

The History of the Twentieth Century

Episode 223

“A Calculated Piece of Inhumanity”

Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

“Our reign in India or anywhere else has never stood on the basis of physical force alone, and it would be fatal to the British Empire if we were to try to base ourselves only upon it.”

Winston Churchill.

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

[music: Opening Theme]

Episode 223. A Calculated Piece of Inhumanity.

When we left off at the end of last week’s episode, Mohandas Gandhi left South Africa in July 1914, never to return to the country where he had spent most of his adult life. He was on his way back to his native India, although he meant first to visit Britain. His ship arrived on August 4, just in time for him to witness firsthand the expiration of the ultimatum and Britain’s declaration of war on Germany.

Gandhi was swept up in the patriotic fervor on display in Britain. Men were lining up to enlist; women were volunteering to make bandages and dressings for the wounded. Once again, Gandhi watched the British go to war and saw an opportunity for Indians to earn British respect that might eventually translate into greater rights. For the third time in as many wars, Gandhi organized an Indian volunteer ambulance corps, this one to go to France and help treat and evacuate the wounded. About fifty volunteers in all were sent across the Channel.

The British government expressed its gratitude for the assistance. The Indian nationalists in London, on the other hand, who tended to be young student activist radicals, were appalled at the sight of the noted champion of Indian rights recruiting Indians to assist their oppressor in its European war.

I’ll just remind you here that, as you know from episode 102, some 25,000 Indian soldiers fought on the Western Front in the early months of the war.

Gandhi intended to stay in England and continue with this work, but as autumn began transitioning to winter, the cold and the damp were adversely affecting the 45-year-old and his wife of the same age. They decided to leave the country, and in November, boarded a ship bound for India. They arrived in January 1915 to a spirited welcome, and apart from one trip to Britain in 1931, Gandhi would never leave India again.

The Indian National Congress had recently seen a split between moderates and extremists. One of the principal leaders of the moderate, liberal side of the Congress was Gopal Krishna Gokhale, who was also, not coincidentally, a strong supporter of Mohandas Gandhi. Gokhale had encouraged Gandhi's actions in South Africa and had encouraged him to return to his native country to teach his principles of satyagraha. But the India of 1915 was a very different place, more modernized, better educated, more industrialized, than the India Gandhi had left in 1893. For this reason, Gokhale encouraged Gandhi to spend a year traveling across the country and reacquainting himself with India before jumping into the nationalist struggle. Gandhi took this advice, but alas, Gokhale, who had been something of a mentor and patron for Gandhi in India, passed away just a few weeks after Gandhi arrived.

The nationalist movement in India was divided. It had always been divided. The Congress was overwhelmingly Hindu, and usually led by high-caste, educated Brahmins, like Gokhale. Then there was the Muslim League. Both of these groups had their internal quarrels, their quarrels with each other, and then there were all the Indians not represented by either organization, like say, the Sikhs, or India's fifty million Dalits, who got no consideration from anybody.

Gandhi's experience in South Africa had taught him that battles were not won while Indians were fractured into separate communities by religion and caste. It was when Indians from all backgrounds came together that their might became too great for the British to ignore.

But Gandhi was no more than a marginal figure in the Indian nationalist movement. At this point in our story, we've come back around to where we were at the end of episode 220. In 1916, the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League held a joint meeting in Lucknow which led to the agreement known as the Lucknow Pact, under which the Muslim League agreed to support home rule in exchange for the Congress endorsing the Muslim League demand for separate Muslim representation in provincial legislatures.

More radical nationalists who were impatient with the Congress approach rallied around the 60-year-old Bal Gangadhar Tilak, one of the radicals rejected by the Congress moderates. Tilak was an ardent supporter of swaraj by any means and had recently been released following six years in prison for sedition. Tilak worked with Annie Besant, a freethinking English woman, formerly a vicar's wife who took up various radical causes, like socialism and Irish Home Rule, causes that led her to leave her Tory husband and befriend Fabians like George Bernard Shaw. She was eventually attracted to theosophy and became president of the Theosophical Society, which

brought her to India, where she became an advocate for Indian home rule. When the Great War began, Besant, echoing Irish nationalists, declared “England’s need is India’s opportunity.”

