WAR CABINET.

THE INDIAN POLITICAL SITUATION.

IN connection with my memorandum on the above subject (W.P. (42) 42) I circulate the following telegram from the Viceroy.

India Office, January 28, 1942.

Telegram from the Viceroy to the Secretary of State for India, dated January 21, 1942.

(Most Immediate.)

104. S. His Majesty's Government will wish for an appreciation of political position here in the light of recent developments, particularly Bardoli Resolution, and for my suggestions as to policy which we should wisely adopt in the present circumstances. Text of Jinnah's Resolution at Nagpur and of Bardoli Resolution and gist of discussions on the latter in All-India Congress Committee will be available to you and need not be repeated here.

2. Cabinet will have noted in Bardoli Resolution insistent demand for "full freedom": reference to our system as "arrogant Imperialism which is indistinguishable from Fascist authoritarianism"; and deliberate misrepresentation of our attitude. Discussion of Resolution in All-India Congress Committee on 13th January was important as bringing out the real reluctance of substantial elements to co-operate wholeheartedly whatever happens, fact that the Resolution was got through after all on the assumption that it committed nobody to anything unless His Majesty's Government conceded Congress demand, when the position could be reconsidered; and extent to which elements in Congress were afraid to antagonise possible victors by helping or coming to terms with us. Rajagopalachari added that Bardoli Resolution "does not say what we want. The British Government know what we want. Therefore we need not reiterate it," and as usual with Congress pronouncements, there has been a number of competing public statements by prominent Congressmen as to what exactly it means.

3. In effect Bardoli Resolution taken with discussion in A.I.C.C. represents reiteration of Congress demand for surrender by His Majesty's Government to Congress claims, ignoring other parties and interests and their own obligations in the hope that they will get Congress support in fighting the war. Its main importance is that it places us at some tactical disadvantage because of the ease with which it can be misrepresented to our disadvantage here and elsewhere, while it has helped Congress machine by responding to strong feeling in the country that non-violence is an impossible proposition in present conditions with Japanese next door. It is important not to let ourselves be hypnotised by Rajagopalachari and his appearance of reasonableness and plausibility. He is endeavouring to concentrate spotlight on himself and to obscure the very significant dissident strains that have emerged in discussions at A.I.C.C.; while Congress publicity will continue to oversimplify the resolution and endeavour to present it to the public quietly as offer to co-operate on reasonable terms.

4. The Moslem League attitude, so far as I am aware, remains unchanged, with Jinnah apprehensive that His Majesty's Government will allow themselves to be stampeded by Hindus and Congress. Jinnah has just informed Lumley [23832-2]
that he stands firm on Pakistan, and thinks that Hindus are out to get us to make an engagement which would prejudge and rule out Pakistan, and, having obtained that, use it as a weapon with which to intimidate Moslems. In all minority provinces the Moslems had sampled Congress rule, and were determined not to submit to any constitution which would install Congress domination over the whole of country. He does not think that Congress resolutions have materially altered their position, and thinks that Secretary of State, in reply to a recent question in Parliament, has made only possible answer. He accepts without question that we genuinely want to arrive at a settlement which must mean a transfer of power, but is afraid that we may succumb to pressure, though he seemed, to Lumley, well satisfied with present attitude of His Majesty's Government.

5. Minorities, such as scheduled castes, and large body of opinion which is anxious to assist but knows that it can in no circumstances hope to exercise real control itself over political future, is watching line we shall take with uneasiness and uncertainty.

6. Issue is clearly of great importance, and we must consider it dispassionately. I am quite ready to accept that it may be necessary for us to alter general line of our policy towards India after and as a consequence of the war. But I am clear in any event that policy as it stands (ultimate dominion status and transfer of real power to Indians at centre, &c, and ultimate implementing of arrangements covered by Declaration of August 1940) is one which can only be successfully implemented from a strong position. Our present position I would not regard as a strong one, and our prestige is undergoing some deterioration. I have to bear in mind further fact that we are under warning that we may lose Singapore, and that, as I have frequently informed Secretary of State, I am advised that India is at present wholly insufficiently protected against attack, and that direct attack on any considerable scale might produce an exceedingly difficult situation to hold in terms of security in this country. I would not judge that there could wisely be any question allowing ourselves to be stampeded into implementing either wholly or partially our long-term policy in such circumstances and at present time. And if I am right in thinking that these are not circumstances in which implementation of our long-term policy is practicable, I am of opinion equally that there is very little if anything further that we can do within our tether.

