on local bodies and the Legislative Council.²

The Case for Council Entry

The case in favour of council entry which the Das group developed over the following eight months deserves our close attention, for by providing an insight into their motives it will help us answer the second of the two questions with which we opened this chapter.

In the first place they explained that they could not accept Gandhi's constructive programme because it was not suited to the provincial character. 'Not we alone, but Srijut Bipin Pal too has been saying from the beginning that Guzarati politics will not agree with the nature of the Bengalis'.³ Council entry was Bengal's way,

¹ N.C. Banerji: At the Cross-Roads, pp. 172-3.
² Bengalee,* 16 Apr 1922.
³ Nayak,* 27 Jul 1922.
they insisted, but Gandhi and his adherents were too doctrinaire to admit provincial differences. They were also incapable of distinguishing between symbolism and reality in their own movement. Das observed:

> It is often stated that Khaddar alone will bring us Swaraj. I ask my countrymen to consider in what way it is possible for Khaddar to lead us to Swaraj. It is in one sense only that the statement may be said to be true. We must regard Khaddar as the symbol of Swaraj. But what would that symbol signify? To my mind such a symbol worship requires the spreading out of all non-co-operation activities in every possible direction.¹

The Das group also warned their fellow-bhadralok against the dangers of Gandhi's methods, which depended upon a reawakening of the masses. 'Reawakening means the extinction of the middle classes. Are we ready to pay the price'.² Already the non-co-operation movement had weakened the position of the educated classes who previously 'were being forced into a great Indian nation .... One's hair stands on end to think of what will become of the English-educated classes in the future!'³ To avoid these dangers, politics should be redirected into the old safe channels.

There were positive arguments for council entry. The aim of the non-co-operation movement had been to destroy the system of government which made possible outrages like Amritsar. Despite all its

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² Atmasakti,* 1 Nov 1922.
³ Swaraj,* 14 Jul 1922.
achievements it had failed to do this. The British autocracy had been shaken but it had not been broken. Worst of all it was still able to disguise the nature of its despotism behind the screen of the reformed institutions. Having failed to destroy these from outside, the non-co-operators should now enter them and destroy them from within. Das wrote:

Hitherto we have been boycotting the Councils from outside. We have succeeded in doing much. The prestige of the Councils is diminished, and the country knows that the people who adorn the Council Chambers are not the true representatives of the people. But although we have succeeded in doing much, these councils are still there. It should be the duty of the Congress to boycott the Council more effectively from within as also from without.

The Reformed Councils are really a mask which the bureaucracy has put on. I conceive it to be our clear duty to tear this mask from off their face. To end these councils is the only effective boycott.¹

That Das used this as his main argument is of great significance for it shows that the non-co-operators in Bengal were as concerned with the workings of the reformed institutions as were the Government and the Moderates, for opposite reasons. The Government considered it vital that it should never again have to rule without this institutional support. The non-co-operators were determined to force it to do so. 'I am aware of the large powers of veto which the Governors can exercise under the Reforms Act', wrote Das. 'Let them govern by veto till the time must come when they must either

¹ Das' press statement, op. cit., p. 132.
yield to our demands or withdraw the Reforms Act'. The Moderates were concerned to maintain the reformed institutions as a means of justifying their political style. The non-co-operators were resolved to prevent them: 'The Council has practically become a place for personal advertisement', warned the Nayak. 'Let those who, boycotting it, are sitting silent, get up. It will not do to sit inactive'.

'I warn my countrymen against the policy of allowing these Reformed Councils to work their wicked will', said Das. '... there is an apprehension in my mind. I desire to express it with all the emphasis that I can command, that if we allow this policy of drift to continue, the result will be that we shall lose the people who are with us today'.

Das knew that the criterion by which the bhadralok judged its nationalist politicians was their skill in harrying the Government. He recognised that the non-co-operators had lost their ability to do this with the collapse of civil disobedience. For that reason, they would be inviting defeat if they sat in the villages spinning yarn, and left the Moderates to goad the British in the Council.

'We are realising at every step that unless we can bring in a feeling

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1 Das' press statement, op. cit., p. 132.
2 Nayak,* 13 Jul 1922.
3 Presidential address, All-India Congress session, Gaya, 26 Dec 1922, Congress Presidential Addresses, 1911-1934, p. 600.
of struggle against the bureaucracy, the non-co-operation movement will not live long', wrote the Banglar Katha. 'The obstructionist policy in the Councils is a great instrument for fighting with the ruling powers'.

Holding Attention

This problem of getting to grips with the British, of keeping themselves actively in the public eye, worried the Bengal Congressmen throughout the remainder of 1922. While in prison they gave the Government as much trouble as they could by provoking their gaolers and inciting the ordinary criminals to riot. Their efforts were rewarded with a number of serious outbreaks of violence and the floggings which the Government ordered in retaliation won them much public sympathy. They also had the satisfaction of seeing Sir Abdur Rahim resign his portfolio of gaols in protest against these punishments.

When they were released in August they organised rallies which brought young bhadralok men from all over Bengal to taste the political delights of Calcutta. A chance for public service was

1 Banglar Katha, * 22 Dec. 1922.
4 H.N. Das Gupta: Subhas Chandra, pp. 52-3.
provided early in October by disastrous flooding in Northern Bengal. The Government was in Darjeeling at the time and, as in the Chandpur affair, was slow to act. Congress saw its opportunity and immediately despatched Bose and Sen Gupta to the disaster area to organise relief. Supported by a fund raised in Calcutta by Sir Prafulla Chandra Ray, the great Bengali chemist, they enlisted more than 200 volunteers to rescue peasants and their livestock, and to distribute food, medicines and clothing. As the floodwaters receded they helped the villagers repair their devastated homes. With his indefatigable energy and outstanding organising ability, Bose in particular earned praise from all quarters for two months invaluable work. Banerjea, as Minister of Public Health, provided a pathetic contrast by making a one day excursion through the area and returning to Darjeeling to collapse with pneumonia.¹

The Council Entry Debate

Throughout 1922 and the early months of 1923 there was a battle royal in the Bengal Congress over council entry. When the Das group came out of gaol they found themselves for the first time at a disadvantage in the B.P.C.C., which had been taken over in their

absence by the Gandhians. This group accused them of misinterpreting non-co-operation by subscribing to 'the old Moderate fallacy that the sole end of political agitation is to embarrass the Government .... The object of the non-co-operator is not to annoy the officials or to obstruct their work temporarily ... it is his aim to so train up his countrymen by means of sacrifice and suffering as to be able at a given moment to stand completely aloof from all the various ramifications of the Government administration'. Council entry, whether to obstruct or co-operate, was a denial of this aim.

Few of the Bengal newspapers favoured the constructive programme but they were no more enthusiastic about council entry, for it resembled too closely the Moderates' policy of co-operation on which they had been pouring their editorial scorn for the preceding 18 months. Das knew that he had to have newspaper support if he were to carry the day. He revived the Banglar Katha, which had been forced to cease publication in mid-year because of lack of staff, and, after an abortive attempt to gain control of the Gandhians' main paper,

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1 N.C. Banerji: At the Cross-Roads, p. 173.
2 Servant,* 24 Apr 1922.
3 Ananda Bazar Patrika,* 18 Apr 1922.
4 NP, passim.
5 Banglar Katha,* 14 Dec 1922.
the Servant, he formed a company to produce a new English-language daily Forward.

He also realised that a provincial political leader could no longer afford to restrict his activities to his home province. The old-style Congress — a federation of provincial grandees — had been destroyed by Gandhi's consolidation of the powers of the All-India Congress executive and his frequent intrusions into provincial politics. There were now two inter-dependent power structures — the national and the provincial — and to maintain his influence the nationalist politician had to have a secure position in both.

For Das the time seemed opportune for a concentration of effort at the national level. The provincial executive was out of his control, temporarily at least, and the all-India leadership was vacant because of Gandhi's imprisonment. At a meeting of the A.I.C.C. in Calcutta in November he supported Motilal Nehru in a resolution in favour of council entry, but their opponents had the matter postponed to the plenary session of Congress to be held at Gaya in the following month. Das presided at Gaya and in his opening address on 26 December 1922 he appealed for support for council entry. His main opponent

1 N.C. Banerji: At the Cross-Roads, p. 173.
2 Indian Struggle, p. 117. H.H. Das Gupta: Subhas Chandra, p. 64.
4 Congress Presidential Addresses, 1911-1934, pp. 587-600.
was the Tamil politician, C. Rajagopalachari, who successfully carried a resolution against council entry. Motilal Nehru and Das therefore decided to form a new party which would contest the elections. It was given the name Swaraj Party and Das was elected leader. On 1 January 1923 he informed the new A.I.C.C. of their action and tendered his resignation from the presidency of Congress. The prospect of the disintegration of Congress alarmed his opponents and they declined to accept the resignation. They also tried to persuade the council entry group to compromise but Das and Nehru stood their ground. For the following six months the leaders of both groups toured the country seeking support for their views. By May Das' opponents had been forced into a minority on the A.I.C.C. and a special session of Congress in September recognised council entry as a legitimate line of action for Congressmen.  

In Bengal all the major newspapers had swung over to support the Swarajists by the middle of the year and Das was slowly but surely winning recruits from among his opponents in the B.P.C.C. In August he succeeded in replacing the Gandhian office-bearers with a group of neutrals but the Gandhians refused to yield and for a month there were two provincial executives claiming authority in Calcutta. The A.I.C.C. finally settled the dispute in favour of the

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2 NP, May-Jun 1923.
new men. When the B.P.C.C. was re-elected towards the end of the year the Swarajists gained an outright majority and Das resumed the presidency with S.C. Bose as his secretary.

The Reaction

Andrews wrote to Rathindranath Tagore on 11 August 1920:

... these Indian leaders ... are living from hand to mouth on every fresh excitement. Sadly enough, these false excitements, coming one after another, produce a morbid atmosphere, like drug or dram drinking. People cannot bear to be without them, and one excitement must follow another in quick succession. This means, in the long run, a terrible reaction and an appalling waste of energy.

The reaction to the political excitements of 1920–21 came in late 1922 and early 1923. As a result Das and his party faced some difficult problems of appeasement as they prepared for the Legislative Council elections to be held in November 1923.

From the leaders of the low-caste Hindu communities came the complaint that the bhadralok had run true to form in deserting non-co-operation. Nirode Behari Mallick, a Namasudra representative in the Legislative Council, had voiced the general dissatisfaction of his community in the 1922 budget debate: 'So far as mere sweet words are concerned, I admit that from the highest rulers of the

2 Das Gupta: Subhas Chandra, p. 65.
3 Andrews MSS.
province to the so-called Leagues, every one shows sympathy with
the condition of the backward classes. But when the time for practical
action comes, all sympathy evaporates'. The *Raiyat Bandhu*, a
Calcutta newspaper, was of the same opinion. In January 1923 it
advised its peasant readers that the nationalist movement was not
for them, 'but for those who have not to toil for their bread; who,
seated in the midst of plenty, dream pleasant dreams, and who would
live in the dirtiest lane of the town, rather than forego the charms
of town life'.

The Swaraj party decided that it could safely ignore these
complaints for it considered that the lower castes were too poorly
organised to exercise any decisive influence at the polls. Its
judgment was borne out at the 1923 elections by the defeats inflicted
by its *bhadralok* candidates in Khulna and Bakarganj South, two
Namasudra strongholds, on Nirode Behari Mallick and his brother
Mukanda Behari, Vice-President and President of the Bengal Namasudra
Association.

Less easily disregarded were the fears expressed by many caste
Hindus that Congress had endangered Hindu society by allying with
the Muslims during the non-co-operation movement. The *Nayak* wrote

1 BLCP, 27 Feb 1922, vol. VII, no. iii, p. 27.
of the Muslims on 19 February 1923:

Within the next ten or twenty years they are sure to oust the Hindus from their leading position in Bengal, if they are intelligently guided, whether they secure communal representation or not. Our Babus can make very dexterous use of the catchphrases of international politics, such as "mandate", "franchise", "proletariat", etc., but they do not understand their household matters. They are spreading English hatred broadcast in the country, with the result that Muhammedans are daily growing stronger and more united. The Congress has become an insignificant tail of the Khilafat conference; the big leaders are eager for the sympathy of Khilafat chiefs. The 2½ crores of Hindus of Bengal are scattered and feeble like flocks of sheep without a watcher by the side of their Muhammedan compatriots.¹

This conviction of the need to organise the Hindus against the rising power of the Muslims led to the formation in Bengal in 1923 of a number of communalist organisations, the most important of which was the Hindu Mahasabha.² Das had little sympathy with the objects of these bodies and he offended their organisers by insisting that political and social security in Bengal could be ensured only if the bhadralok were willing to admit the lower orders, Muslim as well as Hindu, to some form of partnership.³ With this as his attitude, he could not count upon electoral support from the communalists but he could take heart from the fact that the Moderates had made themselves even more unpopular with these men because of their concessions to the Muslims in the Calcutta Municipal Act.

¹ Kayak,* 19 Feb 1923.
² NP, Aug 1923.
³ Banglar Katha,* 7 Feb 1923. NP, 7 Apr 1923.
By 1923 the terrorists were again active in Bengal, working in groups modelled on the revolutionary samitias of the partition period and, in many cases, carrying the same names. They were composed mainly of young bhadralok men and they had the support of the communalist Hindus. Das personally disapproved of their activities but some of his followers in the Swaraj party, Subhas Chandra Bose among them, favoured violent methods and these men served as his liaison with the terrorists. The connection was later to prove an embarrassment to his party when it attempted to move towards cooperation with the Government but in the short run it was a considerable electoral asset as it secured bhadralok sympathy.

While appreciating the continued importance of cultivating the bhadralok vote, Das realised that no party could hope to command a majority in the reformed Bengal Legislative Council unless it had Muslim backing. His position vis-à-vis the Muslims at the beginning of 1923 was not strong. Even at the height of the non-co-operation and Khilafat movements, the Muslim alliance in Bengal had never been as close as it was in many other provinces, and in 1922 with Gandhi's retreat and the collapse of the Khilafat agitation it had disintegrated. The Muslims resented the open contempt which the bhadralok displayed

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1 Pundits & Elephants, pp. 57-61.
2 See Bose's "Dreams of a Youth", originally published in May 1923, reprinted in The Mission of Life, pp. 1-5.
for the masses\(^1\) and the growth of Hindu communalism convinced many of their leaders that their communal identity was endangered.\(^2\)

At this time there was no enthusiasm displayed by the Muslim press for the idea of council entry\(^3\) but Das was determined to gain the community's support for the Swaraj party. The Moderates made his task easier by their reluctance to concede the Muslims' demands with regard to the Calcutta Municipal Bill and the manner in which the Muslims finally achieved their victory over communal electorates convinced many of their leaders that the community's interests could best be secured by organising a solid Muslim bloc in the Council, which might then ally with other groups on its own terms.

There followed a vigorous intra-communal debate over council entry, which Das attempted to swing in his favour by campaigning in the Muslim centres of Eastern Bengal.\(^4\) He made it clear that he was willing to negotiate terms with the Muslims as a community if in return they would support the Swaraj party. It was on this basis that discussions were begun in September 1923 to settle the details of a Hindu/Muslim alliance in Bengal. These were not finalised until after the elections but in the meantime many Muslim candidates

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1 E.g. Progress\(*\) 17 Apr 1923.
2 E.g. NP, Aug 1923.
3 NP, Nov 1922-Mar 1923.
4 Progress\(*\) 7 Aug 1923.
had accepted the Swarajist label and the party had the general goodwill of the community in its election bid.

The communal and class dissensions which had appeared in 1923 were to have a disastrous influence on the political future of Bengal but, temporarily at least, Das had shielded his party from their most harmful effects and enabled it to contest the 1923 elections strong and united.

**The Swarajist Election Campaign**

The Swarajists approached the elections with many advantages. They were the heroes of the greatest anti-Government agitation India had ever seen and they proudly bore the new title of honour: prison graduates. They had symbols, such as the wearing of khadi, by which they could appeal to the new mass electorate and they could offer themselves to the people as Mahatmaji's disciples. By contrast the Moderates could be represented as 'Government men' and this had the hue of truth, for was it not a fact that they had been absent in Calcutta for the last three years on Government business?

Because of the time they had spent in their localities organising support for non-co-operation, the Swarajists were known in person to the electors in a way politicians in Bengal had never been before. Moreover they had at their disposal the reformed Congress organisation extending to the villages and the volunteer brigades, although but a remnant of their former strength, could be used for the hack work
of election propaganda. By securing a sweeping victory in the local body elections in April 1923, the Swarajists had secured an additional source of local power.¹

Possibly even more important factors were the personnel and organisation of the party itself. In Das it had a leader of outstanding ability - a politician with a flair for the dramatic and an acute sense of timing; a man who could command the unquestioning obedience of his followers and who could yet delegate power wisely.² He was an excellent judge of men and had gathered a group of lieutenants who were scarcely less capable than himself: J.M. Sen Gupta, Subhas Chandra Bose, B.N. Sasmal, Nirmal Chandra Chandra, and Kiran Sankar Ray. Das was 53. His senior officers were all in their thirties or forties with the exception of Bose who was 26. They were the ablest members of a young generation which acknowledged them as its leaders.

For the first time in Bengal there was a party which approached a general election with an unchallenged leader and a central organisation to nominate its candidates. It could furnish them with election workers and ample funds for campaigning, for it had its

¹ Englishman,* 26 Apr 1923.
² For judgments of Das' ability by three of his contemporaries see P.C. Ray: Life & Times of C.R. Das, pp. 229-41; Jayakar, vol. I, pp. 344-7; and Pundits & Elephants, p. 44.
hands in many full pockets. It could also provide electioneering expertise, for three at least of its members (Das, Bose and Dr Bidhan Chandra Ray) had assisted British Liberal candidates in parliamentary elections while studying in England. As a result, the party applied techniques new to Indian politics. These can be illustrated from Dr Ray's campaign in the 24-Parganas Municipal North constituency, where he gained a spectacular victory over Surendranath Banerjea.

At 41 Bidhan Chandra Ray was one of India's leading surgeons. As a student he had had a brilliant career in Calcutta and London, and on his return to Bengal in 1911 he had divided his time between private practice and university teaching. In 1916 he had been elected to the Calcutta University Senate where he joined Sir Asutosh Mukherjea's group. It was P.C. Mitra's criticism of Mukherjea in 1922 that first gave Ray the idea of entering the Legislative Council.

His ambition was encouraged by Surendranath Ray, who was looking for a candidate to set up against Banerjea to even the old score over his non-appointment as Education Minister. He offered Dr Ray the support of his purse and his influence if he would contest the 24-Parganas Municipal North seat. Ray accepted the offer, reasoning

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that a victory against Banerjea would be an excellent start to a political career while a defeat at his hands would be no disgrace.¹ Das recognised Ray's ability and gave him the Swarajist nomination for the constituency.

He opened his campaign in May 1923 and in the following seven months spent most of his evenings and his Sundays among his electors. In the same period Banerjea visited the constituency twice only for he was in Darjeeling throughout the summer. Ray had the help of the Congress volunteers and Das personally supported him at a number of his meetings.

He offered the voters a choice between a representative who would devote himself to their service and one who was bound to the Government. In India there were only two parties, he said; the party of the few who supported the Government and profited from its every action, and the party of the many who suffered. 'I do not belong to the party of the Government'. On the other hand, Sir Surendranath Banerjea 'by accepting office ... has identified himself with the Bureaucracy'.²

Socially the 24-Parganas Municipal North constituency was a mixed bag. Lying on the outskirts of Calcutta, it comprised a number of satellite towns which had grown up around the jute mills along the Hooghly. Its centre was Barrackpur which had a British

¹ K.P. Thomas: Dr B.C. Roy, p. 88.
² Ibid, pp. 91 & 94.
cantonment and to which many bhadralok were attracted because of the excellent rail service to Calcutta. Between the towns were numerous villages.¹

Ray attempted to reach all classes of voters with his appeal. To the bhadralok he spoke of his keen interest in higher education and he pledged himself 'to strive to preserve the position of the University and oppose any attempt to destroy the legitimate autonomy or in any way to reduce its status or utility as an institution for higher research'. He informed the mill operatives that he was opposed to 'the forces and resources of the State' being 'more readily placed at the service of Capital than for due protection of the vital interests of labour'. He was careful to add, however, that he would set his face 'sternly against the fomenting of class war or the organisation of industrial strikes for the pursuit of political ends'. He would encourage 'healthy co-operation between capital and labour'. His final appeal was to the tenantry, whom he promised to protect against the tyrannies of zamindars and officials alike.²

Election day in Calcutta and the surrounding towns was an exciting occasion. There were noisy demonstrations by the supporters of the rival parties and hundreds of motor cars plied the streets at the candidates' expense, bearing placards and carrying voters to

² K.P. Thomas: Dr B.C. Roy, pp. 92-3.
the polls. The results were announced on 30 November. In 24-Parganas Municipal North Banerjea had suffered a humiliating defeat, securing only 2283 votes to Ray's 5689. The new Swarajist daily, Forward, was jubilant: the Barrackpur contest 'represents the clash between the limitations of the real and the vision of an idea. The issue is plain and simple - Diarchy or a free and unfettered India with a soul and a nationality; a dead horse or a full manhood. Sir Surendra Nath represents Diarchy and, in his fall, was voiced the free will of the people.'

Throughout the province the Swaraj party had triumphed. In the Hindu constituencies its candidates had captured three-quarters of the seats and in the Muslim electorates, where there was considerable reluctance to acknowledge any but a communal allegiance, they had secured half. The Moderate party had been reduced to a rump and nearly all its leaders had been kept out of the Council.

To what did the Swaraj party owe its victory? Primarily to its success in spanning the two levels of politics - the old level of bhadralok society and the new level of the mass electorate. The

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1 GB, Appointment, 6R-220(1-5) of 1923, A87-91, Jul 1924.
3 Forward, 1 Dec 1923.
party had retained the confidence of the bhadralok because it was itself largely bhadralok in composition but its members had also won a popular following through their district work. They had taken the old bhadralok Congress and refashioned it to meet the demands of mass politics. They had used symbols which did not offend the bhadralok and yet could be understood by the masses. They had a watchcry which was simple and absolute: 'We want swaraj; we want freedom. Small rights will not satisfy us'.

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1 Swaraj party election manifesto, Swadesh,* 29 Sep 1923.
CHAPTER VIII

REAPERS OF THE WHIRLWIND

Strategy & Organisation

Das had brought his party triumphantly into the Legislative Council but he had now to face new tasks. He had first to devise a strategy which would satisfy his party and enable it to retain the confidence of the electors. He had then to bind his following securely together so that the unity of the party would not be destroyed in the division lobbies. As he was well aware, neither task had been successfully accomplished by his predecessors in the Council.

In working the reformed institutions in Bengal nationalist politicians were confronted with grave problems. In the first place they had to serve two masters: the bhadralok, a tightly structured class with clearly formulated and exacting demands, and the new mass electorate, which was fractured and inarticulate. Secondly, the legislature in which they had to work was divided by its constitution into groups responsible to separate communal and sectional electorates. There was thus no single 'bar' before which all members could be 'arraigned' for their actions in the Council and no sense of a common allegiance. The Muslims who occupied 30 per cent of the seats and the Europeans who occupied 14 per cent preferred their communal
interests to wider considerations of general social welfare. These difficulties had proved too much for the Moderates. Das had now to wrestle with them.

Lytton forced him into an immediate decision on strategy by calling him to Government House as soon as the election results were finalised and offering him the ministerial portfolios as leader of the majority party. The Governor was holding open a door which Das dared not enter no matter how tempted he may have been. He had persuaded the bhadralok to tolerate council entry by arguing that it was in the Council that the Government could best be fought, and the Swaraj party was pledged to destroy dyarchy. Any hint from Das at that stage of a willingness to co-operate with the British would have split his party and alienated its bhadralok support. In his reply to Lytton he nailed his colours to the mast of obstruction. 'The members of this party are pledged to do everything in their power, by using their legal rights granted under the Reform Act, to put an end to the system of diarchy. This duty they cannot discharge if they take office'.

What did Das hope to gain by his policy of obstruction? He believed that if he could bring the working of the reforms to a standstill the British would be forced to come to him cap in hand with an offer of constitutional concessions. He would then be in a

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1 C.R. Das to Lytton, [16 Dec 1923], Pundits & Elephants, p. 44.
position to dictate his own terms. His belief was not unjustified for since 1920 the British had been obsessed with the importance of keeping the reformed institutions working and it was their fear of a collapse which had brought them to Das and Gandhi in December 1921 with the suggestion of a round table conference.