Now 69 years old, Besant, along with Tilak and others organized the All-India Home Rule League. Besant was arrested in 1917, which triggered loud protests not only from the Home Rule League, but the more moderate Congress and Muslim League. These protests forced her release, and soon afterward, this now-70-year-old English woman was elected president of the Indian National Congress.

What I’m saying here is, the Indian nationalist movement had no shortage of leaders or of organizations or of strategies or of enthusiasm, which invites the question: What exactly does a middle-aged expatriate like Mohandas Gandhi bring to the table that the movement doesn’t already have? Well, he brings satyagraha. But remember that satyagraha is not just a protest tactic. It’s a philosophy. It’s a way of life. It is not something to be adopted. It is something to be studied. It is something to be lived.

Gandhi’s message, that the nationalist movement needed to pause for a moment and look inward, to study, to meditate, to join an ashram, was not a message the movement was interested in listening to. It was a message that Gokhale had supported and had encouraged Gandhi to bring home to India. But Gokhale was dead, more radical figures like Tilak and Besant were now leading the movement, and they weren’t much interested in talking about spiritual purification.

Gandhi set up an ashram in his home province of Gujarat, along the bank of the Sabarmati River, along the model of his Phoenix Farm in Natal, and invited family members and supporters, including some from South Africa, to live there in accordance with the principles of satyagraha. Financial support came from wealthy Gujaratis. He proclaimed that in order to win independence, India must become a “purified country.” Notice the implication that at present it was not. And he asserted his view that the nationalist movement must be a mass movement composed of all classes of Indians in the most shocking manner possible: by inviting a Dalit family, that is, an “untouchable” family, to live at the ashram. This was a blatant attack on one of Hinduism’s biggest taboos, and provoked controversy even within Gandhi’s own family. Even within his marriage; his wife threatened to leave him over it.

Gandhi attended the Lucknow conference in December 1916, but he was among those seated in the audience, not up front. He was not conspicuous, but he did attract the attention of one excitable young man named Raj Kumar Shukla, who had come to the conference to express his own grievances against British rule. After none of the important people at the conference would listen to him, Shukla approached Gandhi, who had difficulty understanding the young man’s rural dialect. Another attendee, a Bihari lawyer, offered to serve as interpreter. It seemed the young man was an indigo farmer, from the province of Bihar, which borders on Uttar Pradesh, which was where the Lucknow Conference was being held, and he wanted someone to come and

investigate the treatment of indigo farmers in his home region of Champaran. (I sure hope I'm pronouncing all these names correctly. My apologies if I'm not.)

Gandhi had never heard of the place, but he agreed to go there with Shukla a few months later; April 1917, the same month the United States declared war on Germany. Shukla escorted Gandhi as far as Patna, the capital of Bihar, which lies in northeastern India, just south of the border with Nepal. Much to Gandhi's frustration, Shukla turned out to have no money, to know no one in Patna, and he could not even speak the local language, and it seemed to Gandhi that though he had traveled most of the way, he wasn't even going to get to see this Champaran place.

But Gandhi did happen to know a lawyer he had met during his student days in London, a Muslim man named Maulana Mazharul Haq, who lived not too far away, so they called on him. Haq gave Gandhi a warm welcome. He was himself an activist in the nationalist movement and was already involved in advocacy for these very same indigo farmers. He was happy to bring Gandhi up to speed on just what was going on.

