

Cripps Mission 1942: Main Proposal, Implications and Failure of Cripps Mission

In March 1942, a mission headed by Stafford Cripps was sent to India with constitutional proposals to seek Indian support for the war.

Stafford Cripps was a left-wing Labourite, the leader of the House of Commons and a member of the British War Cabinet who had actively supported the Indian national movement.

Why Cripps Mission was sent:

- i. Because of the reverses suffered by Britain in South-East Asia, the Japanese threat to invade India seemed real now 'and Indian support became crucial.
- ii. There was pressure on Britain from the Allies (USA, USSR, and China) to seek Indian cooperation.
- iii. Indian nationalists had agreed to support the Allied cause if substantial power was transferred immediately and complete independence given after the war.

Main Proposals:

The main proposals of the mission were as follows:

1. An Indian Union with a dominion status; would be set up; it would be free to decide its relations with the Commonwealth and free to participate in the United Nations and other international bodies.

2. After the end of the war, a constituent assembly would be convened to frame a new constitution. Members of this assembly would be partly elected by the provincial assemblies through proportional representation and partly nominated by the princes.

3. The British Government would accept the new constitution subject to two conditions.

(i) any province not willing to join the Union could have a separate constitution and form a separate Union, and (ii) the new constitution-making body and the British Government would negotiate a treaty to effect the transfer of power and to safeguard racial and religious minorities.

4. In the meantime, defence of India would remain in British hands and the governor-general's powers would remain intact.

Departures from the Past and Implications:

The proposals differed from those offered in the past in many respects:

i. The making of the constitution was to be solely in Indian hands now (and not “mainly” in Indian hands—as contained in the August Offer).

ii. A concrete plan was provided for the constituent assembly.

iii. Option was available to any province to have a separate constitution—a blueprint for India's partition.

iv. Free India could withdraw from the Commonwealth.

v. Indians were allowed a large share in the administration in the interim period.

Why Cripps Mission Failed:

The Cripps Mission proposals failed to satisfy Indian nationalists and turned out to be merely a propaganda device for US and Chinese consumption. Various parties and groups had objections to the proposals on different points.

The Congress objected to:

(i) The offer of dominion status instead of a provision for complete independence.

(ii) Representation of the states by nominees and not by elected representatives.

(iii) Right to provinces to secede as this went against the principle of national unity.

(iv) Absence of any plan for immediate transfer of power and absence of any real share in defence; the governor-general's supremacy had been retained, and the demand for governor-general being only the constitutional head had not been accepted.

Nehru and Maulana Azad were the official negotiators for the Congress.

The Muslim League:

(i) Criticised the idea of a single Indian Union.

(ii) Did not like the machinery for the creation of a constituent assembly and the procedure to decide on the accession of provinces to the Union.

(iii) Thought that the proposals denied to the Muslims the right to self-determination and the creation of Pakistan.

Other groups also objected to the provinces' right to secede. The Liberals considered the secession proposals to be against the unity and security of India. The Hindu Mahasabha criticised the basis of the right to secede. The depressed classes thought that partition would leave them at the mercy of the caste Hindus. The Sikhs objected that partition would take away Punjab from them.

The explanation that the proposals were meant not to supersede the August Offer but to clothe general provisions with precision put British intentions in doubt.

The incapacity of Cripps to go beyond the Draft Declaration and the adoption of a rigid "take it or leave it" attitude added to the deadlock. Cripps had earlier talked of "cabinet" and "national government" but later he said that he had only meant an expansion of the executive council.

The procedure of accession was not well-defined. The decision on secession was to be taken by a resolution in the legislature by a 60% majority. If less than 60% of members supported it, the decision was to be taken by a plebiscite of adult males of that province by a simple

majority. This scheme weighed against the Hindus in Punjab and Bengal if they wanted accession to the Indian Union.

It was not clear as to who would implement and interpret the treaty effecting the transfer of power.

Churchill (the British prime minister), Amery (the secretary of state), Linlithgow (the viceroy) and Ward (the commander-in-chief) consistently torpedoed Cripps' efforts.

Talks broke down on the question of the viceroy's veto.

Stafford Cripps returned home leaving behind a frustrated and embittered Indian people, who, though still sympathising with the victims of Fascist aggression, felt that the existing situation in the country had become intolerable and that the time had come for a final assault on imperialism.