Successful obstruction would depend upon party solidarity and as soon as the elections were over Das turned to this work. He had first to make good his promises to the Muslims. In this regard he could not afford to be niggardly for a considerable number of the 40 Muslim M.L.Cs. were as yet uncommitted and some might join the Swaraj party if it proved itself willing to give generously to their community. On the other hand, any suggestion of partiality for Hindu interests would almost certainly drive the existing Muslim members out of the Swaraj party into a communal organisation.

Early in December 1923 in discussions with a number of leading Muslims the terms of a Hindu-Muslim pact were settled and these were accepted by a meeting of the Swaraj Council party on the 16th. They were published two days later over the signature of S.C. Bose as secretary of the B.P.C.C. 'It is resolved that in order to establish a real foundation of Self-Government in this province it is necessary to bring about a pact between the Hindu and the Mahomedans of Bengal dealing with the rights of each community when the foundation of Self-Government is secured'. Representation in the Legislative Council was to be in proportion to population and through separate
electorates. In local bodies the majority community in each District was to have 60 per cent of the seats and the minority community 40 per cent. Fifty-five per cent of government posts were to be reserved for the Muslims and until that percentage was reached the community might supply up to 80 per cent of all recruits. No resolution affecting the religion of any community was to be passed by the Legislative Council without the consent of three-quarters of the elected representatives of that community. There was to be no music in procession before mosques and cow-killing was not to be interfered with.\(^1\) Das paid dearly for the 21 Muslims who followed him into the Council.\(^2\)

He had secured one flank. To secure the other he formed an alliance with a group nominally led by Byomkes Chakravarti, his old rival from the 1917–20 period who had played but a minor role in politics since Das' triumph at Nagpur. However Chakravarti had maintained his influence in Calcutta through his position in the Bengal Landholders' Association and the Bengal National Chamber of Commerce, and it was to represent the latter that he was returned to the

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\(^1\) A. Karim: *Letters on Hindu-Muslim Pact*, pp. 2-3 & appendix A.

\(^2\) There is a conflict of evidence on the exact composition and size of the parties at various stages in the second Council. The figures given in this chapter are the author's estimates based on division lists and the following sources: *Pundits & Elephants*, p. 46; Reports on the working of the Reformed Constitution, 1927, pp. 178–9; Simon Commission Report, vol. VIII, pp. 103 & 109; *Statesman*, 1 Dec 1923; PP, 1924, *Cmd. 2154*, vol. XVIII, pp. 500, 503, 522–34.
Council in 1923. Immediately after the elections he had gathered around him a group of 24 M.L.Cs., some former Moderates and others renegade Swarajists, who shared little apart from the title Independent Nationalists and a common desire to hold office. It was to this group that Lytton turned after Das had rejected his ministerial offer but he found that Chakravarti would accept office only if all three Ministers were chosen from his party. As the Independent Nationalists would be dependent upon Moderate votes for a majority in the Council, Lytton refused to agree to this.

With the prospect of office gone, the main bond uniting the group was destroyed and Chakravarti beat a hasty retreat to the Swaraj party, whence five of his six Muslim followers had preceded him, attracted no doubt by the Hindu-Muslim pact. Displaying great tact, Das treated Chakravarti as the leader of a separate group while at the same time providing him with a new constituency to replace the Bengal National Chamber of Commerce seat of which he had been deprived because of the corruption by which he had secured his original election. The remainder of his followers, most of whom rejected the Hindu-Muslim pact, remained outside the Swaraj party but Das

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1 Reports on the working of the Reformed Constitution, 1927, p. 178.
2 Pundits & Elephants, p. 45.
3 GB, Appointment, 6R-1(1-35), A105-139, Jul 1924. Ibid, 6R-1(1-9), A12-20, Nov 1924.
and Chakravarti were usually able to secure their votes on vital issues. Thus Das entered the new Council supported by 46 Swarajists and 19 Independent Nationalists.

Down with the Ministers

In search of Ministers Lytton had now to turn to the Moderates, a disorganised group of 30 M.L.Cs. who had no acknowledged leader. In these circumstances the only possible basis for selection was personality. Lytton's choices were Surendranath Mallick, an extremist in the first Council whose considerable influence in Calcutta had been increased by his appointment under Banerjea's regime as first Indian non-official Chairman of the Corporation; Fazlul Huq, who now commanded a personal following of eight Muslim members; and Abdul Karim Ghuznavi, a former Imperial Legislative Councillor and a large landholder in Mymensingh.¹

The Swarajists regarded Lytton's appointment of Ministers as a challenge - a challenge, moreover, which they were glad to accept for they knew that few of their electors drew any distinction between the personalities in the Government and the institutions of Government. For this reason, a successful personal attack on a Minister would be regarded as a success against the reformed institutions. They set out to knock down the Ministers and Surendranath Mallick was selected

¹ *Pundits & Elephants*, pp. 45-6. GB, Appointment, 18L-23(1-3), A47-49, Feb 1924.
as their first victim. A petition was filed contesting the legality of his return to the Council from the Calcutta South constituency, as a result of which a re-election was ordered. To oppose Mallick in the new contest the Swarajists and Independent Nationalists jointly nominated Surendranath Haldar, who had great influence in South Calcutta as a member of the priestly caste of the Kalighat temple. With the Swarajist election machine working for him, he was able to defeat Mallick comfortably and the Minister was forced to resign without having taken his seat in the Council.¹

The attack on Huq and Ghuznavi was begun through the public press, which described the two Ministers as a pair of self-seeking opportunists.² The Swarajists' experience during the non-co-operation movement had taught them the value of a well-conducted campaign of defamation, and with three major newspapers at their disposal, the English-language Forward, the Hindu-edited vernacular Nayak, and the Bengali Muslim Mohammadi,³ they were able to pillory every leading personality connected with the reformed institutions. Lytton and his Executive Councillors were represented as repressive autocrats;⁴ the President

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¹ GB, Appointment, 18L-43(1-4), A31-34, Mar 1924. Fundits & Elephants, p. 48.
² E.g. Mohammadi,* 28 Dec 1923.
³ Reports on the working of the Reformed Constitution, 1927, p. 189.
⁴ Ibid.
of the Legislative Council, Evan Cotton, was reviled as an enemy of Indian freedom - 'the unworthy son of Sir Henry Cotton'; the Ministers were ridiculed for their every action; and the ordinary M.L.C. who had the temerity to cast a vote for the Government was named in bold type in the centre of the front page of the following day's papers.

The new Legislative Council was sworn in on 22 January 1924. The Swarajists made a striking impression. They came in a body, dressed uniformly in white khadi, bareheaded and clean shaven. They sat together in the centre of the opposition benches and in the proceedings which followed showed a vigour and poise which was unusual in new members. They had a well-prepared party organisation, with a caucus and whips, including one for the Muslims.

Their policy was to lop off the tall poppies - to hit at the main personalities opposing them - and their method was to misuse the constitutional machinery. In both ways they would earn bhadralok applause and impede, if not wreck, the working of the institution.

Their first act was a mark of disrespect for the Governor: they absented themselves from the Council during his speech of welcome on

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1 Nayak, *26 Mar 1924.*
3 Drummond, p. 175.
23 January. They followed this with an attempt to criticise his appointment of Ministers by moving for the presentation of a formal address from the Council. Cotton ruled the motion out of order and this was the beginning of a running fight between the Swarajists and the President over points of procedure. Every possible ruling from the Chair was contested in an attempt to discredit Cotton and his office. There were rowdy demonstrations from the opposition benches, which frequently had vocal support from the visitors' galleries, and on a number of occasions the Swarajists walked out of the Chamber when they failed to get their way.

The Ministers were subjected to a barrage of interjections whenever they addressed the Council and frequent use was made of supplementary questions in an attempt to catch them off balance. When they voted with the minority, even on a reserved question, the Swarajists called for their resignations. Those few items of legislation which the Government was rash enough to trust to the Council's tender mercies were obstructed or so mutilated as to ensure their withdrawal.

1 Drummond, p. 129.
4 E.g. ibid, 20 Feb 1924, vol. XIV, no. ii, pp. 126-50.
The climax to the campaign came in March 1924 with the Swarajists' attack on the Government's financial demands. On the reserved side they rejected every demand except that for police and on the transferred side they refused grants to pay the salaries of the Education Department inspectorate, the Medical Department establishment, and the Ministers.\(^1\) The contest over the last item was regarded by both sides as a major trial of strength, for the constitution would have to be suspended if no money was provided to pay the Ministers. The Swarajists were at pains to ensure that the electorate understood why they were opposing this grant. At public meetings and in the press they explained their motives,\(^2\) and as a result their rejection of the Ministers' salaries was acclaimed as a triumph for nationalism. 'The opposition in the Bengal Legislative Council has already begun to prove too strong. Mr B. Chakrabartti and Deshbandhu Das are really making their presence felt by their legal acumen and their gift of the gab. Who is there on the Government side to match any of these two giants? The strength of the opposition means the strength of political life in the province'.\(^3\)

March 1924 also brought the Swaraj party a victory outside the Legislative Council. In the elections for the Calcutta Corporation,

\(^1\) BLCP, vol. XIV, no. v.
\(^3\) Telegraph,* 2 Feb 1924.
reformed under Banerjea's Municipal Act, it captured nearly three-quarters of the seats. At the first meeting of the new Corporation, Das was elected Mayor and Subhas Chandra Bose appointed Chief Executive Officer. As a gesture towards the Muslims, the Deputy-Mayor was chosen from Calcutta's leading Muslim house: the Suhrawardys. He was 31 year old Huseyn Shaheed, who was to have a checkered association with the city's affairs throughout the following quarter century.

Control of the Corporation provided the Swarajists with the power that was denied to them in the Legislative Council because of their policy of obstruction. They now had public funds at their disposal and jobs to distribute as patronage. They began by rewarding five party supporters with appointments as city aldermen, and, with an eye to the communal question, they found posts on the Corporation staff for 25 Muslims. The business of the municipality furnished excellent opportunities for demonstrations of nationalist ardour. The Corporation's employees were outfitted in khadi and much publicity was given to the purchase of swadeshi goods in preference to imported equipment. Many of the city's streets and parks were renamed after the nation's heroes and civic receptions were held for Congress leaders instead of British dignitaries as in the past. To gratify property

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3 Dainik Basumati,* 14 Apr 1924. NP, 2 Aug 1924.
holders, building rules were relaxed and, when it suited the party, tax arrears were disregarded. Popular support was gained by heavy expenditure on free primary schools and medical dispensaries in many parts of the city. A weekly journal - the Calcutta Municipal Gazette - was started to publicise the new regime's achievements.¹ The activities of the Swarajists in the Corporation were a perfect foil to their work of destruction in the Council and it served to consolidate their hold on Calcutta, still the key to political Bengal.

The Governor in Politics

Every Swarajist success in the Council or Corporation was galling for Lytton for he had set out determined to prevent the party succeeding in its attempt to wreck the constitution. From the beginning he had regarded the affair as a fight in which he was personally involved and he was fully prepared to come down into the political arena to grapple with Das and his followers. When in December 1923 the Swarajists and Independent Nationalists rejected his offer of the ministerial portfolios, he had published a long press communique detailing his negotiations with them and explaining why he had finally chosen his Ministers from the Moderate party.² In his first address

² 23 Dec 1923. GB, Appointment, 18L-43(1-4), A31-34, Mar 1924.
to the Council a month later he threw out a direct challenge to the Swarajists.

I selected my new Ministers from among those who believed that the best way of achieving the end which is desired by all is not to refuse but to accept responsibility, not to destroy the foundations, but to build upon them, not to obstruct but to construct .... Throughout the sessions of this Council there will be only one main issue before you, namely, whether you will side with the party of obstruction or whether you will side with the party of construction.¹

Once battle was joined in the Council, Lytton took an active part in advising his officers on tactics and supplying them with troops. He talked personally with M.L.Cs. in an attempt to persuade them to vote with the Ministers and on one occasion he held a tea party at Government House for all non-Swarajists and lectured them on the need for party organisation.² Immediately before the Government submitted its demands for grants on 18 March, he appeared unheralded in the Council to warn the members that if they refused finance for the transferred items he would have no hesitation in closing down these departments, with the result that many public employees would be thrown out of work.

It may be thought, perhaps, that Government would not dare to face such a situation and would make any concessions rather than allow it to continue. Let there be no illusions on this point - my Government would not be embarrassed by such a situation which was not of our creation, and from which we would in no way suffer, while it lasted. Those

¹ ELCP, 23 Jan 1924, vol. XIV, no. 1, p. 5.
² Forward, 2 Apr 1924.
who brought it about would have to justify their action as best they may to those whom they represent, and the final decision in the matter would rest with the constituencies which will be vitally affected by the consequences.¹

There was an uproar in the press at what was variously described as 'bluff' and an 'unconstitutional attempt to coerce the members',² but Lytton was convinced that his speech had had a salutary effect and had forestalled even more drastic cuts in the budget.³ Moreover, he considered that the refusal of the medical and education demands provided him with an excellent opportunity to teach the Swarajists a lesson. He promptly gave the school inspectors and medical staff six months notice of dismissal⁴ and then published a press communique which said in effect: 'Look bhadralok at what the Swarajists are doing to your employment'.⁵

From Delhi and London the Viceroy and Secretary of State were watching Lytton's activities with growing uneasiness for they were afraid that his provocative interventions in politics might aggravate what was already a serious situation. Both criticised his action in dismissing Government staff and Reading advised him to use his

² NP, 19 Mar 1924.
³ Fundits & Elephants, p. 49.
⁴ Ibid.
⁵ 16 Apr 1924. GB, Appointment, 2B-14(1-9), A78-86, Jul 1924.
constitutional power to certify the funds required to pay the salaries. ¹ Lytton refused, insisting that the politicians had to learn their responsibility to their electors. ² In this case his gamble paid off for there was deep concern expressed in the bhadralok press at the prospect of increased middle-class unemployment ³ and when the grants were resubmitted to the Council in August 1924 they were restored without opposition. ⁴

Of greatest concern to Lytton was the refusal of the Ministers' salaries, but he was determined not to accept this as a final verdict on dyarchy. Consequently he allowed Huq and Ghuznavi to remain in office without pay and work to secure a majority at a revoting. ⁵ He even toyed with the idea of stretching his own powers of expenditure to authorise an interim payment for them, but Reading refused to permit this as it was strictly unconstitutional. He warned Lytton that he was running a grave risk by involving himself in politics in this manner, for he was playing into the Swarajists' hands by exposing himself to personal attack. The Viceroy explained to the Secretary of State, Lord Olivier: "My objection ... was intended to

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² Fundits & Elephants, pp. 49-51.
³ E.g. NP, 12 Apr 1924.
⁵ Fundits & Elephants, p. 51.
protect him against the risk of charges he might find it difficult to answer. These might seriously impair his position as Governor.  

The Ragged Search for a Majority

While Lytton was arguing the point with Delhi, his Ministers were out in search of a majority. The officials gave them every assistance, relieving them of all administrative duties and interceding with M.L.Cs. on their behalf. Huq and Ghuznavi 'worked their power of patronage for all it was worth' and the vacant ministership was held out as an inducement to those with ambitions. Their trump card, however, was communal. They made great play of the fact that the Hindu-dominated Swaraj party was attempting to strike down a Muslim ministry. In reality this is a communal attack, they told their co-religionists, and all Muslims must unite to oppose the Hindus.

The official members of the Government had already agreed that their best hope of breaking the Swaraj party lay in encouraging communal divisions. Their experience in the first Council had convinced them that the reformed institutions could be kept functioning

2 Pundits & Elephants, p. 52.
4 Pundits & Elephants, p. 52.
by a series of tactical expedients. Admittedly communalism was an ugly weapon to use, but, as they hastened to point out, it was not they but the Swarajists who had declared total war. How could they be expected to fight clean when their opponents were breaking every rule of decent political behaviour?¹

They were provided with a moral sanction for the use of communalism by their Muslim colleagues — Rahim, Huq and Ghuznavi — who asserted that in the general interests of the Muslim community its representatives in the Legislative Council should be united against the Swaraj party. They argued that Das had been able to inveigle Muslims into his party because of the factions which divided Muslim politicians. Unless these could be overcome, they said, the community would remain weak and a liability to the Government.²

The best means of drawing off Das' Muslim followers was obviously to destroy their faith in the Swaraj party's Hindu–Muslim pact, and to this end a Muslim supporter of the Government, Khan Bahadur Musharruf Husain, had been persuaded early in the Council's first session to submit a resolution for the immediate implementation of the pact's provisions with regard to the employment of Muslims under the provincial Government. His motion called for the reservation

¹ Chief Secretary, GB, to GI, 14 Jun 1924, GB, Appointment, 6R-92(1-10), A31-40, Dec 1925.
² GB, Appointment, 4M-12(1-3), A70-71½, Nov 1925.
for Muslims of 80 per cent of Government appointments until such time as they occupied 55 per cent of all offices. Sir Abdur Rahim explained what the officials hoped to gain from this:

It was felt in Government circles and among those who were anxious to defeat and destroy the Swarajist party that Mr C.R. Das would, by this resolution, be pushed into a tight corner; he would lose either his 20 Muhammadan followers, to all or to most of whom the Pact had been a strong inducement to join his party, or the support of the Nationalists without whose help he would never have secured a majority against the Government, but who would, on no account, accept the terms of the Pact. Khan Bahadur Mushruflf Hossain received every sort of encouragement from the supporters of Government and also from individual members of Government to press his resolution.²

It was arranged that the motion should be put to the Council in the week preceding the voting on the budget and during the debate every effort was made to force the Swarajists to commit themselves. Spokesmen for the Government and the European non-officials expressed their support for the objects of the resolution and emphasised that it was merely a restatement of the terms of the Swarajists' own Hindu-Muslim pact. Here, they said, was an opportunity for the Hindu members of the Swaraj party to prove their good faith.

From the speeches of the Independent Nationalists, who repudiated the pact, and the Muslim Swarajists, who revealed a painful conflict of loyalties, it was evident that Das was in a very tight corner. He could escape only by avoiding a division on the main question and

² Minute, 27 Jul 1925, GB, Appointment, 4M-12(1-3), A70-71½, Nov 1925.
he therefore moved for an adjournment of the discussion sine die. His excuse was that there had as yet been no time to place the pact 'before the country'. When the budget session was over he intended to tour Bengal to secure popular support for the agreement. Until this had been done, any action in the Council was precipitate.

He succeeded in carrying his amendment but the damage was done. The Ministers were able to say to the Muslim M.L.Cs.: now you can see how you were misled with empty promises. The cry was taken up in the press.

We have all along been saying that the Swarajya pact is only a bait to allure the Moslem members of the Council to the Swarajya party. Had Mr C.R. Das really desired that the pact would be put into practice, he and his party would certainly not have proposed to postpone indefinitely the resolution of Khan Bahadur Musharruf Hossain. Mr C.R. Das has said that if the terms of the pact be not fulfilled after the attainment of Swaraj, the Muslims will be quite entitled to realise their dues on the strength of the lathi. In the meantime the Hindus will become completely skilled in the use of the lathi, so that the Muslims will never be able to realise their dues. The Hindus are already organising themselves in the name of the Hindu Sangathan, and some sections of them have become proficient in the use of revolvers and in making bombs. The Sudhi movement has also been started to convert the Muslims to Hinduism. We ask our fellow-Muslims to note the names of those Moslem members of Council who have voted against the resolution of Khan Bahadur Musharruf Hossain.

There were angry replies from the Hindu newspapers and bitter attacks on the British for their attempt to divide and rule.

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2 Moslem Hitaishi, *4 Apr 1924*.
3 E.g. Viswamitra,* 15 Mar 1924; Sarathi,* 3 Apr 1924.
To consolidate their advantage, the Government's Muslim supporters began organising a communal party in the Council. At a meeting of the Central National Mohammedan Association on 24 April, Khan Bahadur Abdus Salam, the Association's honorary secretary and M.L.C. for Jessore North, argued that a party to unite all Muslim councillors was the logical corollary of communal electorates.

... it is now, therefore, opportune for the Moslem Members of the Legislative Council, if they are true to the raison detre of separate Moslem communal electorates, if they are true to Islam and its traditions, if they are honestly anxious to promote its prestige and well-being, side by side with the advancement of the country as a whole, to reconsider their position, to shake themselves free from the shackles of Non-Moslem influences, and to organise themselves into one united Moslem Party and to formulate a policy with programme of work, and to call upon Moslem Ministers to assent to such a policy and programme. Otherwise, Moslem interests will become increasingly the football of Non-Moslems, to the loss of Moslem prestige and to the eternal shame of present-day Moslem leaders.¹

The party's promoters ran into the old problem of 'personal jealousies and rivalries which bulk largely in Bengal Moslem Society'² but they were successful in persuading four Swarajist supporters to join their ranks, including two of the Suhrawardys, Dr Abdulla-al-Mamun and Huseyn Shaheed.³

This was a great encouragement to the Ministers for every vote would count when the demand for their salaries was resubmitted to the

² Ibid, p. 20.
³ Ibid, p. 63.
Council on 7 July. As the day approached there was vigorous lobbying by both parties.¹ The Ministers played the communal issue for all it was worth, even invoking the authority of religious leaders to convince the Muslim M.L.Cs. that it would be wrong for them to vote with the Swaraj party.²

By the end of June, Huq and Ghuznavi were confident that they had their majority but once more the Swarajists outmanoeuvred them. On 3 July Sen Gupta made a successful application to the High Court for an injunction to prevent the President from resubmitting the salaries demand to the Council. Cotton and Lytton were furious at what they regarded as a personal affront, and, determined to avenge their honour, they prorogued the Council as soon as it assembled on the 7th and appealed against the Court's ruling. At this point Reading intervened for he realised that nothing would suit the Swarajists better than a cause célèbre. To the intense annoyance of Lytton who wanted to fight out the case, he amended the Council rules to remove any doubt about the legality of a resubmission of demands.³

The Swarajists' stratagem had secured them a month's grace and in that time they had managed to tip the balance back in their

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¹ Pundits & Elephants, p. 52.
² Dainik Basumati,* 21 May 1924.
favour — by a liberal application of silver according to the ministers.¹

The four Muslim members who had strayed into Salam's communal party had been shepherded safely back to the opposition fold. To clinch the issue, the party's English-language daily Forward published, on the morning of 26 August, the day that the new vote was to be taken, a copy of a letter carrying Huq's signature which offered a bribe to an unnamed Rai Bahadur in return for his vote. Huq denounced the letter as a forgery but it undoubtedly had some effect in securing a majority for the Swarajists. The new demand was rejected by 68 votes to 66.²

The Ministers immediately resigned and Lytton had no choice but to suspend the constitution. The Swarajists claimed a triumph. 'The Lord had given, the Lord has taken away, Blessed be the name of the Lord — so thinks the man in the street in regard to the withdrawal of dyarchy in Bengal', wrote Forward.³

Lytton's Disillusionment

Lytton was embittered by what had happened. He had come to regard the maintenance of the constitution as a matter of personal honour and its destruction was a severe blow to his pride. His actions

¹ Pundits & Elephants, p. 53.
³ Forward, 9 Sep 1924.
throughout the preceding year had been subject to criticism from all parties: Swarajists, Moderates, European non-officials, the Government of India, the Secretary of State and British parliamentarians. He had come out to India with a sentimental desire to do something big for Indians. 'It seemed that Fate was calling me, and perhaps I had an exaggerated idea of my own ability to steer the destinies of that country at a critical moment'. Now that things had gone badly for him, he dismissed India as an alien society for which he could never hope to do anything. In his memoirs he wrote: 'Thoreau once said that it takes two to speak the truth - one to speak and another to hear. Truth in this sense is rare as between the British and the Indians, for the very terms in which their political controversies are conducted have very different meanings for each. Even, therefore, where sincerity and goodwill are present, it is easier to speak true than to hear true'. In effect Lytton now abdicated his idealistic aims and yielded the initiative to his I.C.S. officers who were on hand with a policy.

1 E.g. IA Committee meeting proceedings, 2 & 4 Sep 1924.
2 E.g. European Association's proceedings, 4 Feb 1924, reported in Hindusthan, 6 Feb 1924.
3 Fundits & Elephants, pp. 49-50. Statesman, 1 Apr 1924.
4 Fundits & Elephants, pp. 8-9.
Das' Dilemma

Das was also in trouble. He had successfully wrecked dyarchy, but what had he gained? The British, he had always said, would be forced to come to terms. But would they? Lytton's communique suspending the constitution certainly had given no hint of any intention to negotiate.