Bihar was a relatively poor and undeveloped region of India. Its principal export was indigo, and British people had been getting rich off indigo cultivation here since the days of the East India Company. In Champaran, the land owners were British people who relied on tenant farmers to do the actual work. The farmers were typically required to set aside a certain portion of their land to grow indigo, which was paid over to the landlord as rent. If you've been listening to the podcast from the beginning, you know that in the early twentieth century, German chemical firms began introducing modern artificial dyes that made indigo obsolete. As indigo prices fell, indigo crops became less valuable, to the point that many landlords were willing to accept payment in cash or other crops in lieu of indigo. This benefited the tenant farmers, as it gave them more flexibility; they could choose to plant whatever crops were fetching the highest prices.

Then came the Great War, and artificial dyes from Germany were off the world market, which meant a rebound in the price of indigo. Now that indigo was profitable again, the landowners quickly reverted to the old arrangement, forcing the tenant farmers to grow shares of indigo, which reduced their incomes even as the landowners enjoyed a wartime windfall. Haq and his circle of lawyers were taking legal actions on behalf of some of these tenant farmers, but there was little money to pay for lawyers, and many of these farmers feared their landlords too much to act openly against them.

One of the lawyers Gandhi was introduced to at this meeting was the 29-year-old Rajendra Prasad, who found this skinny, middle-aged man dressed in peasant homespun, who couldn't even speak Bihari, and who refused all foods except nuts and dates to be, shall we say, a few lentils short of a dal, but nevertheless volunteered to escort him into the most remote places in Champaran so he could see the plight of the farmers for himself.

Gandhi made it only as far as the first village on his proposed tour when he was stopped by a police officer and informed that the local authorities had ordered him expelled from the region. Mohandas Gandhi may not have been a household name in India—not yet—but the authorities in the British Raj were all too familiar with his agitation in South Africa, and his trip to Bihar immediately set off alarm bells, hence the expulsion order, which was possible under the special powers granted to the Indian government under the wartime Defence of India Act.

Gandhi refused to comply with the expulsion order, and he was summoned to appear before the local magistrate to show cause why he should not be imprisoned. Gandhi appeared at the hearing, prepared to tell the court he fully intended to be imprisoned, that was the whole point, but word of his defiance spread like wildfire among the local people, who were quite unaccustomed to anyone defying the Raj. About two thousand of the locals showed up at Gandhi's hearing, overwhelming the small courthouse where it was being held and convincing the magistrate that there was more risk of unrest from imprisoning Gandhi than there was from allowing him to remain free.

The magistrate postponed the hearing and wired the lieutenant governor to request instructions. The lieutenant governor was an Indian Civil Service official named Sir Edward Albert Gait. He reviewed the matter and decided that the local authorities who had issued the expulsion order against Gandhi had overreacted and had the order withdrawn. Gandhi was free to proceed with his tour.

The local farmers were stunned. They had never before seen an Indian go toe-to-toe with the British Raj and make the British back down. And more than that, they clearly understood that it was not Gandhi alone who had successfully defied the British. This was also their victory. Their support and their numbers were what had tipped the scales.

Gandhi proceeded with his tour of the region over the rest of April and May. Wherever he went, he drew huge crowds. They followed him everywhere, chanting his name, throwing flower petals onto his path, drawing his carriage with their own shoulders, and generally treating him like a holy man. It was at this time that he was first given the name Mahatma, derived from *maha atma*, which is Sanskrit for "Great Soul." Gandhi, though, was never comfortable with that name. He preferred the other nickname he acquired at this time: *Bapu*, meaning Father, although maybe it's better translated as Papa, or Daddy.

The commotion in Bihar drew favorable newspaper coverage across India. Thanks in part to the education system put in place by the British, far more Indians were literate in 1917 than had been the case in 1893, when Gandhi had left the country. In fact, there were about 1400 newspapers across India by this time, and all of them were printing stories about the Mahatma's tour of Bihar.

Gandhi met with provincial officials and persuaded them to open a public inquiry into the plight of the peasant farmers of Champaran. British-born officials in the Indian Civil Service were

pleasantly surprised to discover, or be reminded, that the Mahatma had once had a London legal education and was perfectly capable of negotiating with them, pleading his case, and compromising when it would help get an agreement. This had not been their experience with the other Indian nationalists they had dealt with. Gandhi was always willing to compromise; his supporters often complained he was too willing. On the other hand, officials of the Raj always found it easier to give Gandhi some small concession rather than a flat refusal that would lead to a confrontation with his devoted followers.

