

The Round Table Conferences, 1930-32



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A news clipping reporting the end of conference



- One of the **greatest leaders the world has ever seen**
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- The pioneer of **Sathyagraha or resistance** through civil disobedience

- Philosophy – based on **Ahimsa or total non-violence**

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- Honoured by Independent India as the **‘Father of the Nation’**
 - Gandhi led the masses to achieve **Swaraj or freedom** for our country from British rule

- **Organized nationwide campaigns** to ease

-
- poverty
 - expand women's rights
 - build religious and ethnic unity
 - end untouchability
 - and increase self-reliance

- He undertook the famous **Dandi Salt March** in **1930**
-

- to **protest against the British imposed Salt tax**











PIC: weebly.com



- Later **launched the Quit India Movement in 1942**

and demanded immediate independence for India

- Gandhi was also a prolific writer
- Editor of newspapers like – **Harijan, Young India, Navjivan**
- Autobiography- titled -

- In this historic speech – Gandhi states in unambiguous words –
-

- the corner stone of any settlement of the Indian problem should be complete independence of the country

- Some **speakers** have expressed their **apprehension about India being plunged into a state of lawlessness and rebellion**
- Gandhiji tells them that **no county has ever gained freedom without passing through a similar phase of agitation**

-
- Such lessons of history should teach the British Government that **it cannot go on opposing the just demands of the people endlessly**

- He has no desire to put the country through another spasm of struggle and pain
-

- He is ready for compromise if India is promised complete independence

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- Shows – **profound awareness of the problems of the country and his great commitment to the nation**

- Addressing prime minister and others Gandhi says...
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- “I Wish that I could have done without having to speak to you, but I felt that **I would not have been just to you or just to my principles** if I did not put in what may be the **last word on behalf of the Congress**”

-
- “ **I live under no illusion.** I do not think that anything that I can say this evening can possibly **influence the decision of the Cabinet.**”

-
- “probably the decision has been already taken,
Matters of the liberty of practically a whole
Continent can hardly be decided by mere
argumentation, even negotiation.”

-
- **“Negotiation has its purpose and has its play, but only under certain conditions, without those conditions negotiations are a fruitless task.”**

■ The Way of Negotiation

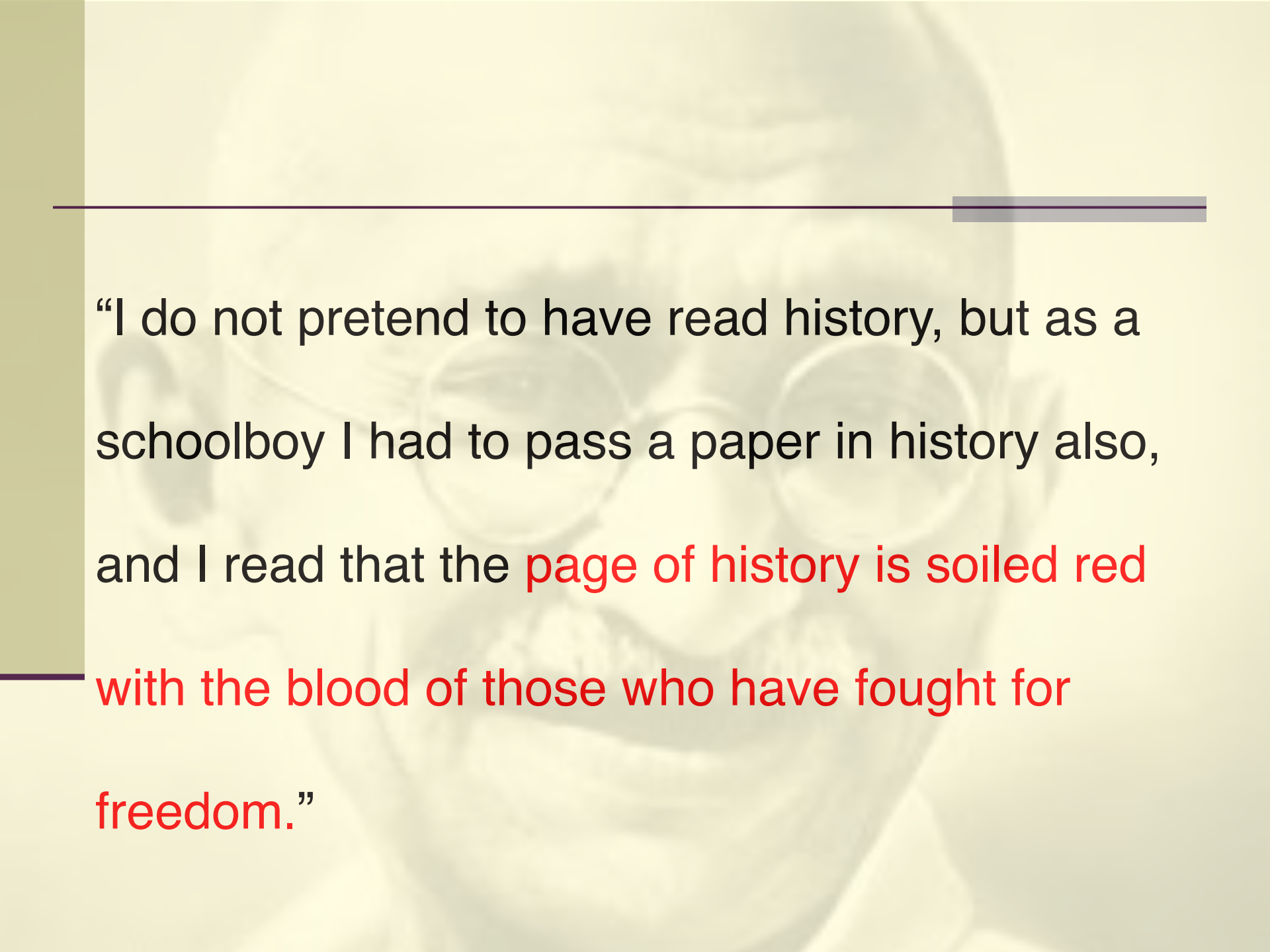
- **“The Congress represents the spirit of rebellion. I know that the word ‘rebellion’ must not be whispered at a Conference which has been summoned in order to arrive at agreed solutions of India’s troubles through negotiation.”**