7. I develop this position further below. In doing so I concentrate on issue as affecting Centre. The Provincial aspects, though important, are less so and not decisive in present argument.

8. Main propositions put forward for our consideration are either—

(a) In effect, implementation of our long-term policy either completely or to a degree which would make it impossible for us after the war to regain any ground given now, and which we thought it desirable to retrace, e.g., the Congress demand for acceptance of complete independence for India, to be accompanied by positive immediate steps in evidence, and their demand (Bardoli Resolution) for a "Free independent India which only can be in a position to undertake the defence of the country on a national basis and be of help to the furtherance of larger causes that are emerging from the storm of war"; or

(b) The Sapru type of proposal—elimination of Parliamentary control, Viceroy to have autocratic powers with wholly non-official executive responsible to him, &c.

9. To take second category first. Cabinet will be fully alive to the objections to the severance of Parliamentary control, and will appreciate that the acceptance of Sapru's propositions would compromise the post-war position beyond any question, while I do not myself believe that it would secure us the support of the major political parties. They represent a leap in the dark from the solid platform of the Act of 1935 and with no guarantee of any reward. "Home Rule for the Viceroy," which I have been disturbed to see that The Times has tended to support, ignores the impossibility of any Governor-General reconciling his diverse obligations, or disposing on an autocratic basis of all the resources of this immense country, without Parliamentary sanction and control. We have
already made arrangements to meet the contingency of a breakdown of all communications between London and Delhi. Indeed in any emergency it may well be unavoidable that the Governor-General should take immediate responsibility for much about which he would prefer to have secured the prior consent of His Majesty’s Government. But all this is very different from a proposal to release the Governor-General and the Government of India from all statutory control by His Majesty’s Government and Parliament. Nor do I believe that any entirely non-official Council that I could put together, unless it had the full support of majority parties (who have refrained from supporting Sapru), would be better than I have got at the moment. Sapru and his friends carry no real weight here. The inclusion of all or any of them would add nothing to effectiveness of our prosecution of war; and I think it quite likely that we should be under strong pressure from them for concessions in this direction or that designed to show Indian public opinion that they really counted for something. In a wholly Indianised Council I should be much concerned, too, lest the moment the war drew nearer to India we found ourselves under pressure to recall Indian formations overseas for India’s local defence, and to close down despatch of warlike supplies outside India in interests of conserving them for India herself. I would take that risk very seriously if I had strong Congress element in Central Government, but it cannot be ignored even with a Central Government of moderates of Sapru type.

11. So much for what I might call a policy of nibbling, and of endeavouring to buy off opposition by concessions of greater or lesser importance, which would not, however, take us all the way to our final objective. I now turn to wider suggestion that we should, in effect, go the whole way at once, accept demand for full independence and give tangible proof of reality of our doing so. It seems to me to be out of the question to consider anything of the sort. And I imagine that that will be feeling of Cabinet also. On that assumption we may take it that there is no possibility of giving satisfaction to Congress or securing their real and whole-hearted support. In my experience they are entirely ruthless politicians; will take all they can get; will do their utmost to manoeuvre us into a position in which we make sacrifices that are substantial and that will increase the prestige and power of Congress in this country. But short of acceptance of their full demand no sacrifices however great can be relied on to keep them quiet.

12. I need not develop the unfortunate effect on those who genuinely sympathise with us in this country, or on those to whom we have given undertakings, such as Moslem League, or on the Princes, of allowing ourselves to be stampeded into negotiations with Congress or acceptance of Congress demand. Nor (while possibility of underground negotiations can never be wholly ruled out) do I see anything to suggest that Congress and Moslem League are at this stage likely to unite and get together in an expanded Council. Jinnah had made clear to the Editor of the Times of India that he would regard as essential, firstly, 50:50 in any such Council; secondly, that representation of minorities should be secured through him and be under his control, since otherwise minority representatives would be absorbed by Hindu element. (I need not elaborate difficulties which any such arrangement would produce.)