History will know this campaign as the Champaran Satyagraha, and although the victories Gandhi won here were slight, they were real. They had propelled him to the front rank of leaders in the Indian nationalist movement and given him his first cadre of followers outside his native Gujarat.

[music: *Moonlight and Daybreak*]

Austen Chamberlain, the son of the old Liberal Unionist lion Joseph Chamberlain, now 53 years old, served as Secretary of State for India in the coalition government created in 1915. In that position, Chamberlain enthusiastically supported the Indian Army campaign against the Ottoman Empire in Mesopotamia, but as you know from episode 120, that campaign saw the humiliating surrender at Kut in April 1916. This setback led Chamberlain to resign in 1917; as a matter of principle he accepted ultimate responsibility for the surrender, though of course he had not personally commanded the Army. And there was the matter of the unrest and the protests in India.

Chamberlain's replacement was the 37-year-old Edwin Montagu, a promising Liberal up-and-comer, whom we've encountered before in the podcast. In a speech in the Commons shortly after assuming office, Montagu told the House that the Government intended to include more Indians in the governance of India, "with a view to the progressive realization of responsible government in India, as an integral part of the British Empire."

In Britain, this remark was not seen as particularly controversial. India's contributions to the war effort had not gone unnoticed in Britain, and the view that Indians had earned the right to a larger role in the governance of their own country was becoming accepted. To the British, though, the key phrase here was "an integral part of the British Empire."

But in India, a different phrase jumped out and demanded attention: the words "responsible government." In British constitutional language, *responsible government* means a government responsive to the people it rules; in other words, an elected government. The very same phrase had been bandied about when the Union of South Africa had been created seven years ago; now the British government's spokesman for India seemed to be saying that the government's goal was self-rule—the first time a British minister had ever suggested such a thing for a non-white country.

You might think this would encourage the nationalist movement in India; in fact, it shattered the Lucknow Pact and divided the movement. Religious minorities, like Muslims and Sikhs and Christians, worried about their place under a Hindu-dominated government. Lower-caste Hindus fretted about Brahmin domination. Rural people feared domination by urban Indians. Moderates fought with extremists. Violence broke out between Hindus and Muslims. The Viceroy and his government despaired. They had hoped that British concessions would empower the moderates and discredit the extremists. Instead, it seemed to turn everyone into an extremist.

And then there was the Mahatma, who, in his typically quirky, almost holy-man way, dismissed the question of what Montagu meant as irrelevant. What mattered was not whether the British were ready to grant self-government, but whether Indians were ready spiritually to receive it.

This led Gandhi, the apostle of ahimsa, to spend the last year of the Great War recruiting Indian soldiers to fight for the Empire. This move was surprising and controversial. After his experience in South Africa, Gandhi surely didn't expect British gratitude. It was meant to build national character. To those who admired his pacifism, and felt betrayed, Gandhi argued that Indians had always been a warlike people, and even satyagraha required a martial discipline. Or as Gandhi put it succinctly, if a bit opaquely: "You cannot teach ahimsa to a man who cannot kill."

Montagu took a tour of India, consulted with the Viceroy, and met with Indian leaders, including Gandhi. In July 1918, the British government announced the substance of its reform of Indian government. It was dubbed *diarchy*, or dual rule. The Viceroy and government would retain control of the most essential government functions; finance, law enforcement and administration, the military, but the remaining portfolios; agriculture, health, education, would be turned over to the elected local and provincial governments and be administered by Indians.