The action of the Legislative Council has had the effect of suspending the working of the Reforms in Bengal for the time being. It is not now possible for the Governor to obtain the services of any Ministers, and His Excellency will himself assume charge of the Transferred Departments under the Transferred Subjects (Temporary Administration) Rules. The constitution which has been deliberately suspended by the Legislature both conferred privileges and imposed obligations, and the existence of Ministers responsible to the Legislature was an essential feature of the whole scheme. That essential feature having been destroyed on August 26th, the people of Bengal have, through the action of their representatives, temporarily lost the advantages which Parliament intended to confer upon them. Until such time as the constitution is restored, the Legislative Council will be summoned only when required for the transaction of Government business.¹

Das had made a grave miscalculation. The British could continue to govern without the reformed institutions and obviously intended to do so. What then was the difference between December 1921, when they had been forced to sue for peace, and August 1924? In 1921 they had been threatened with a collapse of the institutions throughout India and, at the same time, they had faced a violent mass movement which was revolutionary in potential. In 1924 the

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28 Aug 1924. GB, Appointment, 13L-130(1-7), A3-9, Dec 1924.
institutional collapse was limited to Bengal and the Central Provinces, and there was no mass agitation to support it.

What was Das to do in these circumstances? Gandhi, who had been released from prison earlier in the year, was urging the Congress to leave the councils and return to its work among the masses. His cry was taken up by his disciples in Bengal. Das, however, knew that this programme would not be acceptable to the bhadralok, for they had had enough of mass politics. Here was the root of his difficulty. The Legislative Council as it had been reformed in 1919, with its entrenched representation for the Muslims and the Europeans, was a manifestly unsatisfactory institution for the bhadralok, but, if they did not work the political system constructed by the British, they had either to engage in popular politics - which in Bengal meant inciting the Muslim and low-caste Hindu masses and thereby endangering bhadralok social dominance - or resort to terrorism - which could be beaten down by the British without great difficulty.

Das was on the horns of the dilemma forced upon his class by the British determination to extend the electorate and Gandhi's determination to bring the masses into the nationalist movement. Nor had his seven months in the Council assisted him in any way to overcome this difficulty for he had failed, just as the Moderates

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1 *Forward,* 20 Jul 1924.
before him had failed, to devise a strategy which would strengthen his hold on both sections of the electorate, 'bhadralok' and non-'bhadralok'. He had done no more than to adopt the old 'bhadralok' style of opposition to the Government and, by organising his followers efficiently, had scored a tactical success.

**A Leader being Led**

Speaking at Gaya in December 1922 in advocacy of council entry, he had lightly dismissed the question of what should be done if dyarchy were destroyed and the British did not yield. Time enough to think of that should it ever happen, he had said. 'What do we do when it pours with rain? We turn our umbrella in the direction from which the water comes. It is the same way that we must turn the direction of our activities whenever the fulfilment of our national life demands it'. When brought face to face with the issue in August 1924, he had nothing more constructive to offer. In fact he was losing his grip. His health had been broken by the exertions of the preceding five years and the political situation in Bengal was going to pieces under him. The seeds of dissension sown in the reckless days of 1921-22 had taken root and produced a mass of tangled growth.

Hindu-Muslim relations had deteriorated. The Swaraj party's pact, that 'monstrous understanding' with the Muslims as it was

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described in the Hindu press, had offended the bhadralok and there were dark predictions that it was 'the beginning of the end of Das's influence with the Hindu community in Bengal'.¹ The Swarajists had then found themselves in serious difficulties when Musharruf Husain's resolution was put to the Council, and, by moving for an adjournment, they had merely succeeded in giving offence to the Muslims without in any way pacifying their own community. The All-India Congress session at Cocanda in December 1923 had refused to recognise any separate provincial agreement on the communal question on the ground that it might impede a later national settlement² and although Das managed to get his pact ratified at the Bengal Provincial Conference at Sirajganj in June, it was clear that his authority was weakened.³

The Swarajists had made many enemies through their actions in the Calcutta Corporation. By using the municipality as a party patronage machine, they had antagonised those who were not provided for,⁴ and even within the party there had been bickering over appointments. The outstanding instance was the three-cornered fight between Bose, Sasmal and Sen Gupta for the highly-paid position of

¹ *Bengalee,* 19 Dec 1923. Cf. NP, 29 Dec 1923; IA Committee proceedings, 29 Dec 1923; N.C. Banerji: *At the Cross-Roads,* p. 180.
² NP, Jan 1924.
³ NP, 14 Jun 1924.
⁴ E.g. see *Servant,* & *Ananda Bazar Patrika,* 19 Jul 1924.
Chief Executive Officer. Sen Gupta was relatively unconcerned at Bose's victory but Sasmal was mortally offended\(^1\) and a rift developed in the Das group which was to split the Swaraj party apart after its leader's death.

By August 1924 there were strong pressures within the Bengal Congress for lines of action of which Das disapproved, but he had no ready answer of his own and was forced back to talking vaguely of the delights of the indefinite swāraj. Addressing the first all-India meeting of the Swaraj party in Calcutta he said:

> It is asked "what is the kind of Swaraj that you are striving for?" Some friends of mine are so anxious to have the details of Swaraj that in their attempt to define they lose sight of the real principle upon which the whole fight for Swaraj is based, and that is that we do not want any particular system of Government; we want the right to establish our own system of government.\(^2\)

Das was bankrupt for ideas and for the present he could offer no resistance to those who knew what they wanted.

The Hindu communalists had already dragged him into a dispute over temple management. Early in 1924 two Punjabi swamis, Biswananda and Sachidananda, who had been active in the successful Akali movement in north-western India, had come to Bengal to organise an agitation against what they described as the corrupt management

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of the main Hindu shrines. They failed in an initial attack on
the priestly hierarchy of the Kalighat temple but they then turned
upon the mohunt of Tarakeswar, a place of pilgrimage a few miles
north-west of Calcutta. Their accusations of immorality and financial
extortion from pilgrims caused a great stir in the Bengali press and Das' orthodox Hindu followers urged him to intervene. He was
reluctant to do so but his hand was forced by a resolution at the
Sirajganj Provincial Conference calling for satyagraha at Tarakeswar
to dispossess the mohunt.

In June volunteers were enlisted and the two swamis led a march
on the temple. The mohunt had brought in Gurkha durwans to protect
his property and there was violence when the demonstrators reached
Tarakeswar. In the weeks that followed the police intervened on a
number of occasions to break up fights and to remove pickets. There
were many arrests and a few lives were lost, either through rioting
or police firing. Das had little control over the affair but he
was criticised by one faction for encouraging political interference
in matters of religion and by another for not supporting the

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1 Statesman, 27 May 1924.
2 BIA, Publications, vol. XIII.
3 NP, 10 & 17 May 1924.
4 Indian Struggle, pp. 143-5.
5 BIA Annual Report 1924-25.
volunteers more wholeheartedly. When he succeeded in patching up a compromise between the mohunt and the swamis in September, he was accused by both parties of dishonesty and self-interest. The episode served only to discredit him.

The terrorists' activities had also become an embarrassment. Their samitis were now overtly communal and at the same time they claimed the support of the Swaraj party. Das dared not deny this for terrorism was generally approved by the bhadralok. His difficulties were brought to a head by the execution of Gopinath Saha, a student who in an attempt to murder the Calcutta Commissioner of Police had mistakenly shot an English businessman. He had caused a sensation at his trial by expressing sorrow at having killed the wrong man. 'He was glad to pay with his life and hoped that every drop of his blood would sow the seeds of freedom in every Indian home'. He was hanged and the bhadralok had a new martyr.

A resolution was moved at the Sirajganj Conference expressing admiration for his patriotism and spirit of sacrifice, although at the same time discreetly reaffirming Congress' adherence to the principle of non-violence. Das - a leader being led - spoke for the resolution. By doing this he protected his position with his

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1 NP, Jul-Sep 1924.
2 Indian Struggle, p. 146.
3 Young India, 1924-1926, p. 878.
own community but his action offended the Muslims who were growing increasingly apprehensive of Hindu violence. It also provided the provincial Government with the final argument it needed to persuade the Government of India to arm it with extraordinary powers to deal with the terrorists. After some months of careful preparation, it struck a co-ordinated blow at the revolutionary samitis throughout Bengal on the night of 24 October 1924. All the ringleaders were arrested, including S.C. Bose and two Swarajist M.L.Cs., Anil Baran Ray and Satyendra Chandra Mitra.

Back to the Council

The Legislative Council did not meet between August 1924, when the demand for the Ministers' salaries was rejected for the second time, and January 1925. When it did resume the Swaraj party was without its leader, who was confined to a sick bed, and its two political detenus, Ray and Mitra, who were still in prison. What was worse, it could no longer rely upon its Muslim supporters and it had made no progress towards a new policy. It was merely returning after five months for a repeat performance of destruction.

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1 Moslem Hitaishi,* 4 Apr 1924.
2 Pundits & Elephants, pp. 63-5.
4 Das did attend the first day's proceedings (7 Jan 1925) in a wheelchair under the care of his doctor, B.C. Ray. (K.P. Thomas: Dr B.C. Roy, p. 124.)
It achieved an immediate success in rejecting a Criminal Law Amendment Bill with which the Government had hoped to replace the special ordinance under which the October arrests had been made\(^1\) but in February it failed to defeat a resolution moved by Rahim for provision to be made in the budget for Ministers' salaries.\(^2\) The Government had shrewdly held out the prospect of office to a number of groups but had not appointed Ministers before the vote was taken. In this way it had succeeded in dividing the Independent Nationalists from the Swarajists.\(^3\)

When Lytton did make his choice early in March, the general opinion was that he had gained two friends and a host of enemies.\(^4\) His new Ministers were Moderates, Nawab Ali Chaudhuri and a fellow zamindar from Mymensingh, Harmanthanath Ray Chaudhuri, Raja of Santosh.\(^5\) The Independent Nationalists had been disappointed once again and Das appealed to them to stand with the Swarajists.

The cry everywhere is what next? The question admits of but one reply - National Honour and Swaraj. There can be no Now and Next in our national fight, ceaseless but determined, until the goal is achieved. To refuse to fight the evil is death. To refuse to destroy that which is deleterious to

\(^{1}\) BLCP, 7 Jan 1925, vol. XVII, no. i, pp. 15-27.
\(^{3}\) Mussalman*, 23 Jan 1925. NP, 28 Feb 1925.
\(^{4}\) E.g. Mussalman*, 10 Mar 1925.
\(^{5}\) NP, 21 Mar 1925.
our progress is dishonour .... The Bureaucracy divides to rule. Shall we not gather to achieve? Let our people young and old, rich and poor join under the Congress banner and vindicate India's honour and manhood. Our disunion is the cause of Bureaucracy. The united life of the people is its only cure.  

Ten days of hectic lobbying followed during which it became evident that Fazlul Huq and his eight followers were available to the highest bidder. Huq suggested to the Government that it might consider the appointment of two more Ministers while at the same time he was negotiating with the Swarajists for a 'personal consideration'. He kept both parties in suspense until the last day and then declared against the Ministers. His votes gave the Swarajists a majority of six, and on 23 March they once more rejected the demand for salaries. Lytton had no hesitation in suspending the constitution, and this time he made it clear that he would not attempt to restore dyarchy until after the next general election which was scheduled for late 1926.

1 Forward, 14 Mar 1925.
3 Bengalee, 8 Apr 1925. Chief Secretary, GB, to GI, 28 Mar 1925, GB, Appointment, 6R-92(1-10), A31-40, Dec 1925.
5 Pundits & Elephants, p. 80.
The Last Bid

Das felt that the situation was slipping away from him. He dared not leave the Council again without a positive plan of action for his party, for it was obvious that he would lose his leadership to extreme elements unless he could keep his followers engaged. Nor was it simply a question of narrow political advantage. Das had realised, all too late, that he had to curb the tendency towards political and communal extremism if it was not to lead Bengal to disaster. Violence would beget violence, and the sharp hatreds of race, community and class would tear into the fabric of provincial society.¹

The horror of the situation for Das lay in the knowledge that it was partly the result of his own actions. A straight line could be traced from the boycotts and pickets, the strikes and hartals of the non-co-operation movement in 1921, through the negative campaign of destruction pursued by the Swarajists in the Legislative Council and Das' equivocal attitude to violence in the past year, to the extremes of terrorism and communalism which now characterised political life in Bengal.

If Das was to reverse the trend, he had to offer something constructive, but what could he offer? One possibility was co-operation

with the British: to work the constitution instead of obstructing it. Das knew that he would jeopardise his popularity with the bhadralok if he suggested this, but his position was already desperate and he had to make some move. The risk would be worth taking if there were a reasonable chance of the British responding with an offer of constitutional concessions, for he would then be able to claim that Swarajist obstruction in the Council had achieved its purpose.

There were indications that the British might be willing to negotiate. In August 1924 a committee had been appointed by the Government of India to examine the working of the reforms, and its report which had just been published emphasised the defects of dyarchy. Although the majority of the committee's members recommended no immediate constitutional advance, a minority minute of dissent entered a strong plea for a quick step forward.¹ The Viceroy, Lord Reading, was making preparations for a visit to England and it was generally believed that he was going home to discuss the question of Indian reforms with the British Government.²

With the help of two European friends in Calcutta, Das arranged a secret meeting with Lytton at the Ramakrishna Mission at Belur and discussed the possibility of a compromise.³ Lytton had just

returned from Delhi where he had gone to receive a briefing so that he could take over the Viceroyalty while Reading was in England. It seems likely that he had been empowered by the Viceroy to hold out the possibility of concessions to Das, if he were willing to dissociate himself publicly from the terrorists. This was asking a lot of any bhadralok politician but Das was ready to take the plunge, for he had to make some gain. On 29 March he published a bold renunciation of violence:

I have made it clear, and I do it once again, that I am opposed on principle to political assassinations and violence in any shape or form. It is absolutely abhorrent to me and to my party. I consider it an obstacle to our political progress. It is also opposed to our religious teaching .... As a question of practical politics I feel certain that if violence is to take root in the political life of our country, it will be the end of our dream of Swaraj for all time to come. I am, therefore, eager that this evil should not grow any further, and that this method should cease altogether as a political weapon in my country. 

This brought an immediate response from the Secretary of State, Lord Birkenhead. Speaking in the House of Lords on 31 March in a debate on the Bengal ordinance, he welcomed Das' announcement and declared that it opened the way for the consideration of further constitutional advance for India. This was encouraging for Das

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1 Pundits & Elephants, pp. 79-80.
but he needed something more definite. He therefore appealed to the British on 4 April for a clear statement of their position.¹

He received no reply. This put him in an exceedingly difficult position. The Provincial Conference was to be held at Faridpur in four weeks time and it was known that he would face an attack from the pro-terrorist group.² He had hoped to be able to confront them with a definite British offer of constitutional concessions, thereby justifying his condemnation of violence. As it was he would have to go empty handed. However there could be no question of a withdrawal and he decided for a bold line. He would make an outright offer of co-operation to the British. In his presidential speech on 2 May he again condemned terrorism and called upon the Congress to reaffirm its belief in constitutional methods. He was willing, he said, to work with the British if they would give real responsibility to the Indian people. The time had come for a change of heart.

I see signs of reconciliation everywhere. The world is tired of conflicts, and I think I see a real desire for construction, for consolidation. I believe that India has a great part to play in the history of the world. She has a message to deliver, and she is anxious to deliver it in the Council Chamber of that great commonwealth of nations, of which I have spoken. Will British statesmen rise to the occasion? To them I say: you can have peace today on terms that are honourable both to you and to us. To the British community in India, I say: you have come with traditions of freedom, and you cannot refuse to co-operate with us in our national

² Atmasakti,* 1 May 1925. Dainik Basumati,* 6 May 1925.
struggle, provided we recognize your right to be heard in the final settlement. To the people of Bengal I say: you have made great sacrifices for daring to win political freedom, and on you has fallen the brunt of official wrath. The time is not yet for putting aside your political weapons. Fight hard, but fight clean; and when the time for settlement comes, as it is bound to come, enter the peace conference, not in a spirit of arrogance, but with becoming humility, so that it may be said of you that you were greater in your achievement than in adversity.¹

Das had staked everything on this offer and it was desperately important to him that the British should respond. Waiting impatiently for the reply that had to come, he wrote to Motilal Nehru on 13 June:

I do not know whether you will agree with me or not, but I believe something may come out of the Reading-Birkenhead conversations which are going on about India. I fear that you do not attach any importance to them. You may be right but something tells me that they will make some kind of proposal to us — whether it will be of any real value to us is another matter, but the Hindu-Mahommedan question must be settled before the year is out 

The most critical time in our history is coming. There must be solid work done at the end of this year and the beginning of the next. All our resources will be taxed and here both of us are ill. God knows what will happen.²

No proposal came from the British for they were playing this game with Das for party political advantage in England. The Conservative Government was concerned merely to build up a case in favour of Indian reform so that it would have an excuse to accelerate the appointment of the statutory commission which was due to examine

² Quoted Jayakar, vol. II, p. 543. The date (23 Jun) which Jayakar gives for this letter is obviously wrong.
the Indian constitution in 1928. It did not want the Labour party
to have the opportunity of nominating the members. Das had gambled
for the future of Bengal and had lost. His opponents gleefully
shouted: co-operator! 'The Swarajists are stumbling down the incline
of constitutional co-operation so fast that the Liberals are already
claiming them as members, even if wayward and fickle members, of
their fold'. The clamour was silenced by Das' sudden death on 16
June.

Despair and Alarm

'The sky of Bengal is overcast with clouds. God has removed
from Bengal her most notable leaders of men'. The Nayak of 8
September 1925 lamented the death of five of Bengal's foremost
public figures within 18 months: 23 May 1924 Asutosh Chaudhuri,
25 May 1924 Asutosh Mukherjea, 16 September 1924 Bhupendranath Basu,
16 June 1925 Chitta Ranjan Das and 6 August 1925 Surendranath Banerjea.
Five leaders of two bhadralok generations dead and the leader of the
new generation, Subhas Chandra Bose, imprisoned by the British at
Mandalay. 'The most critical time in our history is coming', Das
had written three days before his death. 'God knows what will
happen'.

1 See Birkenhead to Reading, 10 Dec 1925, Earl of Birkenhead:
2 Mussalman,* 6 May 1925.
The bhadralok were bereft of their leadership at the worst possible moment. Politically there was no clear route ahead and the politicians, the lesser men who remained, were divided and uncertain. Socially the class was face to face with a fearful challenge from below. The ferment of the non-co-operation years had aroused a new self-awareness in the masses of rural Bengal, and awakened political and social aspirations which could be satisfied only at the bhadralok's expense. And the masses now had potential leaders, for the Muslim politicians had at last realised that power was available to them in the advocacy of peasant interests and the organisation of the rural electorate. They and they alone could combine the appeals of community and economic interest. Lying ready to hand was the instrument they needed to attack the privileged position of "the classes" in the name of "the masses": the Legislative Council with its reserved seating for Muslims and low-caste Hindus.

To the bhadralok it seemed that their economic security, their culture, their religion, their whole way of life was endangered. They had privileges but they had not the power to protect them, for their land was ruled by a foreign Government. In this Government they could place no trust for it made no secret of its aversion to their pretensions, and they knew that it would not scruple to use religious or class divisions against them. They had their evidence in the Council resolution to destroy the Hindu-Muslim pact. 'The sky of Bengal is overcast with clouds'. The mood was one of despair and alarm, and it gave rise to internal faction and extremism.
The Swarajists were attacked as the creators of the trouble. They had dragged the Congress 'into the mire of the Councils' where communal dissension flourished. With their western ideas of parliamentary politics they had misled the educated classes and lost touch with the masses. Their vaunted pact had merely aggravated communal tension. Busy as they were advertising themselves in the Council and lining their pockets in the Corporation, they had neglected all work in the mofussil. The District Congress organisation had fallen to pieces. Politicians such as these would never free India from foreign oppression.

It is difficult to know what the Swarajists really are and what actually is their programme. They are not non-cooperationists; khaddar is merely a cloak to hide their hypocrisy. They have no definite plan of action; they misguide the people by means of an artificial excitement. They have failed in their council programme, failed in the administration of the Corporation and their underhand policy in regard to Tarakeswar had been thoroughly exposed. Now the hoax of village reconstruction is being tried on the people. The Bengalis are not foolish, ignorant people. They will not blindly accept anything from the Swarajists.

A succession struggle had begun in the Bengal Congress. Gandhi was in Calcutta when Das died and he stayed for some months to assist with the problems of transition. He urged the provincial Congress to

1 Ananda Bazar Patrika,* 13 Oct 1925.
2 Servant,* 10 Aug 1925.
4 Sanjivani,* 17 Sep 1925.
accept Sen Gupta as its new leader\textsuperscript{1} but the other aspirants for the position brushed aside his advice. Sen Gupta would have to fight for the crown if he wanted it. His main rivals were S. C. Bose, B. N. Sasmal and Byomkes Chakravarti. Bose, still in prison in Burma, was not an immediate threat but he was maintaining his contacts and would have powerful support when he returned.\textsuperscript{2} Chakravarti had an advantage in having never subscribed to the Hindu-Muslim pact, but he threw away his chance by declaring for 'responsive co-operation' with the British and calling for the unity of all parties, Moderates as well as Congressmen.\textsuperscript{3}

He was swimming against the tide, which was flowing towards separatism and extremism. The other contestants allied themselves with Hindu communal and terrorist groups, and adopted a defiant line towards the British.\textsuperscript{4} At the B.P.C.C. elections in November 1925, Sen Gupta defeated Sasmal but his hold on power remained insecure for his rivals continued to work against him.\textsuperscript{5} Nripendra Chandra Banerjea, a former non-co-operator returning to Bengal at this time after two years as editor of the \textit{Rangoon Mail}, was appalled by the state of provincial politics:

\textsuperscript{1} H.N. Das Gupta: \textit{Subhas Chandra}, pp. 90-1. \\
\textsuperscript{2} S. C. Bose: \textit{The Mission of Life}, p. 19 ff. \\
\textsuperscript{3} \textit{NP}, 5 Dec 1925. \textit{Dainik Basumati,*} 11 Apr 1926. \\
\textsuperscript{4} \textit{Bijali,*} 13 Nov 1925. \\
\textsuperscript{5} Ibid.
I went out on a tour to North Bengal towards the end of 1925: some of the sittings of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee which I had attended had filled me with great misgivings about the internal discipline and strength of the Congress in Bengal and I wanted to judge for myself how the organisation was working in the districts .... I found an awful "rot" in the rural centres of Congress: in many places the organisation had ceased to exist. In some others it was a fake and I found a local Muslim leader (who had been active on the Swaraj-cum-Khilafat front in 1921) wearing British cloth and not feeling he was doing anything anti-national.¹

The main concern of bhadralok politicians of all shades was now the protection of the interests of their class. There were demands in the Hindu press for the exclusion from Government appointments in Bengal of all candidates from other provinces² and for the provision in the legislatures of communal representation for Hindus.³ When the Government introduced a Tenancy Act Amendment Bill to the Legislative Council in December 1925 every means was used by the zamindar and bhadralok members to obstruct its passage. Their efforts were applauded by their community. 'In season and out of season Government indulge in vilification and denunciation of Bolshevism', observed the Burdwan Pallivasi. 'But is not the grant of occupancy right to a korfa raiyat, as contemplated in the Tenancy Bill, an application of the principle of Bolshevism?'⁴ In the same month the Council refused leave to the

² Amrita Bazar Patrika,* 10 Oct 1925.
³ NP, Mar 1926.
Government to introduce a Municipal Bill, which made provision for new taxation of property holders.⁴ Official proposals for the extension of mass primary education in rural areas were also opposed by the bhadralok. 'If we enforce compulsory primary education on the peasants and compel them to give up tilling and thereby try to reform society by giving them newspaper education, it will be simply inviting ruin', wrote the Atma Sakti.² In all these matters, the interests of the caste-Hindus and the Muslims were in obvious conflict. This gave a boost to communalism in both camps.³

They have sown the wind

Lytton had been absent from Bengal officiating as Viceroy in the four critical months following the final suspension of the constitution in March 1925. He had no desire to return. 'I began work again in Calcutta on August 9th, my 49th birthday', he wrote, 'and immediately experienced again that sense of suffocation from the fumes of insincerity, intrigue and selfishness of Bengal politics from which I had enjoyed such a welcome escape during the last four months among the hills of Simla'.⁴ He had lost all enthusiasm for his work and would

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² Atmasakti,* 15 May 1925.
³ See e.g. NP, 9 Dec 1925.
⁴ Pundits & Elephants, p. 160.
willingly let his subordinates have their way in managing the affairs of the province.

A few days earlier, Sir Abdur Rahim had taken up his pen again to remind his colleagues that they had unfinished business with the Muslims. He recalled the circumstances surrounding Musharruf Husain's Council resolution on Muslim recruitment of March 1924 and the Government's desire to drive a wedge between the Swarajist Hindus and their Muslim supporters.

