

The Failure of the Executive Council (1946–47)

Introduction

The Executive Council was formed in 1946 under the Cabinet Mission Plan as a temporary governing body for India. It was intended to include equal representation from both Hindus and Muslims, with Lord Wavell as the Viceroy and Jawaharlal Nehru as Vice President. The Muslim League later joined the Council after initial hesitation. However, despite its structure, deep mistrust between Congress and the League made the Council weak and ineffective.

Objectives of the Executive Council

The main aim of the Executive Council was to prepare India for independence by allowing both Hindus and Muslims to share power. It was supposed to give Indians experience in self-rule and provide a model of cooperation before a final constitution was written. The British hoped this arrangement would prevent partition by uniting the two communities. In theory, it was meant to build harmony, but in reality, these objectives could not be achieved.

Challenges Faced by the Executive Council

The Council quickly faced major challenges. Congress and the Muslim League did not trust each other, and both competed for more influence. Nehru and League ministers clashed frequently over policies. The League accused Congress of trying to dominate and ignoring Muslim concerns. At the same time, communal violence outside the Council deepened mistrust, while Lord Wavell struggled to control the situation. Most meetings ended in deadlock, showing the Council's inability to function effectively.

Reasons for Failure

The Executive Council failed because Congress refused to accept the League's demand for Pakistan, while the League insisted on protecting Muslim rights through a separate homeland. Communal violence across India made cooperation impossible. The British were unable to enforce discipline or provide clear leadership. Strong ideological differences—Congress wanting a united India and the League demanding partition—could not be reconciled. Rival propaganda and lack of sincerity from both sides further led to the Council's collapse.

Historical Significance

The collapse of the Executive Council carried great significance. It demonstrated that cooperation between Congress and the League was impossible. This strengthened the League's case for Pakistan and convinced the British that partition was the only solution. Congress blamed the League for the deadlock, further worsening relations. The failure of the Council became an important step that pushed India closer to independence and the partition of 1947, ultimately leading to the creation of Pakistan.