After the fuss kicked up by Montagu's "responsible government" speech, this was a letdown. Still, an optimist might see it as a step forward toward full swaraj. The reforms were made law by the British Parliament's Government of India Act, passed in May 1919. But by this time, as you well know if you've been listening to this podcast, many other political currents were swirling in the post-war world of 1919. Revolution in Russia. Revolt in Ireland. Unrest in Egypt and the Near East. Stubborn nationalist resistance in Turkey. A border war between British India and Afghanistan. And political unrest, occasionally violence, in India itself.

The Defence of India Act, which gave the Indian government extraordinary wartime powers, was set to expire six months after the conclusion of the Great War. But there were fears within the government that instability and revolution worldwide were feeding unrest and political violence in India. A committee was assembled, under the leadership of a British Indian jurist, Sir Sidney Rowlatt, to recommend legislation. The Rowlatt Committee drafted a bill that would extend extraordinary wartime measures, such as empowering the government to conduct searches and arrests without warrants, to censor the press, to hold prisoners indefinitely without trial, and to conduct secret trials without juries.

The bill was presented to the Imperial Legislative Council and passed in March 1919. Its official name was the Anarchical and Revolutionary Crimes Act of 1919, although it's usually called the Rowlatt Act. Every Indian on the Legislative Council voted against it, and one of them, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, one of the leading voices in both the Muslim League and the Indian National Congress, resigned over it. In his resignation letter to the Viceroy, Jinnah wrote that "a Government that passes or sanctions such a law in times of peace forfeits its claim to be called a civilized government."

Opposition to the Rowlatt Act was universal across India, and that included Gandhi, who declared the Act "evidence of a determined policy of repression." After his successful campaign in Bihar, and another in his home region of Gujarat, Gandhi felt ready to attempt his first national satyagraha campaign, against the new legislation. He called for general strikes, which saw some success, but the strikes devolved into violence in some places, including Delhi and the Punjab.

The Punjab was a complicated place. It had three major religious communities. It had its share of Muslims and Hindus, but it is also the center of the Sikh faith. The Golden Temple, the most important place of worship for Sikhs, is located in the city of Amritsar, which at this time was the capital of the province. And it was at this time a center of unrest.

Gandhi didn't want to see any more violence. On April 8, he began a journey to Amritsar, but British authorities, fearful of more unrest, intercepted Gandhi en route. Some wanted to arrest him, but that was deemed too provocative, and he was simply turned around and sent back home.

Rumors spread that Gandhi had in fact been arrested, which set off rioting in several Indian cities, including Amritsar, where two local leaders who had been supporting Gandhi's campaign were themselves arrested. On April 10, a demonstration was held in the city to demand their release. Soldiers fired into the crowd, killing some of the demonstrators, which in turn touched off rioting. Four Europeans were killed. One English missionary, a woman named Marcella Sherwood, who operated a school for Indian children was attacked by a mob, but rescued by a group of Indian men, including the father of one of her pupils, who escorted her away and turned her over to the military for protection.

Amritsar was relatively quiet the next couple of days, which were a Friday and a Saturday. On Saturday night, the leaders of the protest in Amritsar met and called for a public protest demonstration to be held the next day, Sunday, April 13, at 6:30 PM at a place called the Jallianwala Bagh, an enclosed garden near the Golden Temple.

The next day, Sunday, the commanding military officer in the region, a British officer, Colonel Reginald Dyer, marched a brigade of Indian soldiers into Amritsar. They took four hours to march through the city, banging a drum and stopping frequently to read out a proclamation. Amritsar was under martial law. An 8:00 curfew was declared. All public meetings of more than four persons were prohibited.

It is unclear how many people in Amritsar were actually aware of that morning's declaration of martial law. Today was Baisakhi, which is a spring festival day for Hindus and New Year's Day and a major holiday for Sikhs. This meant there would be a great many Sikh worshippers at the Golden Temple; this was also the day that farmers and merchants came to the city for the annual horse and cattle fair.