Thereafter Sir Hugh Stephenson went away on leave [he wrote]. The political position remained uncertain and acute, and the best prospect of getting support for Government seemed still to lie in Muhammadan quarters. At that time Messrs F. Haque and Ghuznavi were the Ministers and most members of the Government seemed to realise that one means of rallying the Muhammadans was to investigate the ways and means of removing their grievances regarding employment in public service. Mr Donald, who was then in charge of the Appointment Department, discussed the question with me at Darjeeling with the result that Mr Moberly, who was then the Chief Secretary, called upon the various departments of Government to supply facts and figures showing the progress made by Muhammadans in the service of Government. The information has now been collected, but I put off bringing the question before Government as it related both to the Reserved and Transferred Departments and the position of the latter, until the other day, remained uncertain.

In the circumstances that I have narrated, it is our duty to review the entire position and to tell the Muhammadans how far we are prepared to admit the justice of their claims. I would go further and say that, having regard to what happened in connection with Maulvi Mushruff Hussain's resolution, we are pledged to that community to take steps at once to advance the position of the Muhammadans in the administration. For, the discussions on Mushruff Hussain's resolution amply showed that on the merits, the Swarajists as a body, the European non-officials and the Muhammadan ministerialists constituting altogether a large majority of elected members, gave their support to it.
This question, which has been an open sore on the body politic of Bengal for a long time, has now acquired as we all know, considerable dynamic political force and it is up to us to regard it from the point of view of statesmen and not of the appraisers of examination papers.¹

There was more than a hint of Machiavellianism in this argument. The Government is desperately in need of support. You suggest where that support may be found and the terms on which it might be obtained. You point out that the Government has already committed itself in some measure to meeting those terms. But the community which you indicate as a likely source of support is your own and the terms embody the essence of your community's ambitions. Moreover it was you who manoeuvred the Government into the position of making the first guarded offers to your community, not only by arranging for the resolution to be moved in the Council and suggesting the line that the Government should take, but also, it is confidently asserted in many quarters, by having a hand in the original Hindu-Muslim pact which had made possible the whole machination.²

Rahim had played his cards well, and although the British members of the Government had no illusions as to his object,³ it suited their

¹ Minute, 27 Jul 1925, GB, Appointment, 4M-12(1-3), A70-71 ½, Nov 1925.
² Swaraj,* 1 Jan 1924. Ananda Bazar Patrika,* 27 May 1926. This story was supported by Akram Khan, Das' chief Muslim negotiator, in an interview with the author (Dacca, 14 Feb 1962).
purpose to disregard his sleight of hand. They agreed with him that
the Muslims should have a share of appointments in the services
proportionate to their population 'to ensure that the general interests
of the community shall not suffer and that the activities of Government
as a whole shall be for the benefit of the whole population'. A
meeting of the Executive Council in October 1925 decided to instruct
all departments to increase the tempo of Muslim recruitment\(^1\) and in
December a communique was issued making public this order\(^2\) - an action
which in itself was a tacit admission of the Government's political
motive. Its effect was to intensify communal ill-feeling.\(^3\)

The British had given sufficient inducement to obtain Muslim
support but this would be of no practical advantage unless the community
had sufficient unity and political organisation to ensure the election
to the Legislative Council of representatives who would vote consistently
with the Government and not drift away to Hindu-dominated alliances
as in the past. In the latter half of 1925 the Government decided
to take a hand in this work of organisation.

The District Officers were instructed to throw their influence
behind whichever local Muslim association was prepared to support the
Government. They were to encourage other communal organisations to

\(^{1}\) GB, Appointment, 4M-12(1-3), A70-71\(^{1/2}\), Nov 1925.
\(^{2}\) Ibid, 4M-11(1-8) of 1925, A16-23, Feb 1926.
\(^{3}\) E.g. see Dainik Basumati,* 21 Dec 1925; Mohammadi,* 23 Dec 1925.
amalgamate with this chosen body and to bring all the community's affairs in the locality under its control. Those groups which insisted on maintaining their independence were to be removed from the Government's list of recognised organisations and thereby deprived of the opportunity to recommend candidates for public office, to assist in the preparation of electoral registers, to be represented at official functions and to secure the hundred-and-one other minor forms of patronage normally dispensed by the Government.

The operation was superintended by the Political Department in Calcutta and it had no hesitation in intervening directly if it saw an opportunity to secure a political advantage. For instance in October 1925 it received a report from the Dacca Divisional Commissioner regarding a new Islamia Anjuman which was seeking recognition in place of the District Moslem Association. The Commissioner advised against this but the Political Department overruled him, for it was impressed by the aims of the executive committee of the new organisation.

They say that the Anjuman proposes to take action to see that suitable Muhammadan candidates are nominated for election to all public bodies for which they are eligible and to prevent the loss of seats to Muhammadans by rivalries within their own community. They also propose to organise for the next Legislative Council election so that Muhammadan candidates may not be tempted to seek the support of the Swaraj Party. They say that the non-recognition of the Association by Government may lose them some support and ask that recognition may now be allowed.1

At the same time the Government was promoting raiyat associations and peasant co-operative societies, and encouraging the Muslims to make common cause with other agricultural communities. The cry was taken up in the Muslim press and, as the general election approached in 1926, it became a regular item in its lists of suggestions to candidates. 'Those who are ready to contest for the Council seats this year should bestir themselves to protect the agriculturalists in their respective constituencies', wrote the Dainik Taraqqee of 18 August 1926. 'The enormous sum of money that they spend for election should be employed to organise the agriculturalists and found co-operative banks'. That the advice did not go unheeded was shown by the apprehensive comments in the bhadralok papers. The Barisal Hitaishi of 14 July 1926 wrote:

From the speeches delivered in the various mass meetings held at different places either jointly by the Muhammadans and the Namasudras or by the Muhammadans alone, it is apparent that the Namasudras and the Muhammadans are uniting against the upper classes. We should be careful of the Moslems whose motive in making alliance with the lower class Hindus is to oppress the upper class on the one hand and to convert the lower class Hindus into Muhammadanism on the other.

The Government had one more job to do. It had to extend the franchise. Even if the peasantry were organised and provided with 'loyal' leaders, its strength would be no asset to the Government until a large number of its members had the vote. The Montagu-Chelmsford

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1 GB, Political, 8A-6, B36-44, Dec 1924. Ananda Bazar Patrika,* 29 Jan 1926.
reforms had enfranchised only the well-to-do cultivator in rural Bengal and, besides, it had given the urban electors a weightage of five to one. ¹ Most of the witnesses before the Reforms Enquiry Committee of 1924 had insisted that this arrangement should be maintained because of the illiteracy of the rural masses. In 1925 the Government of Bengal undertook an enquiry in an attempt to prove them wrong. The Chief Secretary, Leonard Birley, wrote on 27 May:

My own impression is that in Bengal too much is made of this theory of illiteracy .... It is the fashion to decry the electorate as ignorant and illiterate and some of the witnesses who gave evidence before the Committee even wanted to reduce the numbers of the electorate. It is in the interests of the middle-class to depreciate the quality of the electorate and restrict the franchise to their class. It is in the interests of the cultivating class that the Bengal electorate should not be saddled with a reputation for illiteracy, which it possibly does not deserve.

It is clearly in the interests of (1) democracy and of (2) the establishment of a system of party Government that the cultivating classes should have as much representation as their conditions deserve.

Rahim fully agreed:

I would even go further than Chief Secretary. Even if there is a great deal of illiteracy among the cultivating classes they should have the vote in Bengal and we should not countenance the attempt of any members of the middle class (Bhadralogue) to monopolise the franchise. Otherwise we should have to face even a greater political disaster in the future.²

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² GB, Appointment, 6R-45(1), A16, Jul 1925.
The Divisional officers were instructed to report on the percentage of literate voters in sample electorates throughout rural Bengal. The figures were ready early in 1926 and they were a severe disappointment to the Government. In the Muslim constituencies 62 per cent of voters were illiterate and in the Hindu constituencies 47 per cent. Birley's only consolation was that these figures could be used in support of the Government's campaign for extended primary education.¹

And they shall reap the whirlwind

Writing to the Secretary of State, Lord Olivier, in 1924, Reading lamented the enmity existing between Hindus and Muslims. 'It is a menace to the peace of the country. Some, doubtless, think that this is to our advantage, but, if so, they fail to realize how grave the position might become if the feeling between the two communities continues to grow more antagonistic and fails to be alleviated by some compromise'.² Every action of the Government of Bengal from 1924 to 1926 was aimed at preventing such a compromise. Rahim, a communalist to the finger-tips, was the helmsman and he was aided and abetted by the British officials. It was a short-sighted and irresponsible policy which led Bengal to disaster in 1926.

Rahim's term on the Executive Council expired late in 1925 and he was then free to play out his chosen role on a wider stage. His

¹ GB, Appointment, 6R-45(1-25) of 1925, A92-116, Mar 1926.
first act was one of outright provocation to the Hindus. Speaking in December as president of the All-India Muslim League session at Aligarh, the spiritual home of resurgent Indian Islam, he told his community that the time had come for an organised fight for Muslim rights. The political existence of the community was endangered by Hindu ambitions, he said, and the Muslims must resist their achievement with every weapon available. The Hindus were a menace to the British and Muslims alike. If the British would willingly concede the Muslims' just demands, they would have the Muslim community as their ally in the coming battle.¹

This raised a storm in the Hindu press throughout India² but for Bengal it was just a beginning. Rahim entered the Legislative Council at a by-election in January 1926 and took the lead of a Muslim group. Apart from the Swaraj party, which had retained a few of its Muslim members, there were now no inter-communal parties remaining in the Council.³ To encourage the trend, Abdul Gafur, a former Swarajist, moved a resolution when the Council resumed in mid-February for the amendment of the Bengal Electoral Rules to provide for the representation of communities in proportion to their population. This displeased the Europeans and Anglo-Indians, whose representation in the Council was

² NF, 9 Jan 1926.
³ GB, Appointment, 18L-13(1-8), A38-45, Apr 1926.
already far greater than their population entitlement. To save the situation, Rahim suggested an amendment to the resolution by the addition of the words: 'with just and proper representation of minorities and commercial interests'. The Swarajists objected to the admission of the amendment and, when the President over-ruled them, Sen Gupta led them out of the Chamber. The amended resolution was carried without a division and another nail was driven into the coffin of communal amity.¹

Rahim's main work lay outside the legislature. His aim was to play on the existing state of communal tension so as to persuade the Bengal Muslims to organise an exclusively communal party under his leadership to contest the elections at the end of the year. He had taken over a Calcutta newspaper, the Hanafi, and it broadcast his message:

Like the present Council the next Council also will trample on the religious and communal rights of the Musalmans if selfish and weak-minded members be elected from the Moslem constituencies through the influence of the Congress, solely dominated by the Hindus. It is, therefore, incumbent on the Moslem community to exert themselves beforehand and, independent of the Congress, to persuade every Moslem constituency to elect persons who have the interest of the community foremost in their minds.²

Rahim was assisted in his task by the fiercely communal tone which characterised all writing in the Muslim press at the time.³ In March

¹ BLCF, 18 Feb 1926, vol. XX, no. i, pp. 129-46.
² Hanafi, 5 Feb 1926.
³ See e.g. NP, 30 Jan 1926.
there were also reports that agents provocateurs were active in the province trying to foment strife between Hindus and Muslims.\(^1\) Their task was all too easy for the leaders of neither community were concerned to restrain them, and the Government, busy with arrangements for the annual move to the hills, failed to heed the signs of impending disaster.

On 2 April the Arya Samaj held its annual procession in North Calcutta, with police permission and accompanied by the usual police escort. Led by a band, the procession wound its way two miles from Cornwallis Street to Harrison Road. It reached Dinu Miah's mosque at the time of the Azan, the call to prayer, preparatory to the four o'clock public worship. A Muslim ran out of the mosque and called for the music to be stopped. The Inspector of Police accompanying the procession instructed the Hindus to do as they were asked and all stopped playing except for one drummer who kept obstinately beating his drum. The Muslims in the mosque grew angry and began pelting the procession with debris. There was great noise and confusion. The crowd struggling in Harrison Road was quickly joined by men of both communities carrying lathis and other weapons. The riot spread like wildfire through the neighbourhood and a number of temples and mosques were desecrated.\(^2\)

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\(^1\) Dainik Basumati,* 23 Mar 1926.

\(^2\) The account of the riots in this and the succeeding paragraphs is based on the following sources: Report of the Riots Enquiry Committee of the IA, IA Annual Report, 1926; Simon Commission Report, vol. IV, pp. 104 & 112-5; Pundits & Elephants, pp. 165-74.
This was the start of a fortnight of fierce and bloody communal fighting throughout Calcutta, in which more than 50 people were killed and 700 injured. Shops were looted and burnt, and temples, mosques and gurdwaras were razed. The police could not cope with rioting on this scale and troops using automatic weapons and armoured cars were required to restore a semblance of order.

The most sinister feature of the outbreak was the evidence which appeared of premeditation and organisation on both sides. There were Muslim and Hindu leaders who thought that their political cause could be advanced by a communal clash in Calcutta and they had done their utmost to provoke violence. Once the fighting had begun, the newspapers were used to fan the blaze and inflammatory leaflets were circulated.

'Moslems, Beware!
Otherwise the Hindus will eat you up'.¹

'Rise up, O Hindus! girding up your loins and stand up steadfast on the arena of the fight;
On this holy plain of Kurukshetra either get killed or gain victory.
Having given up trust in this or that;
teach Shiva's teaching.
Let all the higher and lower castes unite and exhibit the glory of the Hindus'.²

Life in the city was apparently back to normal by 15 April but the leaders on both sides regarded this merely as a breathing space.

¹ GB, Political, 12C-13, B484-485, Dec 1926.
² Dainik Bharat Mitra,* 12 Apr 1926.
and a chance for reorganisation. On the 24th a drunken brawl in Cotton Street in Central Calcutta sparked off another fortnight's bitter civil war. A method of killing favoured in the first round - the imprisonment of victims in buildings which were then fired - gave way to the stabbing of individuals in back alleys by roving bands of the opposite community. Firearms made their appearance for the first time in Indian communal affrays and the riotous mobs were swollen by up-country goondas imported by businessmen to protect their property. This time looting was more widespread and there were more deaths. Seventy killed, four hundred injured.

Although order was restored in the city by 9 May, there were numerous clashes in other areas of the province and in Bihar throughout the following two months, and in the middle of July a dispute over the playing of music before a mosque again led to ten days of bloodshed in Calcutta. Andrews wrote to Rabindranath Tagore on 17 August:

... for the last three or four months the Indian press has not been interested in anything at all outside India. It has been too desperately engaged with these terrible riots and communal questions. Calcutta has been like an armed garrison city .... Every day came fresh news of outrages, murders, riots, and the flood of hatred ever mounting higher. Chitpur Road just by Dwarkanath Tagore house has been garrisoned night and day with soldiers with rifles and bayonets in charge of a European for over three months. No one's life has been safe.¹

¹ Andrews MSS.
Rahim's Success

'The venom of the unreasonable demands of Rahim has spread through the whole social body', wrote the Sandhya of 5 April 1926. How long must the rioting go on to serve its purpose, demanded Forward at the end of the month. 'How long, the public ask, will it take to ensure the safe return of Sir Abd-ur-Rahim's thirty followers at the next elections? Is not the submerging of nationalism by communalism yet complete?' Among the bhadralok it was generally believed at this time that the riots had been organised for political purposes by Rahim and his son-in-law, H.S. Suhrawardy, who was known to have built up a following among the lower-classes in Calcutta. The Hindu press saw the danger of a solid Muslim communal bloc controlling the next Council through an alliance with the Europeans, and it urged its own politicians to take a leaf out of the Muslims' book and organise the Hindu community.

No suggestion of compromise would be tolerated. Sen Gupta as Mayor of Calcutta was bitterly attacked for appointing Muslim office-bearers in the Corporation and especially for allowing Suhrawardy to remain as Deputy-Mayor. At the Provincial Conference at Krishnagar

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1 Forward,* 29 Apr 1926.
2 Matwalla,* 1 May 1926. BIA Publications, vol. XIII.
3 GB, Police, F.31-9(1-3), A26-28, Mar 1926.
4 Anrita Bazar Patrika,* 7 May 1926.
5 Ananda Bazar Patrika,* 15 May 1926.
late in May there was an uproar when Sasmal, as president, criticised the terrorists. He was hounded out of the pandal and in his absence the Hindu-Muslim pact was rescinded.¹ The old Swarajist leadership was obviously in danger from the extremists, and Sen Gupta decided that he must take a stand on the pact. At a meeting of the B.P.C.C. in June he managed to have the Conference's decision reversed but this brought upon him the wrath of the Hindu press, which accused him of selling out Hindu interests to the Muslim communalists.² Congress unity in Bengal was shattered and the Hindu politicians wasted the remainder of the year in a futile faction fight.³

Everything was working in Rahim's favour. The Congress was too involved with its internal disputes to be able to devote any time to the Muslims, and, besides, by allowing the Hindu extremists to gain the upper hand in its affairs it had strengthened his case for Muslim unity. The riots had left a legacy of bitterness in Muslim hearts and Rahim had only to remind his co-religionists of the role played in the disturbances by organisations such as the Arya Samaj and the Hindu Mahasabha to persuade them to eschew all contact with the Congress.⁴

¹ NP, 29 May 1926.
² Andrews to Rathindranath Tagore, 13 Jun [1926†], Andrews MSS.
³ NP, 19 & 26 Jun 1926.
⁵ E.g. see Mussalman,* 4 Jun 1926; Khadem,* 4 Aug 1926.
His positive advantages were the possession of a programme - the domination of the Council by a Muslim party with the purpose of enacting legislation to improve the economic and social condition of the Muslim community - and the existence of pro-Government and anti-Hindu communal organisations throughout the mofussil. The Government had done its work well and the consolidated District associations gave Rahim a firm foundation on which to build his election platform.¹

He had still to contend with the factional rivalries among the Bengali Muslim leadership, but for the time being at least the bitter experience of the Calcutta riots had eradicated one old vice: the alliance of factions with Hindu parties in order to gain a temporary advantage. Rahim knew the value of organisation and well before the elections he had formed a Council party with a salaried organiser: Abul Kasem, a former Congress worker who had long experience in political journalism and on representative bodies.² Rahim also knew the value of communalism. He went to the electors with a simple religious appeal: 'Musalmans! who are you going to vote for? For the servants of Rahim (Worshippers of God) or for the slaves of Rama (Hindus)'.³ The voters gave a clear answer. Of the 39 Muslim representatives returned to the new Council,

¹ GB, Political, 8A-5, B451-461, Sep 1927.
² Dainik Soltan,* 11 Sep 1926.
³ Leaflet distributed in support of his party, GB, Appointment, 6R-77(1-5) of 1927, A1-5, Feb 1928.
only one was a Swarajist. The other 38 pledged themselves to work the constitution in their community's interests. Their resolve was applauded by the Government and by the European non-officials, who assured them of their support.

The End of an Era

The stage was set for a new act in the drama of Bengal politics. Up until this time the bhadralok had played the leading role; now it was taken by the Muslims. At first it was difficult to see what was happening for the action was confused. Rahim was appointed as a Minister in January 1927 but had to resign because no Hindu would serve with him. His successors, A.K. Ghuznavi and Byomkes Chadravarti, survived for only seven months, and their successors, Musharruf Husain and F.C. Mitra, for nine months. Superficially there seemed nothing novel in this and certainly the instability of the ministries was the result of these communal divisions in the Council which had been a source of trouble ever since 1921. There were new elements, however, which were to be of fundamental importance in provincial politics throughout the following 20 years. Because of the determination of the Muslims to stand apart from nationalist politics, there had been

2 NF, Jan 1927.
3 GB, Appointment, 6R-19(1-11), A103-13, Feb 1927.
a decisive shift in power in the Council away from the bhadralok. The ministries were now led by Muslim politicians and supported in the Council by Muslims, low-caste Hindus, Europeans, Anglo-Indians and a handful of "responsivist" bhadralok members. Moreover, despite their instability these ministries pursued a common aim: the enactment of legislation to benefit the Muslim masses. Agrarian reform and the extension of elementary education became the main planks in the platform on which all ministries were formed in Bengal up to 1947.

The Muslim politicians had made a discovery of profound significance: they had no need to serve two masters. If they dispensed with nationalism, they could also dispense with the bhadralok, for Muslim communal representation gave them an assured base from which to operate in the Council and Muslim numerical superiority gave them power in the community at large. Any extension of the electorate and any development of general political awareness, worked in their favour.

A solution had been found to the main problem involved in working the reformed institutions in Bengal but for the bhadralok it was a disastrous solution. They had lost the initiative in politics and until the province was partitioned 20 years later they were condemned to a course of frustrating opposition. The legislature was being used against them by the Muslims and the British, and their only recourse was to communalism and terrorism. It was the end of an era.
CHAPTER IX

THE FRUSTRATION OF THE BHADRALOK

In conclusion let us focus our attention upon the central problem of this thesis: why did the bhadralok fail in their search for a satisfying means of political self-expression? Why was the theme of these years, 1912 to 1926, one of hope frustrated?

Our point of departure is the nature of the bhadralok in the second half of the nineteenth century: a high-caste, westernised élite, which had gained its ascendancy through the opportunities for education and professional employment which had been provided by the establishment of British trade and British rule. As western education was extended more widely, and as other sections of society began to demand a share in professional employment, the élite would be forced to consider its relationship with these aspiring groups. It would have to choose between alternative courses of action: between an attempt to maintain its monopoly of western education and the professions, and to keep its culture as an exclusive possession; or an attempt to accommodate other sections of society to its culture by opening wide the doors of schools, universities and offices.

This choice between exclusion and accommodation is one with which every westernised colonial élite is faced at some stage, and it has
only a limited time in which to make its decision. If it chooses to remain exclusive, or if it attempts to avoid a decision, which amounts to the same thing, it will never again have an opportunity to change its mind, for the ambitious lower classes on which it has slammed the door, will, in their anger, identify it with the western imperial rulers, and reject its culture as alien.

The bhadralok elite was faced with the need for a decision on this issue by the beginning of the twentieth century, and it had to be a quick decision, for the sphere of bhadralok opportunity, which previously had extended over the whole of northern India, was contracting rapidly with the growth of educated groups in other provinces. Exercising hindsight we can see that the main factor working in favour of the bhadralok's choosing the course of accommodation was their political ambition. They talked of a liberal, secular nationalist movement embracing all communities and classes in India. To give substance to this vision, they might have been willing to come to terms with the lower classes, and admit them freely to the privileges and advantages of western education and professional opportunities. The bhadralok also talked of parliamentary self-government. Had they been given a parliament, based on a territorial franchise which initially they could control but which was to be extended progressively, they would have been forced to appeal to an ever widening section of society in order to maintain their political power.
Whether the élite would have chosen to accommodate the lower orders of Bengali society, either in respect of their power as electors or of their potential contribution to the nationalist movement, we shall never know, for it was given no chance to make a choice. At the moment of decision it was struck by the British a staggering blow - the partition of Bengal - which broke the even flow of its political and social development. The partition shook the bhadralok's faith in liberal, secular nationalism. It drove them in protest to extremes of racial and cultural violence. It forced the élite into premature contact with the lower orders at a time of crisis and disorder, and thereby destroyed its confidence in its ability to control any political order that was not limited to its own class. To protect its identity it turned in upon its privileges and its culture.

This introversion was encouraged by the form of the legislative institutions which the British established in 1909. These institutions were based on a narrow sectional and communal franchise, they had little power, and they were not intended to develop along parliamentary lines. They provided the bhadralok with no incentive to reach out to the lower classes or to abandon their extreme anti-Government agitation in favour of their old liberal, nationalism.

Why did the British act in this way? Because of their desire to preserve their romantic ideal of India: a static India; Fitzjames Stephen's 'frozen river'; the 'true India' of noble princes, honest peasants and loyal martial races. An India in which the I.C.S. would
still have its benevolent mission to perform and over which it could feel confident of maintaining control. The bhadralok and similar westernised élites offended this vision. They were too obviously part of a new India which the British did not wish to see, and they were promoting change. To prevent this – to restore stability – Curzon ran a new provincial boundary through the bhadralok heartland, just as he preserved a provincial boundary between Nagpur and the Chitpavan Brahman's capital, Poona. For the same reason – to hold India steady – communal and sectional electorates were made the basis of the 1909 legislative councils: 'to secure the representation of landed proprietors, and of those who have a stake in the country, and of communities'.

After the upheaval of the anti-partition agitation, the transfer of the Imperial capital to Delhi and the reunification of Bengal in 1912 were two further attempts to restore stability. The bhadralok, however, misinterpreted them as signs of a new willingness on the part of the British to recognise and assist Indian mobility. The group's false hopes were encouraged by Carmichael, who saw that Bengal was moving and considered it sensible to assist it to move in the right direction. It was in this belief that he clashed head-on with Craddock, who was determined to maintain a steady India. If Bengal had got out of line with the other provinces, then (in his view) it had to be put back, even if this required the use of force.

