

Cripps Mission (1942)

The British were alarmed at the successive victories of Japan during 1940s. When Burma was turned into a battle field and the war reached the Indian borders, the British started feeling more concerned about the future of India. Situation in the country was further complicated as the Congress wanted to take advantage of the situation by accelerating their efforts in their struggle for independence. Moreover the differences between the Congress and the Muslim League were widening fast and visibly there was no chance to bring both the parties on a common agenda. In these circumstances, the British Government sent a mission to India in 1942 under Sir Stafford Cripps, the Lord Privy Seal, in order to achieve Hindu-Muslim consensus on some constitutional arrangement and to convince the Indians to postpone their struggle till the end of the Second World War.

Cripps arrived in Delhi on March 22, 1942 and had series of meetings with the leading Indian politicians including Jawaharlal Nehru, Abul Kalam Azad, Quaid-i-Azam, Sir Sikandar Hayat Khan, A. K. Fazlul Haq, Dr. Ambedkar, V.D. Savarkar and Tej Bhadur Sappuru etc. In the meetings Cripps tried to plead his case before these political leaders and tried to convince them to accept his following proposals:

1. During the course of the war, the British would retain their hold on India. Once the war finished, India would be granted dominion status with complete external and internal autonomy. It would however, be associated with the United Kingdom and other Dominions by a common allegiance to the Crown.
2. At the end of the war, a Constituent Assembly would be set up with the power to frame the future constitution of India. The members of the assembly were to be elected on the basis of proportional representation by the provincial

assemblies. Princely States would also be given representation in the Constituent Assembly.

3. The provinces not agreeing to the new constitution would have the right to keep itself out of the proposed Union. Such provinces would also be entitled to create their own separate Union. The British government would also invite them to join the commonwealth.
4. During the war an interim government comprising of different parties of India would be constituted. However, defence and external affairs would be the sole responsibility of the viceroy.

Quaid-i-Azam considered these proposals as “unsatisfactory” and was of the view that the acceptance of the Cripps proposals would “take the Muslims to the gallows.” He said that the proposals have “aroused our deepest anxieties and grave apprehensions, specially with reference to Pakistan Scheme which is a matter of life and death for Muslim India. We will, therefore, endeavour that the principle of Pakistan which finds only veiled recognition in the Document should be conceded in unequivocal terms.” The Quaid, however, was happy to know that in the Cripps proposals, at least the British Government had agreed in principle to the Muslim League’s demand of the partition of India. Yet, Quaid-i-Azam wanted the British Government and Cripps to thoroughly amend the proposals to make them acceptable for the Muslim League.

Actually Quaid-i-Azam and other Muslim League leaders were convinced that Cripps was a traditional supporter of Congress and thus could not present an objective solution to the problem. On the arrival of Cripps, Quaid-i-Azam made it clear that he was a friend of Congress and would only support the Congress’ interests. Congress leaders themselves accepted that Cripps was their man. On his first visit to India, Cripps in fact attended the meetings of the Congress Working Committee. He also visited Gandhi and was so much impressed by him that he wore white khadi suit. He openly ridiculed the

Muslim League's demand for Pakistan when he said, "we cannot deny 25 crore Hindus desire of United India only because 9 crore Muslims oppose it." In fact the proposals Cripps presented were mainly consisted of the ideas which were discussed in a meeting between Nehru and Cripps in 1938.