By mid-afternoon, word came to Colonel Dyer of the impending demonstration at the Jallianwala Bagh, which was still on for 6:30 that evening. Word also came to him that a crowd of at least 6,000—over 10,000 by some estimates—had gathered in the Jallianwala Bagh. Some of them were no doubt worshippers stopping by on their way to or from the Golden Temple. Others may have been people who went to the garden after the police shut down the cattle fair, pursuant to Dyer's declaration. It was a public place of about six or seven acres that often hosted crowds. That's why the demonstration had been scheduled there in the first place; the protestors wanted to get their message out to the larger public. And allow me to emphasize again that it is not clear how many of the people in the garden that day were even aware of the martial law declaration.

What does seem clear is that Colonel Dyer regarded the assembly at the Jallianwala Bagh as a personal affront. At 6:30, the demonstration began as scheduled. An hour later, 7:30 PM, a half-hour before the curfew went into effect, Dyer ordered the narrow alleyways that were the only exits from the Jallianwala Bagh closed. He then marched about fifty Indian riflemen into the garden and ordered them to open fire on the crowd. They fired for about ten minutes. The soldiers fired into the center of the garden. When the crowd fled to the walls, the soldiers fired at the walls. They fired about 1,650 rounds all together. In the confined space, many of those bullets killed or wounded more than one person each. Hundreds were killed and wounded by the shooting. Many more were killed or wounded after being crushed in the resulting panic as the crowds vainly sought safety.

No attempt was made at the time to determine the number of casualties. The Punjab government initially declared a total of 200 casualties, a number clearly too low. There were certainly 400 killed and 1200 wounded at a minimum, perhaps more. The shooting did not stop until the soldiers' supply of ammunition was spent, at which point Dyer and his unit withdrew. The dead and wounded were left where they fell. Bodies were piled higher than a person's head and the cries and moans of the wounded filled the garden.

To underscore his message, Colonel Dyer ordered a whipping post set up on the street where Marcella Sherwood had been attacked. Every Indian man who used the street was ordered to crawl on his belly. Those who refused were strung to the post and whipped. He later explained this policy by saying, "Some Indians crawl face downwards in front of their gods. I wanted them to know that a British woman is as sacred as a Hindu god."

Because Amritsar was under martial law, news of what happened leaked out only gradually, and it was weeks before the full scale of the massacre was known. And the violence and retribution

continued. Hundreds were arrested on suspicion of involvement in the riots, while Dyer and his soldiers went unpunished.

The British-led Indian government offered 500 rupees compensation to the families of every Indian killed that day. The families of the four white people killed in the riots were paid 400,000 rupees each. In other words, each one of those European families received a payment amounting to triple the total amount paid to all the families of the hundreds of Indian victims.

The reaction to the massacre in India was universal outrage. You would expect no less. For many Indians, this moment was the point of no return. It was compared to the war crimes committed by German soldiers in Belgium. Even those moderates who believed that British rule, however flawed or unequal it may have been in practice, still stood in principle for something greater than “might makes right,” that it stood for democracy and justice and similar high ideals, could no longer convince themselves this was true. The marriage between Britain and India was irretrievably broken.

If the massacre at the Jallianwala Bagh was the stripes of a lash on India’s back, the British response to it was a hefty dose of salt rubbed into the wound. Not only was the massacre not condemned, but Dyer’s actions were roundly applauded. To the British in India, Colonel Dyer had single-handedly snuffed out an Indian uprising on the scale of the one in 1857. He was proclaimed a hero. A ladies’ committee raised funds to present Dyer with an award for his service. Back in Britain itself, the reaction was similar.

One of the few people in Britain who was not happy with Colonel Dyer’s actions was Edwin Montagu, the Secretary of State for India. When the Indian National Congress announced that it would conduct an investigation into the massacre, Montagu prodded the government in New Delhi to do more than simply wait for the Congress to do the work, so the Indian government announced the creation of the Hunter Commission, led by Lord Hunter, a respected lawyer, once solicitor general for Scotland. The nine-member Commission included three native Indians.