Although Carmichael did not explicitly challenge the idea of a static India, Lyon did. Face reality, he said to the Government of India
in September 1916. We are already being dragged along behind a rapidly accelerating nation and unless we take our proper place in the driver's seat India may run to disaster. It was the reluctance of the Government of India to acknowledge that people like Carmichael and Lyon were right, which delayed for so long the redefinition of Imperial policy, thereby intensifying the bhadralok's distrust of the British.

Montagu's declaration of August 1917 horrified the I.C.S., for it destroyed once and for all their romantic ideal of the unchanging India - 'the Indian civil servants were very sorry that their day was done'.\(^1\) With their basic assumption shattered, they cast desperately around for a new principle from which they could draw confidence for their frightening task of controlling a changing India. Lying ready to hand was the doctrinaire Whig view of parliamentary representation as a social stabiliser. The stability of English society had been preserved, so the Whigs asserted, by the involvement of the lower classes in parliamentary politics through a progressive extension of the franchise. Applying this principle indiscriminately to Bengal, the British officials increased the electorate a hundredfold at one stroke. The effect was revolutionary. The old political class had neither the confidence nor the technique to meet such a demand, and for nearly a decade there was no one who could control the new mass electorate.

\(^1\) W.S. Harris in conversation with Montagu, 6 Dec 1917, E.S. Montagu: An Indian Diary, p. 88.
At the same time as the bhadralok élite was confronted with this alarming prospect of a hopelessly unmanageable electorate, it was faced with two strong challenges from below. The first was from the Muslims. This community, separate in religion and superior in numbers, had always been the main stumbling-block in the way of a bhadralok attempt at assimilation. Its Islamic culture, and its proud memories of its former political dominion, gave it an assured identity which the bhadralok lacked. With its superior cohesion and articulation, it was better placed than were the bhadralok to secure its demands in the scramble for constitutional privileges from 1917 to 1920. Moreover, the growing assertiveness of its lower strata was a source of strength for its leadership, for there was not the cultural disjunction between the upper and lower orders of Muslim society as there was between those of Hindu society in Bengal.

The other threat to the bhadralok élite came from the frustrated small bhadralok, whose political enthusiasm outran that of the élite leaders in the turbulent years of constitutional reconstruction. The élite might have held its own, had it not been for the intrusion upon Bengal politics of Gandhi, with his profoundly disturbing ideas of mass agitation. These appealed greatly to the small bhadralok, who impatiently dismissed the cautions of the élite leadership as proof of its identification with the British. To save its political position, the élite had to swim with the current, which swept it in 1921 into the vortex of mass politics. It was whirled around faster and faster,
scarcely able to keep its head above water, until in 1922 it found an opportunity to clamber back to safety. It survived the ordeal, but only at the expense of further alienating the lower classes, who felt they had been deserted.

The élite leaders returned to their old stamping ground, the Legislative Council, in 1924 but only to find that they were faced with an extraordinarily difficult problem of control in an institution which was divided into groups responsible to separate communal and sectional electorates, and in which the Muslims and Europeans between them occupied nearly half the seats. The bhadralok leaders tried to bridge the gap which separated them from the Muslims but the Government of Bengal sabotaged their attempt. The British officials were determined to prevent the bhadralok from gaining power in the new institutions, for they regarded such an outcome as the main threat to the realisation of the vision of a 'truly democratic' India, which they now cherished in place of the old vision of a static India. Their aversion to the bhadralok politicians was reinforced by the latter's continual extreme attacks on the Government and its policies.

With the same purpose of blocking the bhadralok's access to power, the officials assisted the Muslims to organise the peasantry, and, on this base of mass support, to form a communal bloc to command the Legislative Council. By 1927 the bhadralok had lost their hold on political life in Bengal and were dispossessed of the institution to which they had looked for a satisfying means of political self-expression.
In their frustration they turned away from liberal secular nationalism to new forms of political and communal extremism.
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- Very stimulating.


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A very intelligent analysis.


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   In three volumes. Valuable.
   In two volumes. Excellent.
   In two volumes. Excellent preface on British rule in India.

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   Important.
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Important.

Useful collection of material, but not reliable.


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Not well balanced.

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Seminar
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Vigil

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i. Bengal


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ii. India


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Outstanding.


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Excellent general survey.

Outstanding.


Important.


Stimulating.


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Important.


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probably not alone in preferring a small attendance, for when the House was exceptionally full there was so much noise that people could be heard only with difficulty. And the suggestion that a new semi-circular Chamber would be superior to the oblong design was criticized, not on the modern ground that it would undermine the traditional two-party system and bring in the multiple-party system prevailing on the Continent, but because it would do little to enable the Speaker to keep order more easily. “I wish”, said Peel, “that, as long as possible, our debates should be carried on in this ancient apartment.”

A new Chamber might have meant a removal to another site. This was considered and rejected in 1835, following the destruction of the old House. There was a long discussion by the Select Committee on the 6th March of that year as to whether St. James’s Palace or Marlborough House should be taken over. But the Queen was found to have a life interest at Marlborough House after the King’s death, and Peel thought it would be a mistake for the House to be too near the Clubs in St. James’s Street: members would not attend the debates so regularly. So the Committee decided to retain the old site, partly too because of its comparatively retired situation and the easy communication by river, especially in the hot weather, with the Law Courts and the City.

(To be continued)
A PLEA FOR THE STUDY OF THE INDIAN PROVINCIAL LEGISLATURES

by J. H. BROOMFIELD

THE Bengali author, Nirad Chaudhuri, dedicates his first and most famous book, *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*, “To the memory of the British Empire in India which conferred subjecthood on us but withheld citizenship; to which yet every one of us threw out the challenge: ‘Civis Britannicus Sum’ because all that was good and living within us was made, shaped, and quickened by the same British rule”.¹ This would serve equally well as the dedication for a history of an Indian legislature. Here is a monument, more or less enduring, to British rule. Under that rule the legislatures could be nothing other than subordinate, but their very existence encouraged the Indian to claim the citizenship which was withheld, and trained him in the political ways of his rulers. Whether this was, in itself, good is a matter of opinion, but there can be no doubt that the political awakening of twentieth-century India was a response to British stimulus and that its tutelage was in British schools.

In view of the mass of writing on modern Indian history, it may well be asked, why the need for further study in Indian politics? The answer is that the Indian legislatures have been neglected, despite their importance, and that this neglect has impoverished Indian historiography. Sir Lewis Namier, discussing the contribution of his school to eighteenth-century studies, once remarked that weather-maps are most regular and pleasing to the eye when they are constructed from few observation-points. Add detail by multiplying the points of view and the attractive simplicity is lost. The gain in accuracy, however, is invaluable and the pattern which finally emerges may be significantly new. At present, the map of modern

Indian constitutional and political history is being drawn in just such a regular and simple pattern. The lines run deceptively straight and two of them are ruled much more firmly than the others. One, political, leads from the foundation of the Indian National Congress in 1885 to its triumph in 1947; the other, constitutional, from the establishment of the Indian legislative councils in 1861 to the Independence Act of 1947. Undoubtedly, these have been the main lines of development but to limit study to them, as has been done to a large degree, is to give a false perspective. The danger of a whig interpretation of Indian history is very real. The remedy lies in a change of viewpoint and a closer study of neglected detail.

That Indian historians should have devoted so much of their attention to the rise of Congress is not surprising. This is a success story and success stories make good reading. The constitutional theme can be regarded similarly by the British, but here the historian, as a craftsman, is attracted equally by the great milestones which stand along the way. From the assumption of direct parliamentary control of British India in 1858, there is a series of historic documents inviting study: the Indian Councils Act of 1861, which established provincial legislative councils, and which introduced non-official members into both the provincial and Imperial councils; the 1892 Act, which enlarged the provincial councils, extended their powers of discussion and introduced a form of indirect election; the Morley-Minto reforms of 1909, which gave to the provincial legislatures an unofficial majority and extended indirect election to the Governor-General’s legislative council; Edwin Montagu’s famous declaration of British policy in 1917 as the development of self-governing institutions in India; the Montagu-Chelmsford report of 1918 and the Government of India Act of the following year, which implemented its proposals, increasing the number of legislatures, enlarging their membership, widening the franchise and introducing dyarchy to the provinces; the report of the Simon Commission published in 1930; the papers of the Round Table Conferences of 1930-32; the White Paper and the proceedings of the parliamentary committee of 1933 which examined its proposals; the Govern-
ment of India Act, 1935, under which India might have become a federation, with a large measure of provincial autonomy and dyarchy at the centre; the reports of the Cripps' Mission in 1942 and of the Cabinet Mission four years later; and, finally, the Indian Independence Act of 1947. Much excellent historical work has been done on these documents, particularly by Reginald Coupland, Arthur Berriedale Keith and A. C. Banerjee, but the detailed study of Indian political history, which is needed to set them in perspective, is lacking. This groundwork should include research on the legislatures, particularly the provincial legislatures.

Emphasis needs to be placed on the provinces for a number of reasons. In the first place because this is the most neglected part of the field. In spite of the strength of Indian provincial feeling, the interest of modern writers has been in the struggle for independence at the national level. Yet it is in the provinces that the birth and early growth of Indian nationalism can best be traced. It is here, too, that the earliest constitutional concessions were won, and the principles of representation, election, and representative and responsible government first applied. It is here that most of India’s statesmen and politicians gained their early experience in the legislative, municipal and district councils, and it was to elect these councils that the Indian people were first enfranchised. Even the Congress party, the most centralized of all Indian organizations, enjoyed twenty years of provincial and municipal legislative and administrative experience before it came to power in Delhi. Yet no significant work has been done on this background.

The study of a province offers the student of Indian politics a manageable area. Here he can sift some of the mass of untouched detail; his boundaries are defined, his problems relatively localized. The politicians whom he must study lived within those boundaries and most of the documents which illuminate their activities are to be found there. By limiting himself to one province he can become acquainted with its political history over a considerable period, thus gaining continuity, without losing a grasp of detail. The geography of
India – its immense distances and its climate – hamper the historian as they do the invader, and the former like the latter must concentrate on one area if he is not to dissipate his strength. The history of the central legislature is yet to be written, but, in this field at least, let the local work precede the national.

The question which must now be asked is, why a legislative study? One may answer that this is the ground on which the British have chosen that their rule of India in the twentieth century should be judged. Indeed the judgment extends beyond India. As J. W. Davidson has written: “The whole justification of the colonial system rests, in fact, upon the assumption that self-government, though it is the ultimate objective, can be established beneficially only if there is careful preparation, and if the time and the circumstances of its inauguration are carefully calculated.”1 From the war of 1914-18, the declared British policy in India was to train Indians for self-rule. The establishment of legislatures and the progressive widening of their powers was the pivot of that policy. The end in view was not only self-government but parliamentary self-government. The historian is fully entitled, therefore, to enquire how well these institutions fulfilled their educative role. Such an enquiry is the raison d’être of the series of studies on colonial legislatures edited by Margery Perham,2 and alone it is sufficient to justify the examination of the Indian legislatures.

That is not to say that the historian may accept this as the whole story. Obviously the legislative councils had functions other than the training of Indian politicians. They existed primarily to legislate, and, until 1909 at least, their non-official membership was valued chiefly as a source of local advice and opinion; not as the germ of some future Parliament.3 Nor may

the declared British policy of full self-government for India, apparently fulfilled in 1947, be accepted uncritically. K. M. Panikkar, one of the most able of contemporary Indian historians, can write:

"The old ideal of imperial domination had disappeared with the first war, and all the political manoeuvring of the period between 1920-9 was in the nature of delaying rearguard actions. The British authorities hoped to be able by their superior political knowledge and experience to modify and limit the independence which they knew India would ultimately acquire; they tried to do this by creating classes and interests which would support their position."\(^1\)

Perhaps Gandhi was right in 1931 when he described the British as having an unequalled faculty of self-delusion. "I know, if the time comes to concede the equality I want for India", he said, "they will say that that is what they have all along desired."\(^2\)

Even if it is shown (as the writer believes it can be) that the end desired by the British was fully responsible parliamentary government for India, it is not necessary to accept this as a good end. Is the British parliamentary system really suitable for India? This is a question which the legislative historian must ask and to which his work may suggest an answer. How strange did the Indians find this exotic institution, and how well did they master the subtleties of its working? Were the British right to import a system which had proved suitable in its place of origin and in the white colonies overseas, or should they have developed something indigenous? In the opinion of John Stuart Mill, writing in 1861, Britain could succeed in her task in India only

"through far wider political conceptions then merely English or European practice can supply, and through a much more profound study of Indian experience, and of the conditions of Indian government, than either English


politicians, or those who supply the English public with opinions, have hitherto shown any willingness to undertake."\textsuperscript{1}

Such warnings were heard frequently before 1914, but rarely afterwards. It may be that there was no Indian alternative to a parliamentary system, and, had the British offered one, paradoxical as it may seem, none would have been harder to convince of their good faith than the educated Indian.

Added point is given to this enquiry into the suitability of the institution, by its retention after Independence in both India and Pakistan, and by its subsequent abandonment in the latter. Is its early demise in the Muslim state an indication of its unsuitability, or, perhaps, of some failure in the training which the British gave their wards? Here again there is a profitable line of investigation: did the British pay enough attention to the training of political leaders and the organization of parties on which the system depends, or were they too concerned with legislative forms? Research on the legislative councils will reveal, perhaps, which political groups were favoured with British support and which had their opposition. Where the British put their weight may, however, have been immaterial. Possibly the issue was settled once Congress had gained the initiative and, indeed, the explanation of the survival of the parliamentary system in post-Independence India may perhaps be found in the unity gained by Congress in the fight against the British, rather than in Indian legislative experience as such.

These are some of the questions with which the student of the legislatures will grapple and, in themselves, they are a justification for his study. All this, however, is reading history backwards, and it must not be thought that the only reason for the research is to find answers to current problems. That the legislatures existed in the late nineteenth and the twentieth centuries as an important part of India's governmental structure, is surely sufficient to warrant their examination. Here is a segment of Indian history and a well documented one.

\textsuperscript{1} Considerations on Representative Government (Oxford, edn. edited by R. B. McCallum, 1946), p. 324.
What are the elements of this study? First, and basic to the whole, there must be an examination of the structure and composition of the legislature at its various stages of development. This will reveal, of course, the changing balance between official, nominated unofficial, and elected members in which constitutional progress lay. It will include an investigation of the forms of proceeding and the conventions evolved to keep the legislative machine in motion. In the period in which there were two Chambers (from 1937 in most provinces) the relations, both formal and informal, between them must also be observed. It will require consideration of the changing electoral provisions – the nature of the constituencies and the franchise – and of the relations between the members and their electorates.

Secondly, there must be a detailed analysis of the membership of both Houses. Who were the men and women nominated and elected? What were their ages, occupations, classes and castes? From what areas of the province or beyond did they come, and what were their connections and their means? Were they educated and did they have an experience of village or municipal administration? Such questions may, and indeed should, be multiplied tenfold. "Scratch a politician and you find a landlord," they say in Orissa.\(^1\) So far very few Indian politicians have been scratched and it is high time they were.

On this foundation, the structure of parties and other political groupings, both within the legislature and outside it, may be examined. Here again there is much work to be done. The main organizations in Indian politics today – particularly the Congress Party, the Socialists and the Communists – have been analysed, but the parties which fell by the way have either been disregarded, or, what is perhaps worse, seen only as discredited rivals of the victorious Congress. These include the Liberals, the leaders of Indian nationalism at the turn of the century, who were still important for their moderating influence even in the 1930’s; the Zamindari and industrial groups, which were so powerful in many of the provinces in

the 1920s and 1930s; and, indeed, the Swarajists, the men within the National Congress who favoured participation in the legislatures and who split with their more orthodox Gandhian colleagues in 1939 on the issue of Indian support for the British war effort. Surprisingly enough, even the Muslim League has received scant attention, despite its leading role in the separation of Pakistan.

What were the links that bound the members of these parties together, and the barriers which separated their groups? The enquiry will involve careful attention to the issues debated in the legislature and to the opinions expressed by members inside and outside the council Chamber. It will involve an analysis of the division lists and the examination of electoral activities, particularly of alliances. At one level this investigation of parties, as also the study of legislative membership, will illuminate to some degree the relationship between the provincial capital and the countryside; a relationship which is full of interest in a land which is overwhelmingly agrarian but which, apparently, was dominated politically by the cities. At another level it will reveal the struggle for power and prestige between the new group of westernized intellectuals, born of British rule, and the old influential interests, whose authority was based largely on landholdings. These phenomena are linked, of course, and they have their parallels in other parts of the British Empire, particularly Africa.

The discussion will also throw light on the European commercial groups within the legislatures. From the first, British interests were represented in the councils and in a few of them had considerable power. In Bengal, for example, where from 1937 their representatives number twenty-five in a lower House of 250, they held the balance of the shifting and uneasy coalitions from which the provincial governments were drawn. Equally interesting will be an enquiry into their attitude towards constitutional advance. Was the British business community as illiberal as common report has it, or was it, in fact, aware of which horse had the running and fully determined not to back a loser?

The study of parties must also open up the thorny question
of the rival religious communities. The friction between these communities, particularly the Hindu-Muslim clash, was the greatest problem faced by the British raj and the Indian nationalists alike in the transfer of power. The gravity of the problem is measured by its solution: the division of India. In colonial territories the struggle for independence is always accompanied by a contest between rival groups to succeed to the power which is being relinquished by the imperial ruler. This contest was unusually bitter in India because of the sharp religious divisions in the community, and the consequent fear of the minority groups that their corporate privileges, and even their existence, were endangered by the British withdrawal. Naturally, pre-Independence Indian politics were bedevilled with these religious divisions and a consideration of the communal question must be central to any Indian legislative history.

In 1909 communal representation was introduced to India to give the minorities a voice in the legislatures. Two questions must be asked – what was the motive which underlay this, and what was its effect? Is it in communal representation, as Hindu nationalists maintain, that the source of India’s tragic division is to be sought? The findings of the Donoughmore Commission of 1928 on Ceylon certainly lend colour to this assertion:

"... we have come unhesitatingly to the conclusion," says its report, "that communal representation is, as it were, a canker on the body politic, eating deeper and deeper into the vital energies of the people, breeding self-interest, suspicion, and animosity, poisoning the new growth of political consciousness, and effectively preventing the development of a national or corporate spirit."

This may have been true of Ceylon, but how true was it of India where the communal problem was so much greater? If the minorities were to retain their identity, was there any alternative to communal representation?

In 1934 Lady Minto, in her India, Minto and Morley, quoted

A letter of 1906 describing the Viceroy’s sympathetic response to a Muslim deputation demanding communal representation as "A work of statesmanship that will affect India and Indian history for many a long year. It is nothing less than the pulling back of sixty-two millions of people from joining the ranks of seditious opposition". This revelation was hailed by many Hindus as confirmation of their belief that the motive underlying the introduction of separate electorates for the minorities was *divide and rule*. How far this is true, the historian of the Indian legislatures must enquire. Undoubtedly his work will throw light upon the effects of communal representation and possibly upon this more complex question of British motive.

There are other lines which must be followed: for example, the relations of the legislative council and its members with subordinate bodies. The municipal councils and rural district boards, in particular, are of importance, for these were (in Lord Minto’s words) “the initial rungs in the ladder of self-government”. The modern system of local government in India was founded in the 1860s and 1870s, and extended by Lord Ripon a decade later. From the first, some of the members of these boards were directly elected, and it was on them that a large number of Indian politicians gained their first administrative experience. This was true even in the 1920s and 1930s for Congressmen, who could not countenance participation in the legislative councils, entered municipal corporations where, they considered, there was greater freedom of action. Jawaharlal Nehru, Chairman of the Allahabad municipality, was just one among many. Consequently these local organs had an extraordinary importance in provincial politics.

Also to be considered are the relations between the provincial legislative council and superior bodies, particularly the Indian central legislature and the British Parliament. These defined the limits within which the provincial legislatures could act. No less important is an examination of the contacts with Government, both at Viceregal level, and, more

immediately, in the provinces. Here the development of the institution will be traced from its birth as a small group of Government officials, presided over by the provincial Governor or Lieutenant-Governor and assisted in the work of legislation by a number of Governor's nominees, to a two-Chamber legislature with a total membership, in the larger provinces, of more than 300, from which the Governor's ministers were drawn and to which they were responsible. Between the two lay the daring experiment of dyarchy, "the technical term for handing over the steering-wheel and retaining control of the accelerator, the gear-lever and the brake", as Philip Mason has described it.¹ The effects of this division of authority, from 1921-37, between ministers responsible to the legislature and those responsible to the Governor alone, will form a most fascinating and important part of any Indian legislative study.

Again, secondary issues suggest themselves. On the one hand there will be interest in observing the part played by the legislature in social and economic reform, an important aspect of all colonial development in this century and particularly significant in India where the departments concerned with social and economic welfare were among the first handed over to Indians. On the other hand will be seen the difficulties of nationalist politicians in office, trying to reconcile (with greater or lesser success) the independence struggle with the day-to-day burdens of administration; the old loyalties of the fight with the growing, though reluctant, loyalties to a Government which they now saw through new eyes. The dangers of their position were grasped by Nehru in 1938 when he wrote: "They are trying to adapt themselves far too much to the old order and trying to justify it. . . . What is far worse is that we are losing the high position that we have built up, with so much labour, in the hearts of the people. We are sinking to the level of ordinary politicians."²

Another profitable line of enquiry will concern the attitude of the council members to the civil service and their opinions

on the increase in its Indian membership. Did they, for instance, concur with the Calcutta Statesman in regarding it as "a file-flattened bureaucracy"?\(^1\)

Lastly, attention must be given to the relations between the legislature and the press. As early as the second quarter of the nineteenth century the Indian press was flourishing. In 1830, for example, Bengal alone had no fewer than forty-nine newspapers and periodicals.\(^2\) Although political journalism was hindered by the restrictions imposed in the interests of British rule, it proved of hardy growth and was of major importance at all stages of the independence movement. Every leading party, and even many of the smaller provincial groups, used the press to advantage. It provides the historian of Indian politics with an invaluable source of evidence, as well as forming an important part of his research in its own right.

This is the structure of the study but, of course, structure alone is insufficient. To determine the shape of the human ant-hill and to map the beaten tracks along which the ants scurry is important, but the final purpose is to discover why they hurry in these long lines and to what end they build. Motive must be sought; the lasting issues which give meaning to the whole must be distinguished. It is difficult as yet to say what those issues will be, for the documents lie unexplored, their clues hidden. At this stage can be seen only a few of the threads which may be significant, and most of these have been suggested already. Obviously the development of the constitution is one. What pressure did the legislative councillors exert to win constitutional concessions? Which was the more important at various stages in forcing advance, local demand or the influence of the British House of Commons and electorates? How did the councillors regard the changes once gained? Did these alter the relations of the political groups with their rival parties on one side, and the British on the other? Another significant theme concerns the part played by communal ties in Indian politics. There must be an estimate of the importance of caste, class, occupation, locality

\(^1\) Quoted Woodruff, II, 335.
and religion in determining political behaviour. No less important is an examination of the nature of political leadership. Who were the outstanding figures? What were their techniques and how able were they? Were they men of city or countryside? Has there been in India (as Myron Weiner suggests) a slow but certain shift in political power over the last fifty years from the former to the latter?  

The record of the Indian ministers in office must be examined, their success or failure weighed against the difficulties which they faced. Their part in social and economic reform, and in handling the growing problems of industrialization, must be measured. This is the reverse side of the coin: how did the Indians use the power transferred by the British? As yet we have only questions and no answers.

In conclusion, one note of caution should be sounded. The historian must beware of the temptation to exaggerate the importance of the legislature. Working within its walls, surrounded by its voluminous records, and communing with its members, dead and alive, he will find it all too easy to forget the wider community of which it is but a small part. Throughout, he must attempt to evaluate its place in the community, even if this finally involves the admission that the part played by the institution was not as great as he first thought.

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preserved by the British themselves which often give a different story of many events which British historians treated from an Imperial standpoint of their own. For example, it was stated by Gait in his History of Assam that the Khasi Uprising of 1829 was caused by the boasting taunts of a Bengali Chaprassi accompanying the British Officers into the Hills, to the effect that the Khasis who had allowed the British to build a road through their territory would soon be treated as British subjects and subjected to taxation. But a study of contemporary records relating to the incident, records left by the British themselves, reveal that bad faith on the part of the British was the cause of the rising as shown in my paper on the subject contributed to the last session of this Congress. There are other instances of British writers stressing only one side of the picture and suppressing things unpalatable to them. And what is true of Assam may be true of other regions of India also.

