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A "Listener" Interview

**"FREEDOM BEFORE BREAD"**

**The Problems That India is Facing To-Day**

**D**R. SURJIT SINGH, dark, tiny, energetic, who recently toured our University Colleges on behalf of the World Student Christian Federation, and who represented Indian Christians at the Conference of the New Zealand National Council of Churches at Christchurch, was interviewed by *The Listener* before his departure for India. It was not a religious interview, however, but political, and ran something like this.

"Tell me," our reporter began, "what you Indians have really been up to during the war. Why did you turn Cripps down, and seem now to be rejecting Wavell's offer?"

"I cannot enlighten you much on the immediate present," said Dr. Singh, "since I get out here only the disjointed newspaper cables that you do. But I can say that all politically alert Indians regarded the change of Government in Britain as a new start for India. Nehru and the other Congress leaders wired congratulations to Attlee and Cripps at once. It wasn't a political move but an expression of personal friendship and respect. Cripps appeals greatly to us—his combination of deep religion and great practical ability."

"Then why didn't you take his offer?"  
"It wasn't Cripps' offer. He was only a mouthpiece. We felt he personally would have held out much more."

**"Jam To-morrow"**

"What was wrong with the 'offer' itself?"

"Well, just that it was 'jam to-morrow.' Every clause but one dealt with the future, and that sole present clause insisted on Britain running India's war."

"Well, what alternative was there? Indians were not willing to run it."

"But we were. Since Indians would have to do 99 per cent of the fighting and suffering in any case, Congress proposed to turn it from a mercenary soldiers' war into a people's war. We pressed for a civilian Minister of Defence responsible to the Indian Provisional Government, leaving of course the Commander-in-Chief still responsible in strategy to the British War Cabinet, enlarged to take in an Indian member. If this had been granted the Cripps' proposals would have been accepted."

**The Position of Gandhi**

Our reporter was unconvinced. "I can't see how this squares with the well-known pacifism of Gandhi, your leader. Nor, I am sure, can other New Zealanders."

"Yes, Gandhi is leader—in the sense that your King is," explained Dr. Singh. "He is our national symbol, the type of what we most revere and admire in humanity—the prophet who has restored our self-respect as Indians and our nerve. But, like the King, he only comes into daily politics when differences need to be reconciled, either among ourselves or, say, with the British Government. When the Congress (or National) Party set up a committee for 'Active Defence'



**CONGRESS IN SESSION:** This photograph might suggest that Gandhi (in foreground) and his colleagues have been "floored." They have, of course, floored themselves, but Dr. Singh says in this interview that there is hope for India yet



**DR. SURJIT SINGH**  
*"The problems are not insoluble"*

at the start of the war, Gandhi naturally retired. So, you remember, did George Lansbury, also a religious pacifist, who was Labour Party leader before Attlee. But when Congress got into an impasse around the time of the Cripps' proposals they called Gandhi back to cut the knot. When he had simplified the issue—and, incidentally, had put his pacifist case once more—he again stepped into the background."

"Where will you be when Gandhi dies?"

"No single man can take his place as symbol of the nation. All the same Gandhi has already delegated very much to Nehru, who, although a clear-cut socialist, is felt to be above Party. He stands for youth, labour, and the peasants."

"But he stands also for the Congress. If it became the Government would that not be totalitarianism—rule by one party only?"

"Congress could never remain one party in a free India," Dr. Singh insisted. "Its Right and Left wings would at once replace the present political struggle by a social contest."

"What hinders you from settling down to these social and economic problems right away? If I lived in India myself I'd be so horrified by the poverty and social rifts that I'd come to any sort of terms with the foreign government that would enable work on these problems to get started. Aren't you hag-ridden by your independence obsession? Why do your politicians still refuse Wavell's offer? Nine-tenths of the cake is surely better than no bread? Anyhow, isn't the real stumbling-block now your failure to agree among yourselves?"

"You mean of course the Moslem League's demand for Pakistan," Singh answered, taking up the last question first. "Candidly I have to regard Jinnah's League as a vested interest. Since the Minto-Morley Reforms in 1909 established communal electorates—that is, voting by religions—the League has worked itself into claiming to act as spokesman for all Moslems, though plenty in fact support Congress against it, and even hold high Congress offices. When the Viceroy offered Moslems half the seats in the proposed Constitution-making Assembly, though they are only a quarter of the population, our Congress leaders backed up the offer. But neither Lord Wavell nor Congress could stand for Mr. Jinnah himself nominating the lot. That is how the Simla Conference fell down."

**The Function of Minorities**

"Then what about letting them have their Pakistan?"

"If most Moslems really wanted it I think it would be considered, even though having two Moslem islands inside Hindustan, which is what it would mean, would be ridiculous economically. But the whole approach is wrong. I belong personally to both of the next

(continued on next page)