MEMORANDUM BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR INDIA.

I circulate, for the information of my colleagues, the Report of the Governors' Conference which was held at Simla on the 23rd July. It gives a recent and authoritative account of the Civil Disobedience Movement. It will be observed that the Governors of the Central Provinces, the United Provinces, and the Punjab ask that an Ordinance on the lines of a Defence of the Realm Act should be drafted ready for use, and the Governor of Bombay would like such a measure imposed at once. The other points of interest in the Report are:

(1) The character of the powers suggested by the Governor of the Central Provinces in such a measure, which include collective punishment, the deprivation of civil rights and the forfeiture of property.

(2) The growing participation of local bodies, as such, in the movement and the sympathy of Hindu Civil Servants.

(3) The complaint by the Governor of the Punjab that Appellate Courts are likely to take a sympathetic view of the Civil Disobedience Movement, and the statement by the Governor of the Central Provinces that a number of Sessions Judges are in sympathy with the movement.

I circulate this paper so that the Cabinet may be informed of the grave character of the situation and the possibility that unless some settlement is reached four Provinces at least, with a total population of almost 100 millions, may be put under something comparable to martial law.

W. B.

9th August 1930.
SECRET.

Conference held at Viceregal Lodge on Wednesday, 23rd July.

PRESENT:
His Excellency the Viceroy,
Their Excellencies the Governors of all Provinces,
The Honourable Members of the Viceroy's Executive Council.

I—Discussion of the Political Situation.

1. His Excellency the Viceroy in opening the Conference invited the views of the Governors on the general situation in their provinces.

Bengal.

2. His Excellency the Governor of Bengal said that in his province there is good reason to believe that the movement is definitely on the decline. Picketing is giving a certain amount of trouble, but there is not much force behind it, and although the return of students from their vacations might give an impetus to picketing by providing more volunteers, he is not greatly concerned on this account. Funds appear to be decreasing, and there are signs of lassitude. The position in the rural areas is on the whole not unsatisfactory. If they are left alone, dangerous developments are likely to occur in some districts; but as soon as they are vigorously tackled conditions are soon restored to normal. They have not sufficient police, however, to permit of vigorous action simultaneously in all districts. The police force has been increased by 500 and additional police have also been posted at the expense of the inhabitants in three places, while proposals are under consideration for similar action in two other places. They have borrowed from the Assam Government 300 men of the Assam Rifles. There is now under consideration a proposal for the addition of one armed battalion of police. His District Officers are generally hopeful. He himself considers that the time is now opportune for vigorous propaganda, and that once the movement begins to go it will go quickly. It is, however, generally recognised that the failure of the civil disobedience movement will be followed by an increase in terrorist activities.

Madras.

3. His Excellency the Governor of Madras said that in his Presidency the situation has definitely improved and the movement is on the decline. Picketing is giving a certain amount of trouble. An increase of 500 in the police force has been sanctioned; but the whole of these additional men are not yet functioning. Propaganda is being carried on with good results. District Officers are doing valuable work in this direction and non-officials are helping and have begun to hold meetings in opposition to the Congress.

Bombay.

4. His Excellency the Governor of Bombay said that Sind has so far been very little affected, except in Karachi. The South of the Presidency has also given very little trouble. The Deccan is watching Bombay, and the movement is getting some hold there. In Bombay City and in Gujerat the situation is very bad. There are some indications that the movement is diminishing a little in Gujerat, but he is himself inclined to think that this is mainly due to the monsoon. The measures so far taken by his Government have had the effect of keeping down the level of enthusiasm, but on the other hand have increased the size of the movement so far as the number of adherents and sympathisers is concerned. Almost the whole population of Bombay is sympathetic, women and children included. Counter propaganda has so far not yielded any appreciable results, except perhaps in one district in Gujerat, where the District Officer is issuing a news sheet. The conditions do not allow counter meetings to be held. The Press and Unauthorised News-sheets Ordinances have been valuable, largely because they increased the powers of the executive. The other Ordinances have not been of much use, probably because they did not invest the executive with sufficient powers.
Economic conditions have contributed largely towards the movement. Business is almost at a standstill in Bombay City. The Stock Exchange is rarely opened; the mill industry is in a bad way; some mills have already closed down and others are likely to close. There is a danger that 100,000 mill-hands will be out of employment at an early date. Most of these are in very straitened circumstances, and the only palliative he could see at the moment, if there were a general closure of mills, would be to send as many mill-hands as possible back to their homes on free passes. At the moment, the Congress are making vigorous efforts to bring the mill-hands over to their side, and their chances of success are not unfavourable. The labourers have lost faith in their Unions and Union leaders, and mill labour generally may easily be worked up into an inflammable state. Congress have plenty of funds and will be able to use them for this purpose.

