

SIMON COMMISSION (1927)

Appointment of the Commission

The Government of India Act of 1919 was essentially transitional in character. Under Section 84 of the said Act, a statutory commission was to be appointed at the end of 10 years to determine the next stage in the realisation of self-rule in India. The activities of the Swaraj Party had induced the British government to review the working of dyarchy introduced by the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms and to report as to what extent a representative government could be introduced in India. The British government appointed a commission under Sir John Simon in November 1927. The commission, which had no Indian members, was sent to investigate India's constitutional problems and make recommendations to the government on a future constitution for India. Indian political leaders felt insulted and decided to boycott the commission.

Boycott of the Commission

The call for the boycott of the Simon Commission was endorsed by the Liberal Federation led by Tej Bahadur Sapru, by the Indian Industrial and Commercial Congress and by the Hindu Mahasabha. The Muslim League split on the issue, with Mohammed Ali Jinnah carrying the majority with him in favour of a boycott. Sir Muhammad Shall, who wanted to cooperate with the commission, decided to convene a Muslim League session in Lahore in December 1927. The Jinnah faction held a Muslim League session at Kolkata, and decided to form a sub-committee to confer with the working committee of the Indian National Congress and other organizations, with a view to draft a constitution for India.

The Congress decided to boycott the Simon Commission and challenged Lord Birkenhead, Secretary of State for India, to produce a constitution acceptable to the various elements in India. An all parties' conference appointed the Nehru Committee to produce an agreed constitution. The Congress was

moving from the demand of 'Dominion Status' to 'Complete Independence'. The Chennai session of the Congress in 1927, passed a resolution of 'Complete National Independence' and later, in 1928, the All Party Muslim Conference also adopted 'the goal of complete independence' as its objective. The Congress boycotted the Commission as it had no Indian member.



Transformation of Boycott into a Movement

It was the Indian National Congress that turned the boycott into a movement. The action began as soon as Sir John Simon and his colleagues landed in Mumbai on 3 February 1928. All the major cities and towns observed a complete hartal and people came out on the streets to participate in mass rallies, processions and black flag demonstrations. Wherever the commission went, they were met with the slogans of 'Simon, go back'. While leading the demonstration at Lahore, Lala Lajpat Rai was severely beaten in a police lathicharge and succumbed to his injuries. It charged the political atmosphere in India it was his death that Bhagat Singh and his comrades were seeking, to avenge when they killed a police official, Saunders, in December 1928.

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