

# Simon Commission

## [UPSC Notes]

### What is Simon Commission?

Simon Commission was sent to India in 1928 by the British Crown under the leadership of Sir John Simon. This was a seven-member commission which was put together to help in understanding the shortcomings of the Indian administrative system.

The 7-member party did not have a single person of Indian origin, which is why it was heavily criticised and boycotted. One of the members was the upcoming leader of the Labour Party, Clement Atlee, who eventually advocated for self-government in India.

### Simon Commission- Historical Background

The Government of India Act 1919 laid the foundation for the need for the committee to look into India's administrative reforms. It states that a commission, 10 years from the act coming out, shall be set up to gauge the working of the reforms brought by the GOI act 1919. However, to understand the policy of the Simon Commission and the reaction it got from the Indian masses, it is important to know its history.

- The Government of India Act 1919 introduced 'diarchy' to the Indian masses. This act made provisions for a commission that should check its function and administrative progress after 10 years of it being active.
- The Indian masses and their leaders wanted the diarchy to be repealed. The corruption in the system was making life very difficult for the population.
- The political scenario in the UK hastened the appointment process of this commission. The parliament was being led by the Conservative Party, who feared losing their place to the Labour Party in the coming elections, which is why instead of 1929, the commission was formed in 1928 itself.
- The problem with this commission was that it had only British members. For a commission that wanted to understand the administration and how it affected the Indian masses, it lacked Indian representation, which is why the commission was severely criticised.
- Lorden Birkenhead, who was serving as the Secretary of State then, had already openly berated his perceived lack of capability of Indians to formulate reforms on their own. It was he who was responsible for the appointment of the members of the Simon Commission.
- Clement Atlee, one of this commission's members, later became Britain's Prime Minister. He harboured pro-Self-government sentiments for India. And it was under his tenure that India got its freedom in 1947.

### Why was Simon Commission Boycotted in India?

The Simon Commission was set up to examine the effect of reforms on the Indian masses and quite insensitive to the needs of the masses, the British government appointed only British MPs

as its members. This enraged the population of the country and the commission was met with sloganeering and severe criticism.

- The Congress Party boycotted the Commission in their 1927 Madras session.
- The Muslim League, under Muhammad Ali Jinnah's leadership, also boycotted and criticized it.
- However, the Justice Party in the south sided with the government over this.
- The Commission was met with slogans of 'Simon, go back' as soon as they landed in the Indian territory. These protests and sloganeering were matched with hartals and black flag demonstrations everywhere in the country.
- Lathi charge was issued to suppress this movement. Senior leaders like Lala Lajpat Rai and Pt. Jawahar Nehru came under clashes as well.
- Lala Lajpat Rai, who was a big name in the state of Punjab and a senior leader, was lathi-charged brutally. He succumbed to his injuries and passed away on 17th November, 1928.
- Dr B.R. Ambedkar submitted a report on behalf of the Bahishkrita Hitakarini Sabha that explained the cause of educating the depressed classes in the Bombay Presidency.

## Impact of the Simon Commission Report

The Simon Commission was met with great backlash, but they still completed their report and submitted it in 1930. The main highlights of the Simon Commission Report have been discussed below:

- Before the report, the British government promised the Indian masses that their opinion would be of note, and the outcome of this report would be India achieving dominion status under the British crown.
- The report suggested abolishing the diarchy system and setting up provincial units of governance that worked with relevant representatives,
- It suggested the setting up of communal electorates to resolve communal tensions between different sects of the society- primarily the Hindu-Muslim issue.
- The Simon Commission report led to the Government of India Act of 1935. This act was of prime importance as it served as the blueprint for the current Indian Constitution.
- The year 1937 saw the first provincial election in India, in which the Congress party won by a landslide majority in most of the provinces.
- This gave rise to Congress' impetus into the Indian political scene and gave the Indian Independence movement a lot of formidable leaders.