He is anxious regarding the future attitude of the rural population. Price of cotton has seriously fallen, and he is afraid that the cultivators will have great difficulty in selling their present crop when it matures. To a very small extent they can substitute other crops for cotton, but this would take time, and in any case the substitution would not be on a large scale. Economic conditions in the villages are, therefore, likely to be very unfavourable and in consequence one has to expect great discontent and consequent opportunities to Congress to create feelings hostile to Government. He is not very hopeful that the financial losses which the movement is causing, and will continue to cause, to Bombay City will produce serious reactions against the Congress: Many of the industrialists and business men who are supporting the movement do not mind if they are broken, provided that Government is broken also. A certain number of leading industrialists would no doubt like to see the movement come to an end, but their employees are all in it and they insist on business being closed down whenever an excuse offers. While he thought that the occupation of the Congress House would have some moral effect on the situation, he believed that any number of other houses would be made available for Congress purposes.

The police have been excellent, although occasional mistakes have been made. His Government have sanctioned an increase of 2,400 men, but the whole of this number have not yet been recruited; and although at first there had been no difficulty in obtaining recruits, recruiting has recently slackened and it has been necessary to extend the period of temporary service to one year.

He considered it most desirable that an Ordinance should be prepared with as little delay as possible on the lines of Defence of Realm Act. The chief object to be aimed at would be to give wide powers to local executive officers in those areas where an emergency existed, and, in particular, to invest District Magistrates with the power to make regulations. He would like to have an Ordinance of this kind at once, but realised the difficulty of promulgating an Ordinance granting such drastic powers if it were required in one province only. He, however, urged the necessity of preparing one with as little delay as possible.

Central Provinces.

5. His Excellency the Governor of the Central Provinces said that the movement is gaining force in his province. It is sweeping up from Bombay into Berar and Mahrratta country. The popular attitude towards it is semi-religious, and to a considerable extent ignores considerations of personal loss. Women and children are taking an enthusiastic part in it, and owing to the terror of social boycott few non-official leaders have the courage to come forward on the side of Government. It is spreading into the villages, and he also is greatly concerned regarding the future economic prospects. He thought that November and December would be critical months. Cotton would then come on the market and if the growers could not sell it, there would be a great deal of rural discontent.

The police, which had previously been a little below strength, have been brought up to normal; but difficulty of recruitment represents a serious obstacle to any considerable increase in the strength of the force.

He is strongly in favour of an Ordinance on the lines of D.O.R.A. The Ordinance should create special tribunals, for although our difficulties in dealing with the movement have so far been greatly reduced by the refusal of accused to plead or to file appeals, their policy might change, and then the attitude of the appellate courts, especially of sessions courts, would be a serious matter. It may be assumed that a
number of Sessions Judges are in sympathy with the movement. Other matters for which the Ordinance should provide are:

(a) Collective punishment on a village that had misbehaved.
(b) Suspension of local bodies.
(c) Deprivation of civil rights, e.g. eligibility to stand for legislative or local bodies.
(d) Forfeiture of property in certain cases.

He attached particular importance to obtaining powers of control over local bodies. Some of these are taking an active and very effective part in the movement and the present legal procedure is cumbersome and protracted. In the meantime much harm is being done.

United Provinces.

His Excellency the Governor of the United Provinces said that in his province, as elsewhere, the movement is mainly urban and Hindu. Hindus generally sympathise with it, including most Hindu Government servants. Three weeks ago there was a lull, which he hoped represented a definite decline, but since then the situation has tended to revert to its former state, and he could not say with certainty that there are now definite indications of a lull in the situation as a whole. There has, however, been no intensification in the towns, and there are signs of weariness. In rural areas, revenue and rents are coming in fairly well, having regard to the economic conditions, and there has been nothing serious in the way of a no-tax or no-rent campaign. In fact, the Congress leaders have temporarily given up this idea, but they are holding out hopes for next harvest. In the western districts of the province there have recently been indications that villages are affected to some extent, and small propaganda parties are doing some harm. District Officers, however, are not seriously concerned at present. The movement has undoubtedly excited greater enthusiasm and emotion than was expected, and the organisation is good. Some local bodies have been troublesome, and a few of them, containing a majority of Swarajist members, use the staff, especially educational, for Congress purposes. Students and schoolboys are willing recruits. Picketing has been bad in a few towns. The attitude of District Officers towards picketing and the use of the Picketing Ordinance varies considerably. The general policy has been to give protection to those who want it and, in particular, Muhammadans have been given protection. Boycott of officials has been negligible and the police have been very good.

Counter propaganda is being vigorously carried on in various ways, e.g. articles in newspapers, itinerant preachers and loyalist associations. In some districts anti-Congress meetings are successfully held and in the Agra district Congress parties are now unable to go into the villages. He attached great importance to taking up at once the question of local bodies and to providing by Ordinance adequate powers of suspension. In his province the harm done by Municipalities and District Boards is serious, especially in outlying districts where counter influences are not effective. Two District Boards, for instance, are using educational institutions for Congress propaganda and are trying to enforce the wearing of khaddar by the staff and pupils.

