5. Why did the Round Table Conference fail?

In total there were 3 Round Table Conferences. The first in 1930, was boycotted by Congress because the Princely States and religious groups were represented separately, which Congress strongly disapproved of. Without Congress participation the decision to run India under dominion status in the form of a federation (that would include the princely states and the 11 British provinces) was unworkable, the idea of India becoming a federation was deemed unacceptable by Congress.

The second Round Table Conference in 1931 noted a change in the political situation. Viceroy Lord Irwin was replaced by Lord Willingdon (a strong Conservative) as a Tory dominated coalition government was elected in England. Gandhi adopted the view that India must be a united country, and thus ignoring the concerns of the minority groups, causing a further increases in difficulty to reach agreements and compromises. The main purpose of the second conference was to reach decisions on the previously proposed idea to federalise India.

The third and final Round Table Conference in 1932 saw no British Labour party representatives, who had been the main driving force behind the conferences. Congress also did not send representatives. The final conference again could not reach any definite conclusions and therefore collapsed.

The Round Table Conferences caused a large setback for Congress and proved highly successful for the British ‘divide and rule’ tactic of maintaining control over India. Gandhi’s arrogance at the second Round Table Conference, believing he alone could represent the whole of Congress, caused disputes and he was rejected as a representative of the Muslims and Untouchables within Congress, meaning overall Gandhi spoke on behalf of less than 50% of all Indians. Furthermore, the Round Table Conferences were designed by the British to cause disagreements resulting in the inability to reach agreements and therefore leaving India to be governed by the British as it had been previously. Gandhi’s uncompromising attitude fuelled this inability to reach conclusions, and the introduction of a Conservative dominated government coalition in Britain, further aided the English ‘divide and rule’ tactic to maintain their power and influence over India.

6. British Reluctance to grant independence and division in Indian Society

British Reluctance to Grant Independence:

- The 1918-1919 Montagu-Chelmsford reforms meant that despite granting Indians some more freedoms (such as half of the council advising the Viceroy had to be Indian), Britain still held 90% of the power over India. The British still controlled foreign policy, currency, communication and criminal law.

- Mr S Rowlatt was appointed in 1917 as a judge to ‘investigate revolutionary conspiracies’. When the Rowlatt Commission reported “revolutionary activity” in Bengal, Bombay and the Punjab in 1918, wartime public controls were continued such as; imprisonment without trial, trials without juries, censorship of the press, house arrests, restrictions of movement, and suspects imprisoned for 2 years for possession of a “seditious” newspaper.

- The Simon Commission 1927, showed how little regard the British government still had for Indian views on how their country should be governed.

- No concessions granted to Gandhi concerning the future of the government of India following the end of the Salt March.