■ The Way of Negotiation

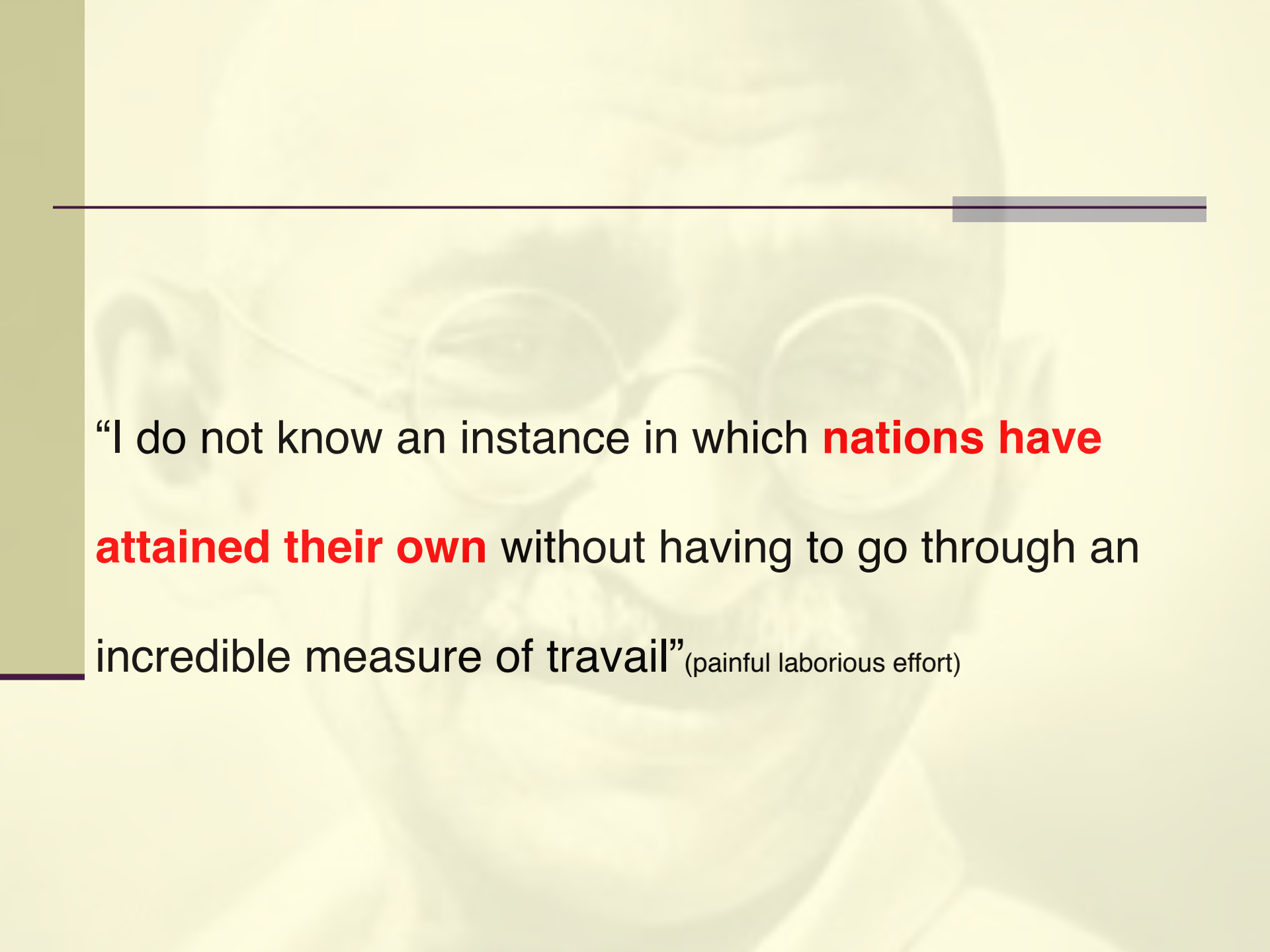
- “Speaker after speaker has got up and said that India should achieve her **liberty through negotiation**, by argument, and **that it will be the greatest glory of Great Britain if Great Britain yields to India’s demands by argument**. But the Congress does not hold quite that view. The Congress has an alternative which is unpleasant to you.”