He considered that Defence of Realm Act should be drafted and kept in readiness, but that it is not required at the moment.

On the whole he thought that if the Muhammadans keep on the right side, and we continue steady pressure, the feeling of lassitude among the public will increase, that discontent among parents will develop, and that after two or three months the movement will definitely be beaten.

Punjab.

His Excellency the Governor of the Punjab said that with the exception of Amritsar City the situation has generally improved in his province. At one time the Congress had been active in all districts, but steady and continuous pressure had completely worn down the movement in some places. In some of the smaller districts it is at a standstill. The supply of volunteers is drying up. No-tax campaigns were tried in one town and in one rural district, but failed. Similarly, efforts have been made to boycott schools, but this also has failed. At the same time there is a good deal of economic unrest due to low prices of agricultural produce, and this is being exploited by the Congress. It might be necessary for his Government
seriously to consider whether an all-round reduction in land revenue should be made. He believed that if this were done, the rural population would recognise that Government had played its part and the economic stress would not then create feelings hostile to Government. The Sikh position is unstable and is a potential danger. It might spread and become a source of supply of volunteers to the Congress. This at present is the most anxious feature of the situation. Apart from that, the movement is very definitely declining and the situation is much better than a month ago.

In Amritsar City the position is unsatisfactory. Intense picketing of cloth shops is going on and six crores of goods are locked up. In June the sales of piece goods dropped from an average of 25 lakhs during the past two years to two lakhs only. Trade is practically at a standstill. Leading merchants are subscribing to the Congress funds and paying the picketers who picket their shops. The sale of Indian-made goods is restricted, because merchants cannot get them on credit and their capital is locked up. There are signs that traders are getting tired of this state of affairs, and they may perhaps approach Government for assistance.

He considered that D.O.R.A. should be drafted and held in reserve. He attached special importance to tribunals, since some of the Appellate Courts are likely to take a very sympathetic to the civil disobedience movement and to reduce sentences, if appeals are filed before them. Generally he does not think that we can count on an early cessation of the movement, and fears that there may be a recrudescence after the Round-Table Conference.

Bihar and Orissa.

8. His Excellency the Governor of Bihar and Orissa stated that with the exception of three districts his officers believe that the corner has been definitely turned. People are getting tired of picketing and so are the picketers. The boycott of police has now practically ceased, and in this connection eight or nine successful prosecutions have had an excellent effect. At one time he was anxious about students and schoolboys joining the movement in large numbers, but this danger has not materialised largely owing to the attitude taken by the Provincial Congress leaders. In Bihar and Orissa the semi-religious hysteria manifest in Bombay and the Central Provinces is absent, and the movement is regarded rather as a means to annoy and irritate Government. The Legislative Council has behaved well. By a majority of 3 to 1 it passed a demand for additional police and another for propaganda purposes. Some of the leading zamindars are playing up, and propaganda is proceeding satisfactorily. The campaign against the Chowkidari Tax has achieved very little success and is not now being seriously prosecuted. Several Municipalities and District Boards passed resolutions in favour of hoisting the national flag. The resolutions were cancelled and the flags pulled down by executive action. Three districts are still the source of some anxiety, namely, Balasore, Bhagalpur and Manbhum. In these, volunteers are doing propaganda in some villages, and the general situation is affected by conditions in adjacent Bengal districts.

Assam.

9. His Excellency the Governor of Assam explained that the conditions in his province were exceptional. The province is almost entirely agricultural, and there are very few towns. Some parts of the province have been infected from Bengal. During the non-co-operation movement the chief source of trouble was agitation in the tea gardens, but these so far have given little trouble, although the price of tea has fallen. They tackled the problem of students and schoolboys by the issue of a circular, which requires an undertaking by parents that their sons will not participate in any political movement. This created loud protests, but in spite of these undertakings have been given in regard to 75 per cent. of the pupils. The reply to this action by Government has been incendiarism, and three important schools have been burnt down. In regard to one of these institutions, an indignation meeting of parents was held, but was broken up by schoolboys. A fall in the price of jute might cause economic difficulties and aggravate the situation, but otherwise he feels fairly happy regarding the future.

10. His Excellency the Viceroy, in summing up the discussion, explained the attitude of Government towards the efforts of Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru and Mr. Jayakar to obtain a solution. His Excellency explained that the initiative had come entirely
from them and that he had refused to give any assurance beyond what he had stated in his address to the Legislature on the 9th July. The Government of India had given facilities for interviews with Gandhi, &c., because they felt, firstly, that they would not have been justified in interposing obstacles, and secondly, that if Gandhi, &c., were unreasonable, this would perhaps help the moderates in their decision to go to the Round-Table Conference.