I have devoted a few paragraphs in this address to Assam in anticipation of your indulgence, because in British days Assam was a backward province and used often to be designated as the 'Cinderella Province' of India. She suffered from negligence of the outside world. In 1948 Shri Rajagopalachariar, then Governor-General of India, had an occasion to tell this humble self that nobody could neglect Assam if she did not neglect herself. The interest shown by this august body in Assam during its last session there has led us to believe that at least the historians will not neglect Assam.

Ladies and gentlemen, I thank you heartily for having listened to my address with so much patience and I shall earnestly count upon your whole-hearted co-operation in conducting the deliberations of this Section of our Congress. Once again I express my gratitude to you all.

THE PARTITION OF BENGAL:

A Problem in British Administration, 1830-1912

J. M. BROOMFIELD

Why was Bengal partitioned in 1905 and repartitioned in 1912? This is a question which has engaged Indian historians, particularly Bengalis, in recent years. I should like to approach the enquiry from a different angle. Why, I should like to ask, was it in 1905 and 1912 that Bengal was partitioned, and not, for argument's sake, in 1895 or 1875? This is a pertinent question, for Bengal had been a problem to the British
Government in India for more than 80 years before Lord Curzon took his fateful decision in 1903. There had certainly been earlier attempts to grapple with the problem, but it was not until the first decade of the twentieth century that anyone ventured to grasp it firmly. The aim of this paper is to suggest some of the reasons why a decision was so long delayed, and why it was taken when it was. I must emphasise that I can offer no more than suggestions, for this aspect of the Partition of Bengal awaits detailed investigation. I am convinced that such an investigation would provide answers that are at present being sought elsewhere.

It will have been observed that the subtitle to the paper is "a problem in British Administration". It is important to realise that to the British Government in India Bengal presented a knotty administrative problem throughout most of the nineteenth century. This area first came under British control after the battle of Plassey (1757) and Buxar (1764). In 1765 Emperor Shah Alam was induced to grant to the East India Company the *Diwani* of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, but it was not until 1772, when Warren Hastings became Governor, that the Company took direct control. Two years later Hastings became Governor-General, with some authority over Madras and Bombay, and immediate responsibility for Bengal. Each addition to the Company's territories in northern India saw the expansion of the boundaries of Bengal, and by 1826 the Presidency extended well beyond Delhi in the west, and into the Valley of Assam in the east. The stage was set for a play that ran for more than 80 years ending in grim tragedy. Bengal was too large for its Government—either it had to be reduced in size, or its Government had to be reconstructed. These, we shall find, were the alternatives with which the British worked throughout the century.

The first move was territorial: in 1836 the Presidency was divided, a separate Lieutenant-Governorship of the North-Western Provinces, extending from the Bihar frontier to the Sutlej, being created. This was followed by the reform of the Bengal Government. In 1843 a provincial secretariat was established, and in 1854 the Governor-General was provided with a subordinate to relieve him of immediate responsibility for Bengal. The charge of the new Lieutenant-Governor was considerable. It comprised Bengal proper, Bihar, Orissa, Assam, Arakan, Chota Nagpur, and tributary states, with a total area of approximately 2,53,000 square miles. This may be compared with the area of the present state of West Bengal, viz. 33,928 square miles. The population was estimated at the time at four crores but it may have been a crore more. That of Calcutta was probably between four and five lakhs.

The Government of Bengal at this time differed in a number of important respects from the Governments of Bombay and Madras, the two other Presidencies. They were headed by full Governors, men selected from English public life who might communicate directly with
the Board of Control in England, and who were assisted by Executive Councils. The Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, a Civilian, governed alone, and was responsible, in the first instance, to the Governor-General. This position, though apparently anomalous in view the importance of the province, may be understood if it is remembered that the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal was only one of two Lieutenant-Governors in the Presidency, and that his capital was also that of the Governor-General, but it placed the Government of Bengal in a peculiar relationship to the Government of India throughout the period under review. The two were so intimately associated, and the Imperial establishment so overshadowed the provincial, that there was little hope that suggestions for major reforms in Bengal would be judged primarily in terms of local needs.

The history of the Bengal Administration in the half-century after 1854 reveals three great watersheds: the Mutiny of 1857; the Orissa Famine of 1866-67; and the latter years of Lord Curzon’s Viceroyalty from 1902-5. The Mutiny precipitated reforms which had long been under consideration. There was, of course, the fundamental change effected by the Crown’s assumption of direct control of India in 1858. This was followed immediately by the codification of Indian law, and in Bengal by a reform of the judiciary. The Lieutenant-Governor was given powers of legislation and a council to assist him in their exercise, while the lower administration in the province was brought into line with the greater part of British India by the union of the offices of Collector and Magistrate. Some attempt was made to establish a system of local government, and there was a reform of the police organisation. In addition, the Lieutenant-Governorship was reduced in size by the transfer of Arakan to the new Province of British Burma formed in 1862.

Arakan was neither populous nor important. Its transfer did little to lighten the burden of the Bengal Government,—and by the 1860’s the weight of that burden was crushing. The population of this huge and fertile region was increasing at the rate of some five lakhs a year, but its administration remained virtually unchanged. The Government was fighting a spirited but losing battle to meet the growing demands for its services. This was revealed with stark clarity by the famine which struck Orissa in 1866. The Lieutenant-Governor, Sir Cecil Beadon, broken in health by the impossible demands of his office and served by an inadequate Administration, was unequal to the colossal task of relief with which he was confronted. Lakhs of people died, and the Secretary of State and the Government of India awoke too late to a realisation that all was not well with the constitution of Bengal.

The result was a full-scale enquiry into the Government and Administration of the Province. Its scope was very wide, and the minutes, memoranda and reports produced form a file of extraordinary proportions. In terms of practical reforms, however, the achievement
was negligible. The blame for this lay chiefly with the Secretary of State, Sir Stafford Northcote. Had he laid proper emphasis upon the two questions which he rightly regarded as fundamental—whether the province should be divided, and whether its Lieutenant-Governor (or Governor) should have the assistance of an Executive Council—this excellent opportunity of solving the Bengal problem might not have gone begging. The immediate need was for reforms in Bengal, but Northcote allowed discussion to wander over every aspect of Indian administration, and to dissipate itself in profitless argument.

Exasperated by the resultant stalemate, Sir Bartle Frere, ex-Governor of Bombay who had sat as a member of the enquiry committee, wrote a masterly expose of the inadequacy of Bengal's administration. Analysing the number of civil servants provided for the province, he said:

"We find that for every five millions of people inhabiting a country larger, richer, and more important in every way, except fighting power, than most third class European sovereignties, we have one-eighth of a Lieutenant-Governor, about 28½ English gentlemen, Covenanted Civilians, and about 112 Uncovenanted gentlemen".

It must be borne in mind that these numbers comprise the whole of the administrative machinery of this vast province, with the most trifling exceptions. The duties which the great feudal chiefs perform in other parts of India, and in most parts of Europe, or which the unpaid administration performs in our own country, are not fulfilled by any class in Bengal........

With these facts before us, can we say that Bengal has anything but the shadow of an administration? Can we wonder at a breakdown like that of Orissa? or that of the late Lieutenant-Governor's two predecessors?......It is true that of late years there has been a nibbling at improvement, both in police and judicial administration; but what has been attempted bears no proportion to the wants of the country, and Bengal is still practically ungoverned for that is the long and short of the Commission's report on it, and all that we have seen and heard during the late famine.

Frere had the wholehearted support of the Lieutenant-Governor, Sir William Grey, who declared that his Government was the greatest anomaly existing in India. Bengal was the largest and most important province, and should, in his opinion, be at least on a par with Bombay and Madras. "I have no hesitation in affirming, that at present the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal is overweighted, to an extent neither fair to the individual nor (which is of more importance) to the interest of the province, or rather provinces, which constitute the Lieutenant Governorship," he wrote. Five years later his successor, John Campbell, was echoing his words. "It is totally impossible", he declared, "that any man can properly perform single-handed the work of this great Government."
Despite these eloquent appeals no major reform was undertaken. Assam was constituted a separate province, certainly, but even this was delayed seven years, in spite of its recommendation by all connected with the famine enquiry. In addition, another secretary was provided for the Bengal Government, but the suggestion of an Executive Council to assist the Lieutenant-Governor was shelved, in deference to the convictions of that confirmed Punjab paternalist, the Governor-General Sir John Lawrence, and his supporters, who held firmly to their belief that council government was inferior to personal government. The enquiry was of great importance in the history of Partition, nonetheless, for it represented the first major attempt to grapple with the Bengal problem. The file produced in 1867 was henceforth the textbook on Bengal to which all referred.

Sir Henry Durand, military member of the Viceroy’s council, writing in that book of wisdom, observed that the problem was not to be solved by administrative readjustments: “This top dressing, so to speak, does not touch the root of the evil,” he said. By the end of the century it was painfully clear that Durand had been right. Since 1854 Bengal had been reduced in area by nearly a quarter, but despite this its population had risen from four or five to almost eight crores. It is astonishing to realise that that was well over a quarter of the population of the entire sub-continent. Add to this the immense expansion in Governmental activity in the second half of the nineteenth century, and some appreciation will be gained of the colossal task confronting the Lieutenant-Governor. “Bengal is unquestionably too large a charge for any single man”, wrote Curzon early in 1902. This statement had by then become a cliché dishonoured by 70 years of official inaction. What followed must therefore be regarded as remarkable. Within ten years Bengal was twice partitioned; its Government was provided with an Executive Council; the Lieutenant-Governor was replaced by a Governor; and the capital of India was removed from Calcutta to New Delhi.

The details of these developments are well known, and therefore we can proceed to a consideration of the questions: why was a solution to the Bengal problem so long delayed, and why was it attempted in 1905? The answer to the first question is the key to the second. It has been observed that the alternatives—the division of the province, or the expansion of its Government—were understood by the British from the first. Why was one or the other not applied? Firstly, it appears, because there was a reluctance to share, or even on occasions to delegate, authority, and this extended right down the line from Governor-General to District Officer. It may be pointed out quite correctly, that this statement runs counter to the great bulk of writing on the I.C.S., but the evidence on Bengal leaves the writer in no doubt as to its validity for that province at least. The opposition of successive Governors-General and their councillors to the provision of an Executive Council for Bengal exemplifies
it. A major reason for this was, undoubtedly, the periodic disagreements between the Government of India and the rather independent Governors and Executive Councils of Madras and Bombay, and (less frequently), between those Governors and their Councils. The Government of India argued, rather illogically, from this that a Governor (or Lieutenant-Governor) was weakened by the delegation of power to Councillors. In rejecting a Bengali suggestion in 1904 for a reconstitution of Government rather than the partition of the province, Curzon and his advisors declared that the idea of giving the Lieutenant-Governor a Council “must be set aside absolutely and without hesitation as a solution of the present difficulty........personal methods of government are better suited to the circumstances of India, and produce superior results.”

The unwillingness to delegate authority is also reflected in the relations between the Government of India and the Government of Bengal. In the discussions which followed the Orissa tragedy, and in those which preceded the removal of the capital to Delhi, it was generally agreed that the Government of India pressed so heavily upon the Government of Bengal as at times to render the latter a mere cypher. In 1868 the Governor-General, John Lawrence, disagreed with this opinion, but proceeded to give the lie to his argument by recommending the abolition of the Bengal Legislative Council. The affairs of the province could be adequately handled by the Imperial Council, he declared, and the Lieutenant-Governor would be better occupied as a member of that Council than in managing one of his own. Curzon once complained that a sparrow could not twitter its tail without this being attributed to direct orders from the Viceroy. One may surely ask: “Whose fault—sparrow or Viceroy?” It was typical of Curzon—and indeed of the normal relations between the Governments of India and Bengal—that it was he who made the tour of Eastern Bengal in February 1904 to enlist support for Partition, and not the Lieutenant-Governor, Sir Andrew Fraser. Why should not his Government have been encouraged to handle this domestic affair?

At the provincial level the failing is seen in the attitude to Lord Ripon’s famous local self-government resolution of 1882. Ripon was a notable exception to the rule, for he emphasised the need to share the increased burdens of administration, and drew attention to the growing number of educated Indians who were willing and able to play their part. His work, however, was frustrated by the opposition of provincial governments, who had little desire to expand representative institutions. The resolution was implemented in Bengal in 1884-5, but for the rest of the century there were repeated attempts by that Government to reduce the elected membership and curtail the powers of local boards. This culminated in the notorious 1899 Calcutta Municipal Act, which returned the Corporation to the control of Government nominees.

The District Officers also failed to make proper use of representative
boards. There was general agreement, e.g. among those who gave
evidence to the Royal Commission on Decentralisation in 1907-8, that
these bodies had failed because the District Officers had given them no
say in determining policy.\textsuperscript{17}

It is important that we should ask why there was this failure to make
proper use of subordinates. One reason, it seems, was the desire to
preserve efficiency. The argument was that control had to be kept in
the hands of those whom one knew to be capable. Carried to its extreme,
this meant oneself. There are indications in the late nineteenth and early
twentieth centuries of an “efficiency cult” in the I.C.S.: as long as Govern­
ment was efficient nothing else was thought to be of major importance.\textsuperscript{18}
This is the ground on which many Conservative opponents to the Morley-
Minto reforms took their stand.\textsuperscript{19} To a degree it was a confusion of
means with ends.

The second reason that may be suggested for this unwillingness to
share authority, and one which is linked with the first, was a tendency
to govern for the sake of the Government, not the governed. Too often
in the discussion on the Bengal issue, both in 1867-8 and 1902-3, it
seemed to be the convenience of the Administration which was of primary
importance. One of the main purposes of the letter of 3 December, 1903,
in which the Government of India informed the Government of Bengal
of its plans for the province, was to warn the officials that they must
not think too exclusively in terms of their own losses or gains from
partition.\textsuperscript{20} That it was thought necessary to emphasise this point surely
indicates that Government for the sake of the Government was a very
real danger. “........there is a dead wall of official resistance always
ready to obstruct anything which can be twisted into meaning interference
with British official rights,” complained Lord Minto, when struggling with
opposition to his reform proposals a few years later.\textsuperscript{21} Here is an im­
portant clue to an understanding of the violent Bengali hatred of Partition.
The measure was pushed through by the British in the name of adminis­
trative convenience against unprecedented protest. The argument of
administrative convenience was considered all sufficient, and opposition
was characterised as ignorant or (more often) selfish and subversive.\textsuperscript{22}
Bengal was shocked into the realisation that the British were willing
to perpetrate such measures—no matter how unpopular—to benefit the
Administration.

If the first reason for delay was a reluctance to delegate authority,
then the second was an aversion in the Civil Service to major reforms,
either territorial or Governmental. If the \textit{status quo} could be preserved,
so much the better; if not, small adjustments were to be preferred to a
thoroughgoing revolution. This explains that “nibbling at improvement”
of which Frere complained. To suggest any change was to court wide­
spread opposition. A territorial adjustment, for example, ran headlong
against vested interest, as was clearly shown in 1905. It was proposed
by the Government of India that Chota Nagpur should be transferred to the Central Provinces, but the Bengal Chamber of Commerce was interested in its mining and industrial potential, and successfully blocked the move. Similarly, deference was shown to the tea industry in the choice of a name for the new province. It was to have been called the “North-Eastern Provinces” but it became “Eastern Bengal and Assam”; so that Assam, known throughout the commercial world, would not disappear from the map. The officials also had their objection. It was the Government of Madras, for instance, which prevented the union of the Uriya speaking people by refusing to transfer to Bengal the Uriya areas under its control. It is clear that provincial boundaries developed related interest groups as much within the Civil Service as without, and in this respect language was a most important factor. An ambitious Civilian faced with a choice of vernaculars, would usually concentrate upon mastering the language of the metropolis—to which he hoped one day to be promoted—in preference to that of a remote district. In Bengal this meant the neglect of areas such as Orissa and Bihar. One of Curzon’s main arguments in favour of the 1905 re-adjustment was that it offered a solution to Assam’s perennial staffing problem, for civilians would be more willing to serve in that province if it were united with Eastern Bengal.

Here is a key to an understanding of the form of the Partition. To the Administration it seemed important that a Bengali-speaking area should be included in every new subdivision of the province, and hence its adamant rejection of demands for linguistic union. This re-emphasises the weight given to administrative as against popular convenience. Bengali and particularly Calcutta interests were severely affected by the Partition—but it was for the Europeans, official and non-official, that adjustments were made.

A reform in the structure of Government raised as many difficulties as a change of area. The secretariat was always ready with the objection that any contemplated reform had no precedent. In 1867, when an Executive Council for the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal was suggested, they replied that Executive Councils were for Governors and Governors-General; men with little knowledge of India and in need of advice. Lieutenant-Governors were Civilians and therefore well acquainted with the local scene. Their argument was accepted, but the Council advocates attempted to overcome the difficulty by giving Bengal a Governor. This proved to be equally objectionable. How, it was asked, could the existence in Calcutta of a Governor and Council, be reconciled with that of the Governor-General and Council? An Executive Council a thousand miles distant was bad enough but to have one in Calcutta would bring chaos. The only answer was to move the Government of India elsewhere. This was as far as the argument got in 1868 for no one was willing to face the task of moving the Imperial capital.
Why, it may be asked? Because of the uproar which this would have occasioned in Calcutta. Bombay and Madras, on the other hand, were heartily in favour of the proposal, for they believed the Government of India to be inordinately influenced by Calcutta opinion. That they were right in their belief, there is no doubt. Besides the secretariat wallahs, for whom Calcutta was a stronghold in the nineteenth century, there was the European business community. Through the Bengal Chamber of Commerce and through private influence, it could put strong pressure on Government, and if checked its displeasure found expression in the columns of the *Englishman, Capital and Commerce*. It had a powerful lobby both in Whitehall and at Westminster, and its opinion was always sought on matters of importance. It is significant that in the early discussions on the establishment of legislative councils, one of the arguments in their favour was that this group should have a say in legislation. John Lawrence's proposal to abolish the Bengal Legislative Council was rejected on the same ground that it would not be fair to the Calcutta Europeans. They continued to enjoy considerable over-representation in the Imperial and Bengal Legislative Councils well into this century, and the latter was given an elected majority in 1909, more than a decade ahead of the rest of India, because the same Europeans could be relied upon to support the Government through thick and thin. Lord Crewe aptly characterised them in 1912 as "spoilt children in many respects, full of their historical and social importance, anti-Indian au fond, and keen to scent out "disloyalty" in any independent expression of opinion, hidebound too in class prejudices."

The influence of Calcutta was the lion in the path of a solution to the Bengal problem. Any attempt to partition the province was seen as a threat to Calcutta as a metropolis; any suggestion to shift the Imperial Capital was seen as a threat to non-official European influence. Both the Government of India and the Government of Bengal, it seems, were bound hand and foot by Calcutta until they were freed by the growth of counter forces in the late nineteenth century. One was an awakened interest in Indian affairs in Britain, and a new determination to control Indian policy from at Home. The other was the development of educated Indian opinion, especially in Bengal, constituting a challenge to old vested interests, although it too was centred on Calcutta. These two forces came to maturity in the first decade of the twentieth century, making possible bold measures, despite continued I.C.S. hesitation and Calcutta hostility. The British Liberal Party's electoral victory of January, 1906, in particular, heralded a new era of Home control of Indian affairs. Significantly, the provision of an Executive Council for the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal in 1910 was the result of a recommendation of the Royal Commission on Decentralisation and the work of John Morley, both of whom were regarded by many Civilians as intruders. Similarly, the reunion of Bengal under a Governor and the transfer of the Imperial
capital followed suggestions in the parliamentary debates on the 1909 Reforms; suggestions implemented by Lords Hardinge and Crewe. They were aware of the furore this would create in Calcutta, and hence the secrecy with which the operation was planned. That the Viceroy and Secretary of State were willing to invoke the wrath of European Calcutta, indicates how the strength of the latter had declined. Thirty years earlier European opinion had forced the Government of India into important and shameful retreat over the Ilbert Bill; now its protests could be ignored.

This goes a long way towards explaining why 1905-1912 were the years of action: Calcutta had lost its powers to obstruct unwelcome innovation. There were two other factors of prime importance. One was the legacy which Bengal had inherited from seventy years of procrastination. Her administrative malaise was by them so acute that to have postponed a cure any longer would have been fatal. The disclosures of the Indian Police Commission in 1903, on the neglect of eastern Bengal had left no doubt on this point. The other was the personality of the Viceroy. In Curzon, India had a reformer of extraordinary vigour and unswerving purpose, who would brook no opposition when once convinced of the efficiency of a course of action. He set his heart on solving the Bengal problem and unfortunately chose partition as the way. It was left for his Liberal successors to repair the damage.

An answer can now be offered to the question: why 1905-12 and not 1895 or 1875? In the nineteenth century the antipathy of the Civil Service to major change and to the delegation of authority, and the strength of the Calcutta non-officials, were barriers to any comprehensive reform in Bengal, but with each year of delay the situation grew appreciably worse. At the same time the development of educated Indian opinion and of interest in India in the United Kingdom gradually freed the Viceroy and his Councillors from the toils of Calcutta. Curzon, determined to leave his mark upon India, saw his opportunity in Bengal and carved the body politic into two neat administrative portions, but his handiwork was rapidly undone by Indian opposition and British interference. The old province was broken into three, and Calcutta was given a Governor-in-Council to compensate for its lost Viceroy. By 1912 the problem of the structure of Bengal’s Administration was solved, and a new chapter opened in Bengali history.

1 Report on the Administration of Public Affairs in the Bengal Presidency, 1855-56 (Calcutta, 1856) 1.

3 The selection presented to Parliament ran to 151 printed folio pages. P.P. (Parliamentary Papers, Great Britain) 1867-68 (256) XLIX, 161-311.

4 See his memorandum dated 16 September, 1867, Ibid, 163-4.

5 Memorandum dated 2 December, 1867, Ibid, 204-5.


8 E.g. see Government of India to Secretary of State, 2 February, 1905, Ibid, 638-41; Secretary of State to Government of India, 27 November, 1908, P.P., 1908 [Cd. 4426] LXXVI, Pt. 1, 52; Government of India to Secretary of State, 25 August, 1911, P.P., 1911 [Cd. 5979] LV, 588.

9 Minute dated 27 February, 1868, P.P., 1867-68 (256) XLIX, 247.

10 Imperial Gazetteer, op. cit., VII, 194 & 222-6.

11 E.g. compare the lists of Government departments given in the Reports on the Administration of Bengal, 1855-56 and 1904-05. In the former year there were 14 departments, in the latter 30, including such novelties as Legislation; Municipal Administration and Local Self-Government; Forests; Manufactures, Mines and Factories; Statistics; Vaccination; and Veterinary Services. In the same period the total revenue of the province had risen from Rs. 11,08,00,168 to Rs. 23,18,53,000. (Appendices to the Bengal Administration Report, 1858-59, 78; Report on the Administration of Bengal, 1904-05, 102.)


15 Minute, 19 February 1868, P.P., 1867-68, (256) XLIX, 227.

16 Ronaldshay, op. cit., 323.


18 An article in Capital (Calcutta) 26 March, 1914, 747-8, exemplifies this view: "The schemes for setting up advisory councils and other frills of that kind look attractive enough on paper, but for administrative purposes they are "not business" ..........It is a case of amateur versus expert administration, and our sympathy is with the expert.

Before new authorities are formed, we shall require proof that (1) the present system shows a decline in efficiency; (2) that indigenous government is superior, or likely to be superior. We see no evidence of any decline in the efficiency of the executive officers of Government, despite the increasing complexity of their work, and we see much to make us doubt whether they could be usefully supplanted by the gentlemen who talk so much of public service and do so little to surround such service with associations of honesty and efficiency ..........despite tub-thumping assertions to the contrary, we still contend that it is administrative efficiency which is India's greatest need."


20 P.P., 1905 [Cd. 2658] LVIII, 204.


22 E.g. see Sir Andrew Fraser: Among Indian Rajahs and Ryots (London, 1911) 319-24.
THE IMPACT OF THE MUTINY ON BRITISH ATTITUDES TO INDIA

THOMAS R. METCALF

The events of 1857 etched themselves deeply into the consciousness of the British in India. Throughout the remaining years of British rule they provided the constant backdrop against which British policy...
The Vote and the Transfer of Power

A study of the Bengal General Election, 1912-1913.

J. H. BROOMFIELD

REPRESENTATIVE Government was an institution dear to the hearts of nineteenth-century Englishmen. It was their pride and, they affirmed, the source of their national strength that they lived under this form of constitution. They were eager that others, especially their colonies, should enjoy its benefits. There were few obstacles in the way of the establishment of representative institutions in the white colonies: the land was different but the people were the same. But in India neither the land nor the people resembled those of England. Nonetheless, the British determined to train an educated, Westernized elite which would make possible the establishment of representative institutions there.

