

# THE MONTAGU-CHELMSFORD REFORMS & THE ROWLATT ACT

- In 1914, even the most extreme nationalists relaxed their campaign (Tilak)
- By 1916, Congress was reunited and calling for Dominion Status (self-gov within the Empire, like Australia etc)
- Congress and the Muslim League had started cooperating (very worrying for the Raj).
- Home-Rule Leagues were springing up all over Bombay and Madras
- And the Ghadr Movement was frightening the authorities

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- The British felt they needed to appease the nationalists in order to secure the support of the moderates (it had worked in 1909).
- Viceroy Chelmsford felt that a bold statement was the only way forward, sending a memo to London suggesting *“the endowment of British India, as an integral part of the Empire, with self-government”*
- *When the new Secretary of State for India Edwin Montagu joined the India Office in July 1917, London finally relented.*

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- Montagu persuaded the Cabinet to listen to Chelmsford and (despite Foreign Secretary Curzon's meddling) made a declaration in August 1917 promising moves to responsible government in the near future.
- In 1919, this promise took its first step as the Government of India Act (Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms)

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- The 1919 Act set up
  - a new 200 seat legislature in Delhi (to advise the Viceroy)
  - Expanded the provincial legislatures which gained control over
    - Education
    - Health
    - Local gov
    - Public works
  - 6 million more Indians were enfranchised (10%) even some women got the vote!

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- BUT:
  - The Viceroy and the Lieutenant Governors could still veto local legislation
  - The Viceroy could pass and enforce laws even if his council rejected them
  - The British retained control over Military, Foreign, Financial and Criminal affairs (as well as transport and communications)
  - There were still 'reserved seats' for minority groups (including landowners)
- The system became known as **DYARCHY** because responsibility was divided between Delhi and the 8 provinces

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- BTW – There was a clause in the Act which stated that the question of the Constitution had to be revisited by 1929 (it will be important later on)
- The Act caused a lot of debate
  - The right felt it was a betrayal, the left that it was a pathetic gesture
  - The issue of separate electorates was unpopular with all the major players but the Muslim League
  - The INC boycotted the 1919 elections in protest that the reforms did not go far enough (there was even more rioting in the Punjab)

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- During WWI Judge S.A.T Rowlatt wrote a report on the dangers of 'sedition' in India and how the Raj should face up to the problem. (One of the main fears was the development of the **Khilafat Movement**)
- On the strength of the report, New Delhi introduced a bill to prolong indefinitely the life of the draconian regulations that were in place to crush wartime dissent.
  - Imprisonment without trial
  - Judicial trial
  - Censorship
  - House arrest of suspects (not tried yet)

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- Montagu and Chelmsford both stated their reluctance to pass the Rowlatt Act, but both felt it was necessary given the nature of the threat
- The Act destroyed any (small) hope that the 1919 reforms had been a step in the right direction
- Clearly the British were still going to rely on coercion rather than debate and concessions
- Opposition to the Act spread, particularly in the Punjab where a number of **Hartals** were arranged in the spring of 1919