

January 26th: When People Were Urged to Celebrate it as Independence Day

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The roots of the celebrations on the 26th of January as our Republic Day actually go back to a very significant development in our Independence struggle. Till 1929, Gandhiji and the mainstream of the Indian National Congress could not decide whether to demand complete independence from the British Empire. Motilal Nehru and the older lot wanted step-by-step progress and were demanding 'dominion status' so that India remained a loose part of the British Empire, but enjoyed considerable autonomy. The younger section of the Congress led by Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose was, however, not satisfied with Motilal's idea and insisted on more complete independence from British rule.

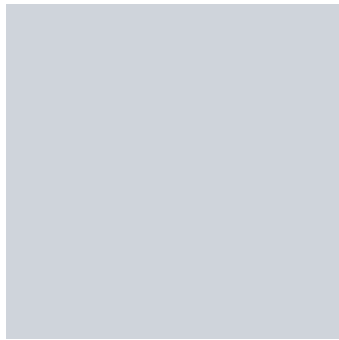
In 1927, the British government set up a Commission under John Simon to suggest constitutional changes in India. Congress and the Muslim League boycotted it as it was an all-European body with no Indian representatives. They started demonstrations against the Simon Commission in 1928 and during the protest in Lahore, the police beat up Lala Lajpat Rai so grievously that he succumbed to injuries. The British dared the Indians to produce their own report on the Indian constitution and the major Indian parties accepted the challenge. This resulted in the Nehru Report piloted by Motilal that endorsed 'dominion status'. Though Jawaharlal was its secretary, he did not agree with its ultimate recommendation. The Jawaharlal camp had earlier tried but failed to get the Congress to adopt a resolution demanding full independence at the Madras session in 1927. In 1928, Jawaharlal tried again at the Calcutta session, but could not succeed as Gandhiji was yet to agree. On the other hand, when the Viceroy was not amenable to Gandhiji's middle path and also attempted to thrust dominion status, there was considerable resentment among Indians. Gandhiji then decided to swing in favour of complete independence.

Thus, the younger Nehru was made President of the Indian National Congress at the Lahore session. Jawaharlal successfully passed the Purna Swaraj resolution in December 1929. On the 31st of December, he unfurled the flag of Independent India on the banks of the Ravi River at Lahore. It was then that Congress urged the people to celebrate the 26th of January as "Independence Day". The 26th of January 1950 was the day from which the Indian Constitution came into effect. The Purna Swaraj resolution of 1929 was, indeed, a historic decision as it marked an important phase in India's struggle for

Independence. From 26th January 1930 to 26th January 1950, when the same date was declared as Republic Day, is a long saga of tenacity, when thousands went to jail and hundreds lost their lives.

During these decades, the most treacherous role was played by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the Hindu Mahasabha. They did not participate in India's freedom struggle and often helped the British. For instance, on July 26th July 1942, the Deputy Chief Minister of Bengal and Hindu Mahasabha leader, Syamaprasad Mukherjee wrote to the Governor of Bengal, John Herbert, that the upcoming agitation by the Congress (Quit India movement) must be crushed. He condemned the national movement declaring "anybody who, during the war, plans to stir up mass feelings, resulting in internal disturbances or insecurity, must be resisted by....government". Syamaprasad further wrote "Mookerjee approached the Governor saying "I am willing to offer you my whole-hearted cooperation". A similar shameless tradition was set by his leader, VD Savarkar, who had begged the British for mercy and for being released from jail, promising to help the empire against India.

Finally, when the Indian National Congress succeeded in getting Independence, the RSS and Mahasabha blamed Gandhiji for the Partition and their supporters assassinated the Mahatma. The RSS was declared illegal and banned for 18 months and its leaders jailed. When they were finally released in July 1949, RSS leaders appeared chastened. Two years later, they invited the same Syamaprasad, who had betrayed the Freedom Struggle, to set up a political party, the Jana Sangh. This would later transform itself into the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). On this 26th of January, it is only with disgust that we recall the shameful history of the Hindu Right that rules India [at present](#).



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