The Congress investigation was headed by Motilal Nehru, a prominent figure among moderate nationalists, but nearly two thousand people provided eyewitness testimony and the investigation threatened to collapse under the weight of this mountain of evidence that needed to be sifted and analyzed.

The person for that job, as it would turn out, would be Mohandas Gandhi, the British-trained lawyer. When Gandhi first heard of the massacre, he called off his satyagraha campaign at once, calling it a “Himalayan miscalculation.” Whereas most people would have simply blamed the British for being barbarians, Gandhi’s view was that satyagraha was not meant either to commit violence or to provoke it, and therefore his strategy needed retooling.

Gandhi had a keen analytical mind, and he was able to assemble the evidence collected by the Congress investigation into a damning indictment of Dyer and his soldiers. Witnesses described

how the crowd tried to flee, but the bullets followed them. When people fell to the ground, the soldiers pointed their weapons at the ground and continued shooting. Some of the witnesses were family members who described rushing to the scene and sitting with their loved ones as they died.

The Congress report, authored by Gandhi, was published on March 25, 1920 and it labeled the massacre “a calculated piece of inhumanity towards utterly innocent and unarmed men, including children, and unparalleled for its ferocity in the history of modern British administration.”

Meanwhile, the Hunter Commission continued its work. Dyer himself appeared before that commission. He showed not the slightest particle of regret and defended his actions with a haughty arrogance that stunned the Commission members. He freely acknowledged that he had come to the Jallianwala Bagh not to warn, but to punish, with the specific intent of shooting as many people as possible. When asked if he could have peacefully dispersed the crowds gathered there, he agreed that he could have, “but then they would have come back again and laughed and I would have made, what I consider, a fool of myself.”

Dyer’s unit had brought armored cars with mounted machine guns, but the cars had been unable to pass through the narrow passageways into the Jallianwala Bagh itself. When asked if he would have brought the armored cars in and turned their machine guns on the crowd if that had been possible, he calmly replied, “I think probably, yes.” When asked whether he had made any effort to tend to the wounded after the shooting, he told the Commission, “Certainly not. It was not my job. Hospitals were open and they could have gone there.”

The Hunter report was released on May 5. The tone of this report was much more reserved; it called Dyer’s actions “a grave error” and said that forcing Indians to crawl on their bellies was “injudicious.” The government relieved Dyer of his command.

Despite its milquetoast conclusions though, the facts reported by the Hunter Commission largely agreed with the Congress report. This did little to satisfy the people of India, since no punitive action was taken, beyond relieving Dyer of his command. Gandhi denounced the Hunter report, calling it “thinly disguised judicial whitewash.”

The question of what to do with Dyer now fell into the lap of the British war minister, who at this moment was none other than Winston Churchill, who certainly keeps popping up in this podcast. Churchill was about as old school, rah, rah Empire as you could imagine, but he was also an idealist of the sort who believed that it was not British rifles but British ideals that made the Empire great, as you can tell from the quote I read at the top of the episode. Churchill was appalled by the massacre and wanted to cashier Dyer. But it wasn’t Churchill’s decision to make alone. It was to be made by the Army Council. As war minister, Churchill was president of the Council, but a majority of its members were career military officers who resisted even that degree of punishment. After weeks of debate, Churchill managed only to get the Council to agree

not to give Dyer a new command, which was effectively a request for his resignation. Even this mild punishment was controversial. Dyer's callous remarks to the Hunter Commission had cost him support, but there were still those in Britain, especially the Conservatives and Conservative newspapers like the *Daily Mail*, who insisted Dyer was a hero, the man who had saved British rule in India.

The government was forced to allow the House of Commons to debate the decision regarding Dyer. The government spokesman for this debate was Edwin Montagu. He was in a difficult position. Montagu was Jewish; one of the first practicing Jews to serve in the British Cabinet, and the same Tories who saw Dyer as a true British patriot saw Montagu as someone not fully British and opposed to Dyer out of perhaps sinister motives. Montagu was quite aware of the anti-Semitism directed against him and lost his cool during his speech in the face of repeated heckling and blurted out remarks like, "Are you going to keep your hold on India by terrorism?"

