

The Hunter Committee (1919–1920)

Background and Purpose:

After the **Amritsar (Jallianwala Bagh) Massacre** of 1919, people in India and Britain were horrified. Thousands of innocent civilians had been shot by **General Dyer**, and the world demanded answers. To calm the outrage, the British government formed the **Hunter Committee** in **October 1919**, officially called the *Disorders Inquiry Committee*.

Its aim was to **investigate the events in Punjab**, especially the conduct of **General Dyer** and **Lieutenant Governor O'Dwyer**, and to determine whether martial law and shootings were justified.

Composition and Work:

The committee had **seven members** — **three Indians** and **four British**.

- Indian members were **Sir Chimanlal Setalvad**, **Sir Sultan Ahmad**, and **Pandit Jagat Narayan**.
- The head was **Lord William Hunter**, a senior British judge.

The committee visited **Lahore, Delhi, and Amritsar**, taking **testimonies from witnesses, officials, and military officers**. General Dyer was questioned about his decision to fire on the unarmed crowd. The committee also reviewed the **use of martial law**, which included **public flogging, crawling orders, and humiliation of Indians**.

Findings:

The Hunter Committee found that **General Dyer had exceeded his authority** and that his **actions were unjustified and excessive**. The firing was done **without warning** and continued even when people were trying to escape.

The report also criticized the **harsh punishments** and **public humiliations** imposed under martial law. However, the committee's report was **divided**:

- The **Indian members** wanted a **strong condemnation** and punishment for Dyer.
- The **British members** defended him and said strong measures were necessary to restore order.

As a result, the **final report was weak and biased**.

Reactions:

The **Indian public was outraged**. They saw the report as another act of injustice.

In **Britain**, Dyer was removed from his post but allowed to keep his pension — meaning he faced **no real punishment**. Many British politicians and newspapers even **praised him** for

maintaining “discipline.”

For Indians, this showed that **British justice only protected the British, not Indians.**

Mahatma Gandhi, Tagore, and the **Indian National Congress** condemned the decision.

Gandhi said it proved that **India must govern itself**, as the British could never be fair rulers.

Significance and Impact:

The Hunter Committee was a **turning point in Indian politics.**

It **exposed the cruelty** and **double standards** of British colonial rule. Indians realized that **appeals for justice within the system were useless.**

The failure to punish Dyer led to **mass disillusionment** with British authority.

This directly inspired Gandhi to launch the **Non-Cooperation Movement (1920)**, marking the **start of a new phase in India’s struggle for independence.**

Internationally, Britain’s reputation suffered, as the massacre and weak inquiry revealed the **true face of colonialism.**

The Hunter Committee thus became a **symbol of injustice** that awakened a stronger sense of **national unity and resistance** among Indians.