His Excellency observed that if the civil disobedience movement were not called off, the conclusions resulting from the discussion appeared to be that Government should continue steady pressure on existing lines, take up at once the question of promulgating at an early date an Ordinance to deal effectively with local bodies and also prepare for use, if required, an Ordinance on the lines of D.O.R.A.

II.—Question of Amnesty.

1. His Excellency the Viceroy then invited the views of the Governors regarding the question of an amnesty. He explained that in reply to the personal and private letter he had addressed to them, the Governors of Madras and Punjab had raised certain objections of principle, while the other Governors had on the whole agreed to the necessity at some time or another of release of prisoners, while expressing in some cases some differences of opinion regarding details. His Excellency made no mention of the matter in his address to the Central Legislature, because he felt that it would do little good at that moment and might create difficulties. It is, however, obvious that the question must be considered if the efforts for peace show signs of leading to any results.

2. His Excellency the Governor of the Punjab said that he feels considerable difficulty in finding a satisfactory formula. There are associations, such as the Nau Jawan Bharat Sabha and the Kirti Kisan, whose attitude is definitely anti-Gandhi, but who have none the less taken part in the civil disobedience movement with the result that many of their members are now in prison. A good number of these are revolutionaries and Communists, and they are unlikely to follow Gandhi if he called the movement off. These appear to require different treatment from that given to true followers of Gandhi. Again, the Provincial Legislatures have on the whole supported Government, and the members deserve consideration. So far, at any rate, as the Punjab is concerned, a fair number of Congress leaders now in jail would, if released, stand for election and their self-imposed martyrdom would be an asset. Their candidature would be embarrassing to present members who stood by Government, and their release from jail at present would be resented. Again, the feeling of the police deserves consideration. The prisoners include many who had openly sympathised with revolutionaries and had joined in meetings eulogising Bhagat Singh and Dutt. On the other hand, there are many prisoners, such as picketers, members of unlawful assemblies, persons put on security under section 108, Criminal Procedure Code, in regard to whom there would be no objection to their early release, if the civil disobedience movement definitely ended.

3. His Excellency the Governor of Madras pointed out that the rumour that Gandhi would shortly be let out of jail had encouraged many to court arrest in order to obtain cheap martyrdom. He said that those who have been imprisoned have deliberately defied the law and deserve little consideration. Their release would have a bad effect on our friends, who would be reluctant to help us on the next occasion.

4. His Excellency the Governor of the United Provinces assumed that there is no question of an unconditional amnesty, such as was given on the occasion of His Royal Highness the Duke of Connaught’s visit to India, but that the proposal is rather that no release of prisoners will be sanctioned until Government are satisfied that—

(a) the movement has been definitely called off, and
(b) the persons who give assurances to this effect can and will carry them out.

He also thought that release should be conditional on an assurance of future good behaviour, and he instanced what was done in the Punjab in the case of prisoners convicted in connection with the Akali agitation.

5. His Excellency the Governor of Assam observed that the amnesty would presumably be accompanied by the withdrawal of exceptional measures, but in this connection he urged that the powers of the Press Ordinance should be retained. Sir Malcolm Hailey and Sir Charles Innes pointed out the difficulties of this.
6. His Excellency the Governor of Bombay said that, as far as he is concerned, the calling off of the movement by Gandhi would give immediate relief to the situation, since he believes that the vast majority of adherents of the movement in the Bombay Presidency would follow Gandhi's lead.

7. Sir Charles Innes observed that it appeared almost essential that the calling off of the civil disobedience movement by Gandhi should be accompanied by some kind of concessions in regard to prisoners, otherwise there would be no effective calling off. It would in practice not be possible for Government to give a blank refusal. The practical problem, therefore, was to obtain a suitable formula.

8. His Excellency the Viceroy in summing up the discussion agreed with what Sir Charles Innes had said, and observed that if Gandhi at some time or another did definitely call off the movement, it would not be possible for Government to remain unresponsive. He gathered that the general feeling of the Conference was that there should not be any unconditional amnesty, but that discretion should be left to Local Governments to review sentences and to release prisoners conditionally. While accepting this formula he expressed the hope that Local Governments would, when the time came, apply it as liberally as conditions would permit.

9. The Governors generally agreed with the formula above stated.

III.

Before the Conference closed, His Excellency Sir Malcolm Hailey expressed to His Excellency the Commander-in-Chief the great appreciation of his Government and officers for the ready and valuable assistance given by the military authorities on all occasions. The other Governors endorsed this appreciation. His Excellency the Commander-in-Chief, in thanking them, referred to the great help the civil authorities had given in getting down troops from the hills on the occasion of Gandhi's arrest.