13. My general conclusion, viewing this difficult matter with greatest detachment that I can, and with full sense of its importance, is in these circumstances that we should stand firm and make no further move. I do not believe that any further move at this stage will be likely to improve India’s contribution to the war. As mentioned above, I think it quite possible that further transfer of power might mean pressure on us for withdrawal of Indian troops and Indian supply. I do not believe that we could rely on a united India (even a united British India, for Princes tend to be ignored to a dangerous degree in discussions in press, &c) solid behind us in fighting the war. India is hopelessly, and I suspect irremediably, split by racial and religious divisions which we cannot bridge, and which become more acute as any real transfer of power by us draws nearer.

14. I take very seriously, too, in reaching my conclusions possibility that further transfer would give marked encouragement to Quisling activity. Recent report from military authorities in Eastern India is to the effect that there is a large and dangerous potential fifth column in Bengal, Assam and Bihar and
Orissa, and that, indeed, potentiality of pro-enemy sympathy and activity in Eastern India is enormous. Sarat Bose has been a lesson. The activities of U Saw and Tin Tut (senior Civil Servant occupying a very responsible position) are another and a grave one. I know that we are frequently urged to do something to "touch the heart of India" and our sympathies naturally lean in that direction. But Cabinet will, I think, agree with me that India and Burma have no natural association with Empire, from which they are alien by race, history and religion, and for which neither of them has any natural affection, and both are in Empire because they are conquered countries which had been brought there by force, kept there by our control, and which hitherto it has suited to remain under our protection. I suspect that the moment they think that we may lose the war or take a bad knock, their leaders would be much more concerned to make terms with victor at our expense than to fight for ideals to which so much lip-service is given, and I have been impressed by prominence given by Rajagopalachari to doubts felt in A.I.O.C. as to wisdom of antagonising possible victors.

15. What we have to decide, however, is whether in such circumstances, whatever feeling of India, we intend to stay in this country for our own reasons, and whether India's place in Imperial communications is not so important, at any rate in war time, that we must hold on and must not relinquish power beyond a certain point. If we accept that India is too important at this stage for us to take any chances, then I would rather face such trouble as we may have to face here as a result of making no concessions now in political field than make concessions which are ill-advised and dangerous, and on which we might have to go back for reasons of Imperial security at a later stage in the war.

16. I recognise to the full that Cabinet have to deal with much left wing pressure and pressure from academic theorists or sentimentalists, reflected even in papers so important as The Times. This battle, if it is lost, will, however, be lost at home and not in India, and if my suggestion that we make no move is accepted by yourself and by Cabinet it will be necessary to consider the best line to take to try to damp down activities of this order. You alone can judge how much significance is to be attached to criticism in the press and from left wing and liberal element in Parliament. I would have judged it myself to be largely a reflection of uneasiness at the turn things have taken in the Far East, and to be based on the assumption, which I do not regard as correct, that by a generous gesture now we can unite India behind us and get her solid moral support for the prosecution of the War.

17. His Majesty's Government will naturally wish to appear as constructive as possible in any debate. I suggest, however, that the general line of any debate could properly be that we have responsibilities to discharge and pledges to honour, to harp again on the depth and reality of the Indian differences; to insist that in no circumstances shall we go back on our pledges to Moslems; to bring out incompatibility of Moslem League demands with those of Congress; to show the public how little the Bardoli Resolution really means; to lay particular emphasis on discussion in All-India Congress Committee; to repeat (it does not matter if it bores people here) the merits of August offer and reluctance of Congress to face up to it; to stress that we have got in practice as national a Government and as good a national Government as we can get in present circumstances, in expanded Council; and, as a possible constructive alternative, to refer to the possibility of the federal scheme (which to my point of view secures defence, secures a degree (corrupt group) control, brings in conservative (corrupt group) element to which our undertakings are so important, and would be practicable consistently with maintenance of war effort). On these lines I should hope that we could gain any ground which Congress have taken from us by appearance of readiness to co-operate on reasonable terms which attaches to Bardoli Resolution.

18. Above represents my own considered view. I have not yet consulted Governors, though I would expect general support from them for policy of standing firm. If there is any further information which you or Cabinet require to enable you to reach decision you will, I am sure, let me know.