It was widely perceived that Montagu had hurt rather than helped the government's case. Speaking against the government was Edward Carson, leader of the Ulster Unionist Party, who attacked the government's actions as "un-English," a remark widely interpreted as an anti-Semitic slur against Montagu.

Then it was Winston Churchill's turn to speak. You should sit up and take note of this moment, as it is the first and last time in the history of the twentieth century that you are going to find Winston Churchill taking a stand alongside Mohandas Gandhi. Churchill did not attack Dyer directly, nor criticize his supporters. Instead he adopted a strategy Gandhi would have approved of: satyagraha, the strength of truth. He recited the facts of the incident to the House. Every military officer has to make hard decisions, Churchill said, including the one on whether or not to order soldiers to open fire. Here, the people fired upon had been Dyer's countrymen, "citizens of our common Empire," as Churchill put it, citizens who were themselves not attacking anyone or anything.

In these circumstances, Churchill argued, Dyer's punishment was the absolute minimum anyone had the right to expect. "We have to make it absolutely clear, some way or other, that this is not the British way of doing business...Our reign in India, or anywhere else, has never stood on the basis of physical force alone."

The speech was one of the best ever given by a man famous for his speeches. One might even be tempted to call it his finest hour. The debate continued. Churchill himself was attacked as "responsible for the loss of more lives than any man sitting in this House," a reference to Gallipoli. The House ultimately voted to support the Cabinet's handling of Dyer's case.

In India, Motilal Nehru, Congress leader, distinguished Indian lawyer, former President of the Indian National Congress, and prominent moderate in the nationalist cause, had all his British-built furniture and his British-made clothing collected into a great pile in the courtyard of the family home. His son, a prominent young lawyer named Jawaharlal, and his three-year-old

granddaughter, little Indira, watched as their father and grandfather set the pile alight and the family's loyalty to the British Raj went up in smoke. From now on, the Nehrus would wear only homespun native Indian cloth, in accordance with the principles of the Mahatma.

On August 1, 1920, Bal Gangadhar Tilak passed away at the age of 64. The fifty-year-old Mohandas Gandhi was now the undisputed leader of the Indian nationalist movement, and he and the movement were now fully committed to independence from British rule.

We'll have to stop there for today. I thank you for listening, and I'd especially like to thank Richard for his kind donation, and thank you to Marissa for becoming a patron of the podcast. Donors and patrons like Richard and Marissa help cover the costs of making this show, which in turn keeps the podcast available free for everyone, so my thanks to them and to everyone else who has pitched in and helped out. If you'd like to become a patron or make a donation, just visit the website, historyofthetwentiethcentury.com and click on the PayPal or Patreon buttons.

The podcast website also contains notes about the music used on the podcast. Sometimes it's my own work, sometimes it's licensed, but most of the music you hear here is free and downloadable. If you hear a piece of music on the podcast and you would like to know more about it, including the composer, the performers, and a link to where you can download it, that would be the place to go. While you're there, you can leave a comment and let me know what you thought about today's show.

This is the sixth and final episode on our series on India. We've now brought the story of India up to the 1920s, and therefore in sync with the rest of the podcast. We will certainly return to India and check in again with Gandhi and the Indian independence movement in episodes to come.

And I hope you'll join me next week, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*, as we return to the United States. We saw the election of Warren G. Harding as President; now we will take a look at the early days of his administration and his most significant accomplishment. The Washington Naval Conference, next week, here, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh, and one more thing. Winston Churchill's political career had been under a shadow since the failure of the Gallipoli campaign. His speech in the Commons defending the government position on Colonel Dyer was an important step forward in the rehabilitation of his reputation. Alas for Edwin Montagu, once regarded as a political figure with a bright future, that same debate marked the eclipse of his own career. First his marriage, then his health, deteriorated, and he died in 1924, at the age of 45.

[music: Closing Theme]