This is the classical British interpretation of the development of representative government in India. I am not concerned here with its validity but with its effects upon the historiography of the Indian legislatures. Because of the acceptance of this interpretation, the legislatures have generally been discussed in terms of those men who held as their political ideal the constitutional advance of India to parliamentary self-government, and who are seen as protégés of the British. Furthermore, the model and most of the evidence for these histories has been taken from the reports upon the working of the Indian constitution which were periodically submitted to the British Parliament. It is my belief that the result has been an overemphasis upon constitutional history and a consequent misconstruction of the part played in the legislatures by the advocates of constitutional advance. I am also of opinion that their social position has been misunderstood. I argue my case in this paper from an analysis of the first general election for the Legislative Council of reunited Bengal, held in December 1912 and January 1913.

The Banerjea Group

The immediate background to this election was the Morley-Minto reforms, which attempted to conciliate nationalist opinion by associating Indians more closely with the Government of their country. Membership in the Governors', Viceroy's and Secretary of State's Councils was now granted to them; they were conceded the right to elect to the legislative councils; and non-officials were placed in a majority in those of the provinces. We must "do our best to make English rulers friends with Indian leaders," wrote the Secretary of State, John Morley, "and at the same time..."
train them in habits of political responsibility."^2\textsuperscript{2} In Bengal the concessions were coldly received by the politicians. Grateful we are, they replied, but your friends we cannot be while the partition of Bengal remains. This was the province which Lord Curzon had found in greatest need of administrative reform, but it was also the province which he had antagonized most. His efforts to reorganize the Calcutta Corporation and University, and to reduce the province to manageable size had driven the Bengali leaders into unequivocal opposition. Co-operation with the Government was impossible, they declared, while the partition remained. The unrest which attached to this question was a continuing embarrassment to the British Administration and at length it was decided that it must be removed. In April 1912 Bengal was reunited. This was hailed as a triumph by those who had led the opposition. Now, they said, the way was clear for them to enter the legislative councils and work the reforms in the spirit in which they were given. They would contest the general election at the end of the year.

This political group can be readily identified (in terms of the classical analysis) as that educated, Westernized elite on which the legislatures were to depend. All its members were graduates of Calcutta University and a number had received higher education in England.^3 They were middle-class professional men from various parts of the province, and, apart from two Muslims, they were high-caste Hindus. They had the backing of the most influential of the Indian-owned English and vernacular Calcutta newspapers. Two of them had achieved the high honor of the presidency of the Indian National Congress and all had won reputations for their opposition to the partition and their agitation for constitutional concessions. They were liberal in the best British tradition. The political future which they foresaw for India would be marked by steady constitutional advance to parliamentary self-government. Abdul Rasul, Oxonian and Professor of International Law at Calcutta University, in his election manifesto accepted the view that the legislative councils were the proving ground for further concessions and emphasized the importance which his group attached to these bodies:

To the people of India has been granted the right of increasing participation in the work of framing laws for themselves, and to prove ourselves worthy of this right we must return the best of our men. Laws that are passed in the Legislative Councils affect the interests of all. . . . Great responsibilities we have before us and if we do not exercise our votes in favour of the best man, the "Hon'ble" members who may go to the Council will not be the sufferers, but we alone shall be left to suffer. Our interests will remain uncared for for three years to come.\textsuperscript{4}

The principal political asset of this group was its leader, Surendranath Banerjea. Sixty-four years old, with three decades of political achievement behind him, he was the recognized elder statesman of Indian nationalism. His was a commanding figure, for he was a well-built man with strong features and a striking white beard. With the emotional fire characteristic of the Bengali, a command of English which few Englishmen could surpass and an Augustan delivery, he could sway a crowd of thousands with his oratory or win the astonished admiration of the Oxford Union.


\textsuperscript{3} The greater part of the analysis in this paper is based on biographical information on the individual candidates, collected from various sources.

\textsuperscript{4} Government of Bengal. Appointment Department proceedings. File 18L–3. B427–33. July 1914. (Subsequent references to proceedings of this department give only the file number and date.)
His career epitomizes the forces which shaped Indian nationalists of the nineteenth century. Son of a Westernized doctor, born at mid-century into Calcutta Brahmin society astir with the excitement of a religious reformation and a revival of learning, he spent his school days among the British boys at Doveton College. Having taken a B.A. in English literature from Calcutta University, he went to London and in 1869 passed the Indian Civil Service examination, only one Indian having ever done so before. His elation was short-lived, for the India Office declared that he and another successful Indian candidate had falsified their ages. Their names were struck from the list. Banerjea challenged the decision in Queen’s Bench, won his case and returned to Bengal, unwelcome in a service which until then had been the exclusive preserve of the British. Three years later he was dismissed for a minor and (what was almost certainly) an accidental error in the return of a law case. Banerjea the official was finished; Surendra Babu the nationalist was born.

His heart was now set upon the political regeneration of India. With his material worries allayed by a chair of English literature provided at a Calcutta college by an Indian benefactor, he campaigned his cause through the columns of the Bengalee, an English language newspaper for which he built an international renown in the half-century of his editorship. He founded as his political platform the Indian Association, a Hindu high-caste middle-class organization, which had only one influential rival in Bengal in the following forty years. At the end of the seventies he toured northern India firing his audiences with his gospel of nationalism; in the eighties he established himself as a dominant personality in Congress; in the nineties he visited England to seek support for Indian demands, and he took the lead of the radical elements in the Calcutta Corporation and the Bengal Legislative Council. Then came his clash with Curzon. In 1899 the Viceroy reduced the number of elected members of the Corporation and Banerjea led out 28 commissioners, swearing not to return until unofficial control was restored. In 1905 he stigmatized Curzon’s decision to partition the province as an attack on the growing political consciousness of the Bengali. From platform and press he thundered his condemnation and the extraordinarily vociferous response which it evoked surprised him little less than it did the British. His political star was at its zenith.

The popular enthusiasm waned with the years but Banerjea and the Indian Association kept alive the partition agitation. In 1911 they sent Bhupendranath Basu to press their case in England and their memorial to the Government of India on the subject provided much of the wording, if not the idea, for Lord Hardinge’s dispatch recommending the repartition. Banerjea and his men were victorious; surely political Bengal lay at their feet. “The future is ours,” sang the Bengalee. “The world-wide forces of progress are with us and the sympathies of civilized mankind will support us in our constitutional efforts for the realization of our destinies which can only be accomplished by a measure of self-government that will help forward the development of all that is best and noblest in us. Then will indeed England have fulfilled her high mission in the East.”

5 Indian Association, General Meeting proceedings, April 1911.
6 Ibid., Annual Report 1911, Appendix E, pp. 19–42; & Great Britain, Parliamentary Papers, 1911, [Cd. 5979], Vol. 55, pp. 582–98.
7 July 19, 1912, p. 4.
The Reasons For Electoral Defeat

In fact, the immediate future was not theirs at all. The electors to whom they came as conquering heroes treated them shabbily. Banerjea personally had a resounding victory but, of the remaining twenty-seven elected seats, only three were won by his followers. This caused widespread surprise and much heartsearching. Why did the group fail when it was (with good reason) so confident of success, and when accepted theories of nationalist politics would suggest that it should have succeeded? A solution to this problem holds a number of important lessons for an understanding of Indian politics of the period.

First, Banerjea's group was not a party in any real sense. There was agreement on political aims, certainly, but there was no formal party structure nor discipline. The Indian Association, to which all the members of the group belonged and which might impress the superficial observer as a workable organization, was in reality a political club, well suited to preparing memorials to Government and for organizing public meetings of protest, but quite unfitted for the management of an election campaign. Lesson number one: Indian politics of the second decade of this century were not party politics. For Banerjea and his men, this meant disorganization and confusion at the polls. Personality and local influence (as we shall shortly see) counted for considerably more than political allegiance, and it must have been difficult for the group, as such, to make political capital from its victories of the preceding five years. The lack of discipline resulted, in one place, in three of the group contesting one double-member constituency, as it had resulted in earlier years in the desertion of a number of Banerjea's followers of the principle of non-participation in the legislative councils. A more serious consequence was the electoral malpractices indulged in by at least one of the group in a personal bid to gain a seat. "The popular party has exhibited a weakness or want of organization which is really lamentable," wrote the Indian World. "It lacks cohesion: it lacks discipline. Half-a-dozen candidates scrambled for a seat as starving beggars do after a piece of bread. The party is a bundle of disjointed units which cannot resist the slightest pressure from without."

The second factor in their disfavor may have been the self-denying ordinance of which they were so proud. Except for the backsliders among them, they had been in the legislative council wilderness for seven years. Their opportunity of dominating the first elected councils in 1909 had been lost and when they returned it was to find others firmly entrenched. Surely it is significant that all but one of their number who were defeated, suffered at the hands of sitting members. Here, I would suggest, is a clue which should not be forgotten when the Swarajists are observed, hastening back to the legislatures ten years later.

The third, and more fundamental, fact was that the partition of Bengal disrupted provincial society. The outcry against the partition, which certainly was loud and sustained, came in the first place from the great Hindu metropolis of Calcutta, aghast at the prospect of losing its economic domination of the rich rice and jute lands of

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8 *Englishman*, January 14, 1913, p. 4; *Capital*, January 16, 1913, p. 154; *Indian World*, January 15, 1913, p. 2; *Indian Empire*, January 14, 1913; *Report on the Native Papers in Bengal*, January 18, 1913, Vol. 2, 45. (In subsequent references, this Report is cited simply as *Native Papers.*)

9 January 22, 1913, p. 2. The *Indian World* was a Calcutta English weekly edited by a prominent member of the Indian Association, Prithwis Chandra Ray.
Eastern Bengal; it came secondly from the Hindu entrepreneurs of the Eastern Bengal towns, now to be a minority in India's first Muslim province, who feared that their links with Calcutta would be broken; it came from the Muslims of Western Bengal, whose minority position would be even more disadvantageous. The most serious division created was between these three sections on the one hand and the Eastern Bengal Muslims, who saw the partition as a heaven-sent opportunity to prosper. It was also of advantage to the Biharis and Uriyas, inhabitants of the West and South-West of the province, who were elated to find themselves for the first time outnumbering the Bengalis, whose domination of the professional and commercial life of their towns they resented as an alien intrusion. Partition was currently believed to be the elixir and they were soon demanding that it be applied to them.10

The surprisingly strong support which the anti-partition campaign obtained from the Hindu middle-class (the _bhadralok_) revealed a degree of discontent more intense than the British had believed possible, and it is fairly certain that its basis was economic. The partition coincided with a sharp rise in the price of rice, Bengal's staple, due mainly to the failure of the crops in 1905. The harvests in the following three years were all poorer than normal and by 1907 the cost of rice had risen by 58 per cent. The agricultural classes benefited, if anything, from this and urban laborers were compensated by increased wages, but the _bhadralok_ were severely hit. Most _bhadralok_ families (the family, not the individual, being the economic unit) derived their incomes partly from land rents and partly from professional salaries or fees. Neither of these sources was sufficiently flexible to meet such an abnormally sharp rise in the basic cost of living as occurred in 1905-6. Already the economic pressure on the _bhadralok_ was considerable, for members of the three leading castes (the Brahmans, Baidyas and Kayasthas), of which it was mainly composed, despised non-professional occupation and the professions in Bengal and elsewhere in India could no longer accommodate all who thought themselves fit to be accommodated. "... the greater part of the economic difficulty at present is, that many young men rate the value of School or College English education much higher than does the average employer."11 Unemployment was one cause of discontent; uneven distribution of wealth was another. While a minority of the _bhadralok_ enjoyed considerable riches, a large proportion lived in grinding poverty and many were hopelessly indebted to money-lenders. In 1906 this source of supply ran dry. At the time there was widespread belief in the "drain theory" and very naturally the impoverished _bhadralok_ blamed their plight upon their British "exploiters."

The result was an outburst of anti-Government violence. Revolutionary _samitis_ were formed from groups of young men—mainly students—excited by the anti-partition speeches, incited by extremist vernacular newspapers and organized by dedicated leaders, who used the less pacific doctrines of Hinduism to convince their impressionable followers of the divinity of their cause. This was more than many of the anti-partitionists had bargained for. The great landholders, in particular, were quick

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10 E.g. presidential address by a Bihari, Dweep Narain Sing, to the Bengal Provincial Conference at Berhampore, 1907, _Bande Mataram_, April 2, 1907, (H. P. Ghose collection, Calcutta).
11 Bengal District Administration Committee, 1913-14, Report, p. 13. This report; the _Census of India, 1911_, Vols. 1, 5 & 6; and J. C. Jack: _The Economic Life of a Bengal District_ (1916), were the source of this paragraph.
to realize that they had far more to lose from a challenge to law and order than from any readjustment of boundaries. As a body they disassociated themselves from the agitation.12 Within the movement itself there were soon disputes over means, and Banerjea and his followers found themselves losing the initiative to radical elements. “Moderates are always at a disadvantage,” commented Morley, as he watched the struggle from the India Office. “The same forces that begin the move, continue their propulsive power.”13 By early 1907 things were so far out of hand that Banerjea joined with the zemindars and the Muslims in a delegation to ask for the Viceroy’s intervention. “It was simply marvellous,” wrote Lord Minto, “with the troubles and anxieties of a few months ago still fresh in one’s memory, to see the ‘King of Bengal’ sitting on my sofa with his Mahommedan opponents, asking for my assistance to moderate the evil passions of the Bengali, and inveighing against the extravagances of Bepin Chandra Pal.”14

Banerjea had caught a disease which has infected so many nationalist politicians since his day: he had become a moderate despite himself. When the Government struck at the revolutionary leaders in 1908, it was not Banerjea who suffered the martyr’s exile in the Andamans—and young Bengal did not forget.

After 1908 prices fell and with them the interest in politics. Victory in the anti-partition struggle was another three years in coming and by the time it did come there were vested interests in Eastern Bengal which were grievously hurt. Dacca and Chittagong (the capital and port respectively of the new province) had enjoyed a mushroom growth,15 and now they were to face once more the impossible competition of Calcutta. The Muslims of the area were to lose their favored position. Even for Calcutta the repartition had a sting in its tail: the capital of India was to be shifted to Delhi. The departure of the Government of India and its entourage gave much anxiety to the owners of city house property, many of whom were leading public figures.16 All in all then, the Banerjea group’s victory was neither as illustrious nor as universally welcome as they imagined or as at first sight it appears. The electoral implications of this fact are easily drawn. Lesson number three: there can be no great political event in India (not even the departure of the British) which is not attended by serious disadvantages for some sections of the community.

The fourth factor in the group’s failure was the date. Politics were out of season. Bengal was reunited, the harvest was excellent, prices were comparatively low, trade was booming17—what was the sense in bothering with nationalist politics of the sort that Banerjea and company harped upon? Better to look to personal, communal, or local interests. A. C. Mazumdar, himself a defeated Legislative Council candidate, lamented in May 1913:

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15 E.g. in the decade 1901–11 the population of Dacca rose by 21% and that of Chittagong by 30%. The increase for Greater Calcutta was only 11.9% and for Bengal as a whole only 6%. (Census of India, 1911, Vols. 5 & 6).
It is useless and what is more perhaps positively harmful to disguise the fact that ever since the modification of the Partition of Bengal public enthusiasm in our own province has been on the wane, and that the people of Bengal has been slowly and silently relapsing into a state of political torpor. It is not my intention to create an alarm, but I am afraid our public men would be guilty of culpable neglect if they fail to take timely notice of the actual situation in the country and in any way contribute to their own deception as well as to the growing demoralization of the public. Even the reformed councils will be of no avail to us if there is not a volume of living, healthy public opinion behind them actively working up to the end which these councils are intended to achieve. Some practical measures should therefore be taken without loss of time to revive the drooping spirit of the public, to infuse fresh enthusiasm in the country and on every important question to make the whole country vibrate with a common burning impulse as was happily the case during the anti-partition agitation in this province.\textsuperscript{18}

Lesson number four: Indian nationalists were always in danger of losing the attention of their following to the powerful counter attractions of personal, local, and communal affairs. At elections, in particular, there were always at stake many issues to which nationalist aspirations were barely relevant. What follows will underscore this.

\textit{The Vote as a Source of Power}

Before proceeding, a point of fundamental importance must be made. The grant of the vote introduced a new form of power to Indian society. From the British viewpoint this was one stage (some thought an advanced stage) in the development of representative institutions; from the Indian angle it was the chance for a person, community, or political group to gain power and increased status at the expense of other sections of society. The Anglo-Indian Association, struggling for enfranchisement in 1908, grasped this point: “For any community of British descent in India to be excluded from any scheme of reform in which the franchise is conferred upon others, is not merely to leave it alone in its depressed condition, but actually to lower it further.”\textsuperscript{19} To be given the vote or to be denied it; to be successful or unsuccessful at an election were henceforth important factors in the relations of Indian social groups. A new power game was to be played. Those who played it well were to inherit the future.

This can be illustrated by the scuffle which occurred in 1912 when it was proposed that the Indian commercial community in Bengal might be enfranchised. In 1909 the Government had rejected this suggestion on the ground that the trading classes were “despised, weak and disorganised.”\textsuperscript{20} Instead it had nominated the Secretary of the Bengal National Chamber of Commerce, Maharaj-Kumar Hrishikesh Law, as their representative. On February 23, 1912, the Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal wrote to the Bengal National Chamber of Commerce and to the Marwari Association, the two leading Indian commercial bodies in Calcutta, asking their opinion on the composition of a commercial electorate. Both replied that there should be two commercial representatives, but whereas the Marwari Association suggested that one should be chosen by each body, the Chamber of Commerce preferred that it alone should have the right to elect. It emphasized that the question was one of prestige. In

\textsuperscript{18} Mazumdar to Pramathanath Banerjea, Hon. Assistant Secretary, Indian Association, May 13, 1913, Indian Association MSS.

\textsuperscript{19} Anglo-Indian Association, Calcutta, Annual Report 1908, pp. 6–7.

\textsuperscript{20} File 18L–23. A120–8. August 1913. This is also the source for the subsequent two paragraphs.
framing the election rules, wrote Law, “I hope you will be pleased not to put our Chamber in the same category with the associations of shopkeepers, petty dealers and other people whose ways are not our ways and whose ideas are not our ideas, otherwise it will lower us in public estimation, and the boon granted under such circumstances would not at all be appreciated by us.”

The news was abroad, however, that there was a seat on the Legislative Council to be had for the asking, and the “people whose ways are not our ways” hastened to assure the Government that their particular organization represented Indian commerce more truly than any other. The prize for ingenuity went to our old friends at the Indian Association. The fact that few, if any, of them were businessmen, they regarded as a minor consideration when a seat in the Legislative Council was at stake; so they formed their own commercial body—the Society of Merchants and Traders of Bengal—and offered it as a suitable electorate. “As must be well known to Government the Bengal National Chamber of Commerce is a one family show,” they wrote, “and that family [the Laws] the most sincerely hated in the country. For the Chamber to exercise the right and privilege of franchise is to abuse it.” There were several other bodies which should participate in any election, particularly the new Society “which under the aegis of Babu Suendra Nath is likely to be an important factor in the national life.”

All this served to convince the Government that its earlier analysis had been correct and that the franchise could not yet be granted to Indian commerce.

His Excellency [the Governor, Lord Carmichael] thinks that it will probably be necessary to nominate this year again; but he was much impressed by the view expressed by the Maharaj-Kumar Hrishikesh Law that if the franchise were given to the National Chamber of Commerce, it will increase the reputation of that body to such an extent that all Indian merchants would come within its influence and the National Chamber of Commerce would then represent Indian commerce in the same way as the Bengal Chamber of Commerce represents European commerce.

His Excellency was also impressed by the Maharaj-Kumar’s view that the National Chamber of Commerce would rather not be asked to nominate along with the other Chambers, because if the Government did not accept the National Chamber’s nomination and did accept the nomination of another body, the Chamber would be lowered in the eyes of the Indian merchants, and much of its influence might be lost. I understand that the Maharaj-Kumar would prefer that Government should not call for nominations, but should choose a man direct.

This was done and Law was the representative chosen.

A number of points emerge. It is clear that a seat in the Legislative Council and the right to elect or nominate to it was highly valued by several persons and organizations. It is also clear that there was sufficient prestige and, perhaps, practical value attached to the grant of the franchise, to make the manner of its disposal important. The vote was, as I have suggested, a new means of raising one’s relative standing in the community.

The part played by the Banerjea group in this episode throws new light on their failure in the election. It demonstrates that theirs was a sectional group competing

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21 Law to W. R. Gourlay, Private Secretary to Governor, May 24, 1912, ibid.
22 H. Dutt to same, May 11, 1912, ibid.
23 Minute by Gourlay, July 18, 1912, ibid.
with other sectional groups, and this indicates the need for an analysis of its structure. Instead of our accepting these men at face value as representative politicians, we shall learn more by determining the features which distinguished theirs from other groups. Obviously, shared political ideals were one of their distinctive features; but it is of equal importance to know that, apart from journalist Banerjea, they were all lawyers; that those few among them who held land had only small holdings; that, apart from the two Muslims, they were all Brahmins or Kayasthas; that they wereuntitled with one exception; and that all had won their professional and political reputations in Calcutta. Clearly, there were large sections of the community (for example, commerce, the large landholders, and the Muslims) with which the Banerjea group had little contact and which it could not hope to represent if those sections put forward representatives of their own—as they did. Lesson number five: one must beware of accepting Indian political groups as “universally representative” on their own testimony alone. The structural analysis of these groups (especially of the Congress) and of their support may open new doors in Indian political history.

The Gilbertian manner in which the Indian Association politicians attempted to gatecrash the trading community affair draws attention to another important reason for their election defeat. The basis of the distribution of seats was sectional and certain of the electorates were mutually exclusive. This was considered policy. The British believed that the Indian community was divided into many compartments, separated one from another by strong social bulkheads. For a legislative council to be truly representative, they argued, it must be composed of members drawn from as many as possible of the most important of these segments. This, it must be admitted, was a logical argument at the Morley-Minto stage, when the aim was for the legislative councilors to represent to their British rulers the various needs of India. The crucial issue, however, was the definition of what were the “important” sections of the community. On this question there could be no hope of a consensus.

Judging by the number of seats allocated, the Government of India considered the important sections of the community in Bengal in 1912 to be the Civil Service (14 seats), mofussil local bodies (11),24 European trade and commerce (7), the Muslims (5), landholders (4), the Corporation of Calcutta (2), and Calcutta University and Indian commerce (1 each).25 Of these, the Indian Association lawyers could hope to gain only the local body, the University and, at most, two of the Muslim seats. From the remainder they were excluded. Their reaction was natural. They declared that the dice were loaded against them:

Whatever may be the other defects of the Council regulations, want of a sense of humour is certainly not one of them, though one would not naturally look for humour at Simla Government Secretariats. In every civilized country, the rule seems to be to allow educated men to come to representative institutions, but here out in India, though the expansion of the Councils themselves has been due to the persistent agitation of the educated com-

24 “Local body” was not a term used in India but, for convenience, it is employed here to include municipalities and district and local boards, the members of which were grouped to form electorates for the Legislative Council.

25 The Council comprised, in addition, the three members of the Executive Council and three nominated Indian non-officials, and was presided over by the Governor. (Great Britain, Parliamentary Papers, 1913 [Cd. 6714], Vol. 47, 199). Discussion in this paper is confined to the non-official members.
munity, it is they alone who have been effectively kept out from any active participation in the reformed Councils. This was hyperbole but it was true that the Government had purposely formed some electorates from which the educated middle-class would be excluded. It recognized that the legislative councils were modifying the structure of Indian society; it feared that the small Westernized Hindu urban middle-class had been given too much influence in the councils formed under the 1892 Act; and it was determined that other “important” sections of the community should be better represented in future. In particular, it wanted more landlord and Muslim representatives.

The Government of India regarded the large landholders as the traditional leaders of Indian society and as the group which had suffered most from the composition of the old councils. They were valued as a conservative body, a stable counterweight to the emergent middle-class. It was considered essential to provide separate electorates for them; so that their most illustrious members could be persuaded to offer themselves as candidates without compromising their prestige. As was emphasized in a memorial to the Government of Bengal in 1909, it was not for them to be begging their inferiors for the favor of election:

These great zemindars actuated as they are by oriental ideas of social dignity would consider themselves greatly humiliated if they are forced to canvass for votes among their subordinate tenure-holders, tenants, retainers and persons of inferior status. If by any chance they be obliged to stoop to such infamous practices, their positions would be lowered in the eyes of the people, their influence would be greatly reduced and their sphere of usefulness become extremely limited.