■ The Old Way

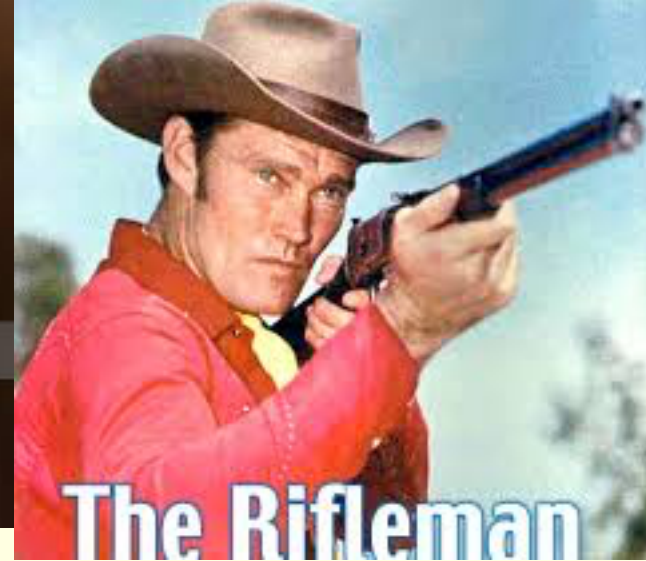
- I heard several speakers—I have tried to follow every speaker with the utmost attention and with all the respect that I could possibly give to these speakers—saying what a dire (terrible, dreadful) calamity it would be if India was fired with the spirit of lawlessness, rebellion, terrorism and so on.



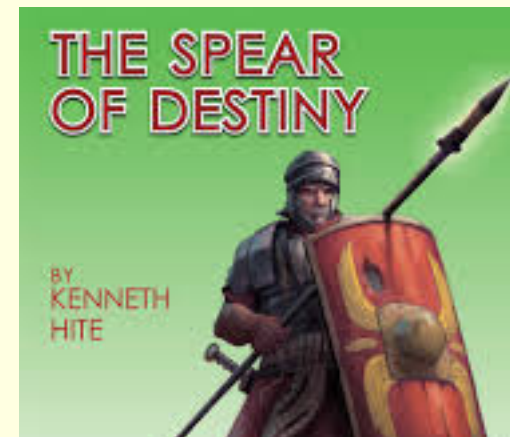
“I do not pretend to have read history, but as a schoolboy I had to pass a paper in history also, and I read that the page of history is soiled red with the blood of those who have fought for freedom.”