In deference to this feeling the franchise for the four zemindari seats was restricted to approximately 500 substantial landholders. As a result, three at least of their four elected representatives in 1913 conformed very well to the pattern of pillars of conservative society. They were titled; they were Brahmin; each came from the leading landed family of his district; they were influential members of their local landholder associations; and they could pride themselves that they had been forced to engage in no professional or commercial venture. The fourth member, Byomkesh Chakravarti, however, was rather a black sheep. He was returned for the Presidency division, an electorate dominated by Calcutta landlords, many of whom had made their money in trade. Although a large zemindar, he was also a London educated lawyer practicing in the Calcutta High Court. He was Honorary Secretary to the Bengal Landholders’ Association, a rival body to the aristocratic British Indian Association to which the great hereditary landholders belonged. He held radical political views and was regarded as a rival to Banerjea as a leader of liberal opinion.

Four seats were specially provided for the zemindars but a glance at the composition of the Bengal Legislature in 1913 reveals that no fewer than 17 of the 26 Indian non-official members were landholders. Three of these were Government nominees:

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26 Indian World, January 15, 1913, p. 2.
27 Great Britain, Parliamentary Papers, 1907 [Cd. 3710], Vol. 58, 457.
28 Prodyar Coomar Tagore to British Indian Association, Oudh, January 18, 1909, enclosure, British Indian Association records, Lucknow.
29 Calcutta Gazette, Extraordinary, November 23, 1912.
Law, representing Indian commerce; Dr. Nilratan Sarkar, an eminent physician; and Sir Kwhaja Salimulla Bahadur, Nawab of Dacca, “for no Legislative Council for Bengal would be complete without the uncrowned king of the Muhammadans of East Bengal.”

This leaves ten zemindars. Three, we find, were returned by Muslim electorates, one by the Calcutta Corporation and six by mofussil local bodies. This caused much perturbation at the Indian Association. The Indian World complained: “The Government is full of paternal solicitude on behalf of the Zemindars. But if one thing is more clear than another it is this that the Zemindars do not stand in need of any special protection. If protection is at all needed, it is not for them but against them.” It spoke of “their long purse and still longer following” and continued: “The elections in Bengal were fought more or less on personal issues. Votes were given on personal considerations, rather than on considerations of public policy or principle. The position of a candidate, not his capacity to work, or the quality of work he would turn out, was looked into. Truly we are in the elementary stage of public life. We blame the Government for the Regulations, none the less should we blame ourselves.”

This underlines what was said earlier about the issues at stake in elections of the period. The length of a candidate’s rent roll, his local prestige, his religion, caste and family, his connections, his wealth, his benefactions, were in most electorates of greater importance than his education or political beliefs. The influence of landholding, the traditional source of power in India, was under siege from the rising urban middle-class; the battle may already have been decided in the latter’s favor, but there were still many weapons in the zemindari arsenal.

This can be demonstrated by examining the course of the 1912-13 election in one of the Bengal electorates. The Rajshahi division District and Local Boards electorate may be taken as an example. Rajshahi division comprised the whole of Northern Bengal and the majority of its population was Muslim. The candidates came from four of the five southern and most populous districts. They were Jogesh Chandra Chaudhuri, M.A., member of the Pabna district bar and son-in-law of Surendranath Banerjea; Maharaja Girija Nath Roy Bahadur, a large landholder in both the Dinajpur and Rajshahi districts, an influential member of the British Indian Association and a member of the old Legislative Council of Eastern Bengal and Assam; Raja Mohendra Ranjan Roy Chaudhuri, also a member of the Eastern Bengal and Assam Legislative Council and of the Eastern Bengal Landholders’ Association, and a titleholder in the Rangpur district; and Maulvi Hafizar Rahman Chaudhuri, a young man, the only Muslim candidate, who was a small landed proprietor from Bogra.

Jogesh Chandra Chaudhuri, hoping to win the favors of the Muslim voters, persuaded two Muslims to propose and second his nomination but this did him no good. The Muslim community in this area had bitter memories of communal rioting during the anti-partition boycott agitation six years before and for this they blamed Chaudhuri’s father-in-law, Surendranath Banerjea. Besides, Chaudhuri had chosen unwisely in selecting his seconder. This man, Maulvi Emaduddin Ahmed, proved to be the

31 Hindoo Patriot, ibid, p. 83.
32 January 22, 1913, pp. 2–3.
33 Census of India, 1911, Vol. 5, 257.
chief electoral agent of the Raja of Kakina, Mohendra Ranjan Roy Chaudhuri, and he did his level best to wreck Jogesh Chandra's chances. To this end he used a standard ploy of the period: he informed the voters that the Rajshahi District Magistrate was opposed to Jogesh Chandra's candidature and that his wrath would be felt by any who voted for him. The Raja was an invalid but his "following and his purse" were indeed long. Reputedly he spent Rs.2000 on "inducements" to voters; he offered traveling expenses to many; and Emaduddin, on his behalf, provided those who came to vote in Rajshahi town with hospitality "much above his own and their ordinary style of living." It was the Raja, not Babu Jogesh Chandra, nor even Maulvi Hafizar Rahman, who caught the ear of the Muslims. He let it be known that he was willing to pay off the local Muhammadan Association's debt amounting to Rs.1500 and, better still, he received public support from the Nawab of Dacca. Where the Nawab went many Bengali Muslims were accustomed to follow. The Raja was elected.34

The strongest impression left by this story is how little it resembled a twentieth-century British election, with its emphasis on politics and parties, and how much more it had in common with, for example, eighteenth-century contests. It must by now be clear why any attempt to explain the 1912-13 election solely in terms of the Banerjea political group was bound to be unsatisfactory.

Communalism and Corruption

In this Rajshahi contest, communal questions were obviously of major importance and this was true of most electorates. We have already remarked the Government of India's desire to provide the Muslims with special representation. Considering that they were in a small majority in Bengal, this must appear rather strange. The explanation is that the Muslim community here was economically and educationally inferior to the Hindus, who held most of the land and who dominated the professions and commerce. The bulk of the Muslims were peasant cultivators.35 The Islamic community throughout India had been less ready than the Hindus to grasp the opportunities offered in the nineteenth century by the provision of English education and it had been outdistanced by its rivals. Early in the twentieth century, however, there was a resurgence of Islam in India (as in other areas of the Islamic world36) and the Muslims began to demand, among other things, a larger share of Government appointments and increased representation in the legislative councils. This new spirit was encouraged by the British and the community was promised separate electorates and the reservation of a proportion of administrative appointments. This provoked Hindu hostility, already aroused by the formation of a Muslim majority province in Eastern Bengal and Assam. The Muslims of the area regarded the partition as a great boon. The obvious discomfiture which it gave to the local Hindus, and broad (though somewhat irresponsible) hints from members of the I.C.S. that the opportunity would be used to advance Muslim at the expense of Hindu interests,37 raised unreal hopes.

35 E.g. the Muslims formed 52% of the total population of Bengal but only 30% of its urban population (Census of India, 1911, Vol. 5); only 10% of those qualified to vote as landholders were Muslims (Calcutta Gazette, Extraordinary, November 23, 1912).
37 E.g. see Sir Bampfylde Fuller: Some Personal Experiences (1930), pp. 140-1.
Dacca and Chittagong boomed; there were more "jobs for the boys"; the Nawab of Dacca held regal sway over the new capital. It was an Indian summer which came to a sudden and frosty end with the announcement of the repartition in December 1911. This cut the Muslims to the quick. The British, it seemed, had performed a volte-face to pacify Hindu extremists. Muslim resentment was tempered only by the determination to gain as many concessions as possible as indemnity for British treachery. The Hindus were equally determined to oppose any suggestion of compensation, for they believed that the British were systematically favoring the Muslims. When the Legislative Council regulations were revised in 1912, for example, the Hindus demanded that they too should enjoy the right of direct election which had been granted to the Muslims in 1909, and the Government's reply—that they must be content with what representation they could secure through the local body constituencies—convinced them of its prejudice.

The strained relations between the communities were naturally reflected in the 1912-13 elections. The Hindus did what they could to dissuade Muslim candidates from contesting local body seats. These, the Bengalee informed them, were meant for the Hindu middle-class. The Muslims were provided with special electorates and "They cannot in all fairness have both." Only five of the 41 candidates for the local body seats were Muslims and only one managed to secure election. Even this was resented by the Hindus. It was the result, they hinted, of infamous collusion between the zemindars and the Muslims of the area. The Hindus had little cause for complaint: in a Legislative Council of 51 members, only eight were Muslims and, of these, two were Government nominees.

The Muslims, for their part, were determined that only staunch communalists should occupy their five reserved seats. It was to Abdul Rasul's extreme discredit, for example, that he was a follower of Hindu Banerjea; and even though he devoted the greater part of his election manifesto to his aspirations for the Muslim community, he was discounted as "not being a good Mussulman."

How much of this mutual rancor was due to the existence of communal electorates? This is an extraordinarily difficult question to answer, for there were so many contributory factors. Certainly the Hindus were suspicious of British motive—this looked to them very like a policy of divide and rule—and any redistribution of jobs was bound to foment hard feelings on both sides. On the other hand, it is equally certain that had the Muslims not been provided with special seats they would have gone virtually unrepresented in the Bengal Council in 1913. It was unfortunate for the future of representative institutions in Bengal that it was found necessary to build into the initial constitution the communal divisions which were the greatest bar to its

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88 Crewe to Carmichael, January 15, 1912, op. cit., p. 152; Statesman, January 2, 1912, p. 7; ibid, January 23, 1912, p. 11.
89 E.g. consider their reaction to the decision to establish a new university at Dacca; Statesman, February 4, 1912, p. 10.
90 E.g. see Statesman, June 5, 1912, p. 7; & Native Papers, November 23, 1912, Vol. 1, 1370-1.
92 Indian World, January 22, 1913, p. 2; Proceedings of the Bengal Legislative Council, April 2, 1913, Vol. 45, 536.
93 Indian World, January 15, 1913, pp. 2-3.
94 "The British wished for and tried to create an Ulster among the Mohammedans of India." Lajpat Rai: Young India (1917), p. lxxv.
satisfactory operation. With the transfer of more power in the 1920's, these communal divisions were to paralyse the working of the Legislature.

It must not be presumed from Rasul's case, that the Muslim contests were marked by general agreement among the faithful. If anything, they were more keenly fought than those for the mixed electorates, for the Muslim community in Bengal was rent by factions, a factor which was to be of consequence in the subsequent history of the province. The Dacca division seat was filled simply by the nominee of the Nawab (a young man of destiny, Maulvi Abul Kasem Fazlul Huq\textsuperscript{45}) but there were seventeen candidates to squabble over the other four Muslim seats—and squabble they did. “The tactics and methods which some of the candidates for election to the various Legislative Councils in the country had recourse to in order to secure votes is painful,” lamented Rasul after his defeat, “and the manner in which some of the voters conducted themselves in the matter of exercising their franchise were, to use a mild expression, simply abominable.”\textsuperscript{46}

Rasul, in contesting the Presidency division seat, had become involved in a vendetta of some years standing. It illustrates the disunity of Bengal Muslim society. There were at first six candidates for this seat, but one withdrew in favor of Golam Husain Cassim Ariff, and it was between Rasul and him that the contest lay. The Presidency division comprised Calcutta and the electorate was dominated by merchants. Ariff, a silk manufacturer, was one of a rich group of Surati \textit{nomins}, who vied for social and commercial preeminence with an equally prosperous, though smaller, group of Delhiwallahs. The vendetta had begun in 1909 at the first elections for the reformed Bengal Council, when Ariff secured nomination as a delegate to vote for the Muslim member of Council, on the understanding that he would support Maulvi Badruddin Haider, Khan Bahadur, who was the nominee of the Delhiwallahs. Instead, he arranged for himself to be surreptitiously nominated and used his votes to secure his own election. The fury of the outwitted was unbounded.\textsuperscript{47} 1912 gave them an opportunity to avenge the defeat and they chose Rasul as their candidate. Ariff proved as wily as ever. As we have seen, he whispered in many ears that Rasul was not a good Muslim. He also had a number of Rasul's graduate friends warned that the Government was angered at the support Rasul was receiving and that there would be no further hope of official employment for any who voted for him. Ariff made a close study of the electoral register and on election day fortuitously received the votes of men who, it was afterwards revealed, had been as far afield as Colombo, Mecca, and Paradise on that day. According to Rasul, he also “had most costly and sumptuous dishes” ready in a room close to the polling booth and it was suggested to voters on arrival, that they might care to partake after “satisfactorily” fulfilling their electoral functions.\textsuperscript{48} He distributed money to voters in the name of travelling expenses and he promised large sums for the construction and maintenance of Muslim institutions in many parts of the division.\textsuperscript{49} All this undoubtedly helped, but the determining factors were almost cer-

\textsuperscript{45} “The Nawab was very good to me,” was Huq’s comment on his political debut. (Interview with the author, December 11, 1960.) He was subsequently Chief Minister of both Bengal and East Pakistan.

\textsuperscript{46} \textit{Mussulman}, January 17, 1913, \textit{Native Papers}, January 25, 1913, Vol. 2, 63-4. The \textit{Mussulman} was a Calcutta English weekly of which Rasul was joint editor.

\textsuperscript{47} File 18L-42. D1650-55. June 1910.


tainly his influence as one of the Surati community and as the sitting Legislative Council member for the electorate. His victory was clear cut. He secured 367 votes to Rasul's 159.50

Again we see how politics (to use that word in the modern Western sense) were overshadowed by the more important questions of personality, connection, and wealth. Corruption also played its part and this was by no means an isolated instance nor was it the worst. In the neighbouring division of Burdwan, for example, a candidate used his position in the local Muhammadan Association to retain the names of absent and dead voters on the electoral roll and, by illegally obtaining possession of a number of voting papers, arranged for votes to be cast on his behalf in their names. Reporting this to the Government, the District Officer remarked: "The whole record makes melancholy reading for anyone who has at heart the interests of local self-government or the Muhammadan community in Burdwan."61 It is important to realize why there was such corruption. The superficial answer is that the electoral regulations were badly framed, a fact which the Government was forced to admit.52 Besides, the electoral registers were inaccurate and this is always likely to encourage malpractice.53 There were more fundamental reasons. The franchise was novel and exotic. It was introduced to an illiterate and poverty-stricken society, which was politically inexperienced and for which representative institutions certainly had no intrinsic value. These disadvantages were tempered, to a degree, by the restriction of the vote to a minute fraction of the population (1 in 465054) but the result was small electorates in which a handful of votes could determine contests—and a handful of votes can often be bought. Corrupt practices were restrained by neither party nor strong political principle, and the community was unlikely to look askance at the adaptation, to this new struggle for prestige and power, of the accustomed methods of that time-honored Bengali institution, doladoli—intrigue and conflict among factions. In this there were ominous portents for the future. As more power devolved upon the Legislature, the stakes of the game became correspondingly bigger. Unless the game itself came to be valued more highly than the stakes, there was the ever-growing danger that it would cease to be played.

Another reason for the failure of Banerjea's men has been revealed. Their political ideal—the desire that the Indian electors and legislators should worthily exercise the franchise—was a positive handicap when corruption was sanctioned by public opinion and unpunished by law.

Earlier we observed that this group could contest only the local body, University and two of the Muslim electorates. We have seen that they were excluded from the commercial, the zemindari and the remainder of the Muslim seats, but this still leaves those of the Calcutta Corporation and the European non-officials. The commissioners of the Corporation were mostly businessmen and city landlords. Their two repre-

50 The two groups fought another round in 1916 when Ariff and a Delhiwallah, Abdur Rahim, contested the Presidency and Burdwan divisions seat in the Imperial Legislative Council, but on that occasion Ariff was defeated. The candidates indulged in such blatant corruption that the Government of India was persuaded (at long last) of the need for an improvement in the electoral regulations. (Calcutta Gazette, May 9, 1917, Part IA, pp. 363–80.)
52 File 18L–61, A33–8, December 1913.
sentatives in 1913 were John Apcar, a lawyer member of the rich Armenian community which owned much Calcutta house property, and Rai Radha Charan Pal Bahadur, whose interests were also in Calcutta landholding.

The European non-officials were provided with seven seats in the Legislature, five by election and two by nomination. For a community of 25,000 persons in a total population of 46,500,000 they were palpably over-represented but this had not prevented their attempting to gain another five seats on the grounds of social and commercial pre-eminence. As a Bengali newspaper remarked, they were in danger of forgetting that India was inhabited by Indians. In 1912 they were smarting from the blow to their influence and pride which had been dealt by the transfer of the capital to Delhi. It confirmed them in the belief, born of the admission of Indians in greater numbers to the councils, that the Government was giving way “before the attacks of a democracy of literati, who have a sense of nothing beyond their own importance.” The Government of India, they feared, had put its foot on a slippery decline which might slide British rule, and with it British commerce, into the sea. Hold was their watchword. Their representatives went to the legislatures determined to see that no further concessions were granted. They were drawn from various sections of the European community—Calcutta trade, the mofussil tea and jute industries, the ports of Calcutta and Chittagong—but all fought under the banner of the Bengal Chamber of Commerce, the best organized, most influential and one of the most rigid communal associations in India. To the Chamber of Commerce, the failure of the Indian Association group in the 1912-13 elections came as a welcome surprise. It proved, they said, that most Indians were as tired as they were of all this nonsense about nationalism and reforms. Not only did the Europeans add one more to those communal blocs which were to hamper the smooth working of the Legislature, but they were also actively hostile to the ideal of progressive constitutional advance for India.

The groupings in the Legislative Council which resulted from the 1912-13 elections were revealed when the non-official members proceeded in February 1913 to select their two representatives on the Imperial Legislative Council, and the result, incidentally, provides a final demonstration of the basic problem which confronted the Banerjea group. Its two nominees were Bhupendranath Basu, a sitting member of the Imperial Legislative Council, and Banerjea himself. The great zemindars and the Europeans jointly sponsored the Maharaja of Nashipur, Ranajit Sinha; while the Muslims, revealing their disunity, put forward three candidates: Dr. A. Al-Mamun Suhrawardy (the man who had clandestinely nominated Ariff for the Bengal Council in 1909), Z. R. Zahid Suhrawardy (who also had Ariff’s support) and Nawab Badruddin Haider, Khan Bahadur, (Ariff’s opponent in that affair). A compromise must have been reached for the two Suhrawardys withdrew to give the Muslims the appearance of a united front.

In the lobbying which preceded the election, Banerjea and Basu between them received the promise of 39 of the 68 total votes and these they arranged to divide evenly so that both might be returned. The plan misfired for Banerjea received 22 of

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55 Statesman, February 3, 1912, pp. 6-7; Capital, November 7, 1912, pp. 1067-8.
57 Englishman, December 25, 1913, p. 4; see also ibid, March 6, 1913, p. 4.
58 Englishman, January 14, 1913, p. 4.
the votes and Basu was left with only 17, thereby allowing the Maharaja of Nashipur to squeeze between them with 18. There were a number of reasons for this misadventure but the most important, it seems, was the reluctance of some Brahmin members to support Kayastha Basu when there was a Brahmin candidate available in Banerjea. Here is an example of sectionalism conflicting with nationalism. Banerjea and Basu, as distinguished nationalists, could command the support of the majority of the Legislative Council members including even some Muslims and many of the landholders, but they could not escape the effects of sectional interests. Indian nationalists were always in danger of having their plans frustrated by these forces.

The British Withdrawal and Indian Society

So far I have emphasized the divisions among the Legislative Council members. It must be realized, however, that as a body they had much in common and much that distinguished them from the bulk of the community. For one thing, they were English speakers and, for another, they were educated, many having attended universities in Bengal and Britain. The Hindus were all Brahmins or Kayasthas, with the exceptions of Sarkar, who was a Brahmo, and Law and Pal, who were from trading castes. Only four among the Indians were not either landholders or lawyers and, of the non-officials as a whole, only four were not city or town dwellers. Compare these figures with those for the province in general and it is immediately obvious how select was the senate. Only two per cent of Bengali men spoke English and fourteen per cent were literate. Seventy per cent were peasants and only six per cent were town dwellers. Of the twenty-one million Hindus, less than two and a half millions were Brahmins or Kayasthas.

Clearly there were large sections of society which were not directly represented, among them the lower castes and the outcastes; the agricultural tenantry and peasantry; orthodox Hinduism and Islam, to which Western learning and Western ways were anathema; and the Anglo-Indians and Indian Christians, who formed a small but not inconsequential minority. These and others were excluded from the Legislative Council. Some had no desire to be represented, but most realized, however vaguely, that a new source of power had been gained by others and they were apprehensive of its being used to their disadvantage. Wrote the Naya, a Calcutta Bengali daily that advocated a Hindu revival:

The right of voting is one of the serious evils which, in the guise of boons, English rule has introduced into this country. The Municipalities and District Boards and similar institutions have really nothing to do with the country and with society, either Hindu or Moslem. . . . Only men who have money and possess influence and can manipulate the voters get into these bodies, which again return members to the Legislative Council. . . . These Babus who are briskly canvassing for votes, whom do they represent? There is no telling what would have been the outcome of Mr Basu's Marriage Bill, but for the presence of the Maharaja of Burdwan on the Council.

60 Englishman, February 28, 1913, p. 7; & March 5, 1913, p. 8.
61 Of the 26 Indian non-officials, 16 were university men of whom 5 had been educated in the United Kingdom. None of the European non-officials had attended university.
62 Of the 34 non-officials, 16 resided in Calcutta and another 3 had town-houses there. Dacca/Naryanganj and Chittagong each supplied three members.
63 Census of India, 1911, Vol. 5.
64 There were 20,000 Anglo-Indians and 100,000 Indian Christians in Bengal. (Ibid.)
65 Special Marriage Amendment Bill introduced to the Imperial Legislative Council in 1911 by
permitted to pass as representatives of the Hindus? These Babus, who are utterly without religion, may be likened to poison thrown out by the churning of Hindu society by the English, and it is for the English like another Nilkantha must grapple with them. Why, instead of doing that, do Englishmen allow this poison to scatter itself over the whole framework of Hindu society?

We have reached the antipode of our starting point. Those men who were then to be the leaven of society have become its poison. This brings us up short against the realization that the training of a Westernized elite could look very different through Indian eyes. At the basis of this criticism there lies an obvious conflict of ideals. The Nayak did not want babus, it wanted pundits. The British aim, it said in a later editorial, was to Anglicize India. “If India is to get Home rule, her people must lose their present national individuality, and approximate to the ruling race before self-government can be granted her.” It is true that there was an assumption of this sort underlying British policy towards the Indian legislatures and it is essential that this assumption be made explicit when their history is written. If it is not, it may disguise the fact that there could be, and was, legitimate disagreement at this basic level.

The Nayak criticism also reflects a conflict of interest. Even at this elementary stage, with the grant of the vote, power was being transferred by the imperial rulers. Certain persons and certain sections of the community were gaining and certain were losing relatively. There was a contest for this power and inevitable dissension as to how it should be distributed and, even, whether it should be distributed. This struggle was particularly severe because of the segmented nature of Indian society. To reduce conflict to a minimum, the British had to attempt to distribute as fairly as possible the power which they were relinquishing. They endeavored to control the pace of devolution and to maintain their own position, by balancing interests. This could retard but could not prevent a revolution in Indian society. It is in this context that communal strife in twentieth-century India is to be understood. The clash of Hindu and Muslim was the most fierce for these two communities were more sharply divided than any others; but this must be regarded as a part of the readjustment which took place at every level of Indian society as the British withdrew—between caste and caste; between great landlord and small; between zemindar and ryot; between capital and labor; between province and province. The reaction of British commerce is also explicable in these terms. Theirs was one of the communities which stood to lose from the devolution of power: they were haves who might become have-nots. Admittedly they were most closely involved with the imperium but they were as much a part of, for example, the Bengal complex as were the Marwaris or the Armenians with whom they vied for the riches of the province—and only slightly more alien. There were struggles within groups for leadership and, as power settled more securely in one or two locales, there were alliances (not all holy) between the

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Bhupendranath Basu. It was opposed by orthodox Hindus and Muslims as it would have made possible inter-creed and inter-caste marriages, by providing for civil weddings. (Proceedings of the Legislative Council of the Governor-General of India, Vols. 49 & 50.)

66 The allusion is to the God Siva, who drank the poison raised by the churning of the ocean by gods and demons and thus saved the universe from its effects. The poison stuck in his throat, which became blue and he himself to be known as Nilkantha—the god with the blue throat.


68 June 14, 1913, ibid., June 21, 1913, Vol. 1, 570.
successful and the farsighted. Does this not explain the presence of the industrialist Birlas in Gandhi’s camp—despite *khadi*?

This was the political situation in which the advocates of constitutional advance were involved. Their ideals and whatever aspirations the British had for their training are of great importance but they are not the whole story nor can the history of the legislatures be written in those terms. The constitutionalists must be understood as a group among groups, possibly standing in a peculiar relationship to the imperial rulers because of some ideals held in common, but sharing the general concern about the devolution of power. It is no disparagement of their idealism to recognize that they saw themselves as successors to the British in the seats of authority. Had they not done so, they would not be ruling now.