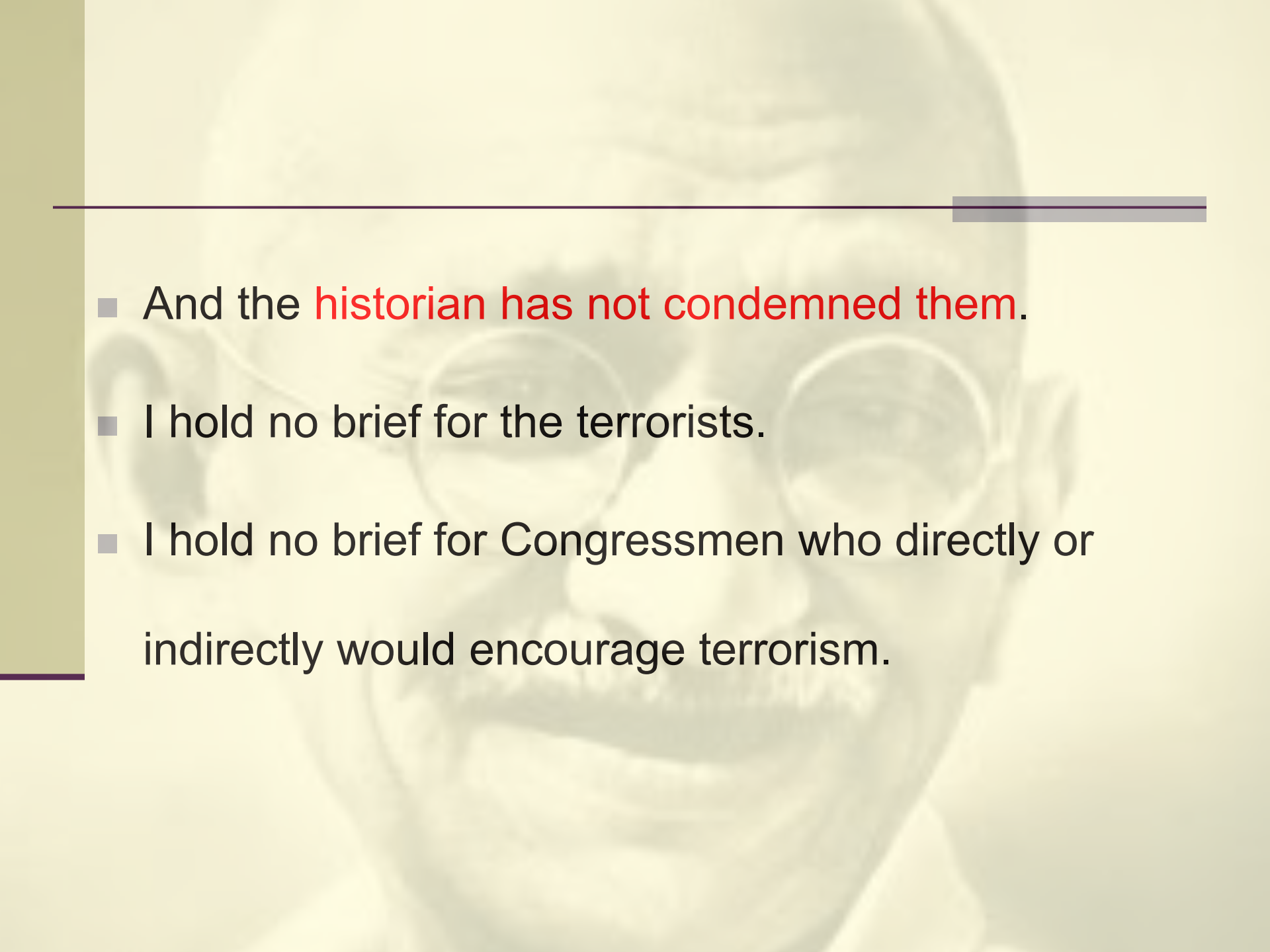


“I do not know an instance in which **nations have attained their own** without having to go through an incredible measure of travail” (painful laborious effort)



The dagger of the assassin, the poison bowl, the bullet of the rifleman, the spear and all these weapons and methods of destruction have been up to now used by, what I consider, **blind** lovers of liberty and freedom.



- 
-
- And the **historian has not condemned them.**
 - I hold no brief for the terrorists.
 - I hold no brief for Congressmen who directly or indirectly would encourage terrorism.

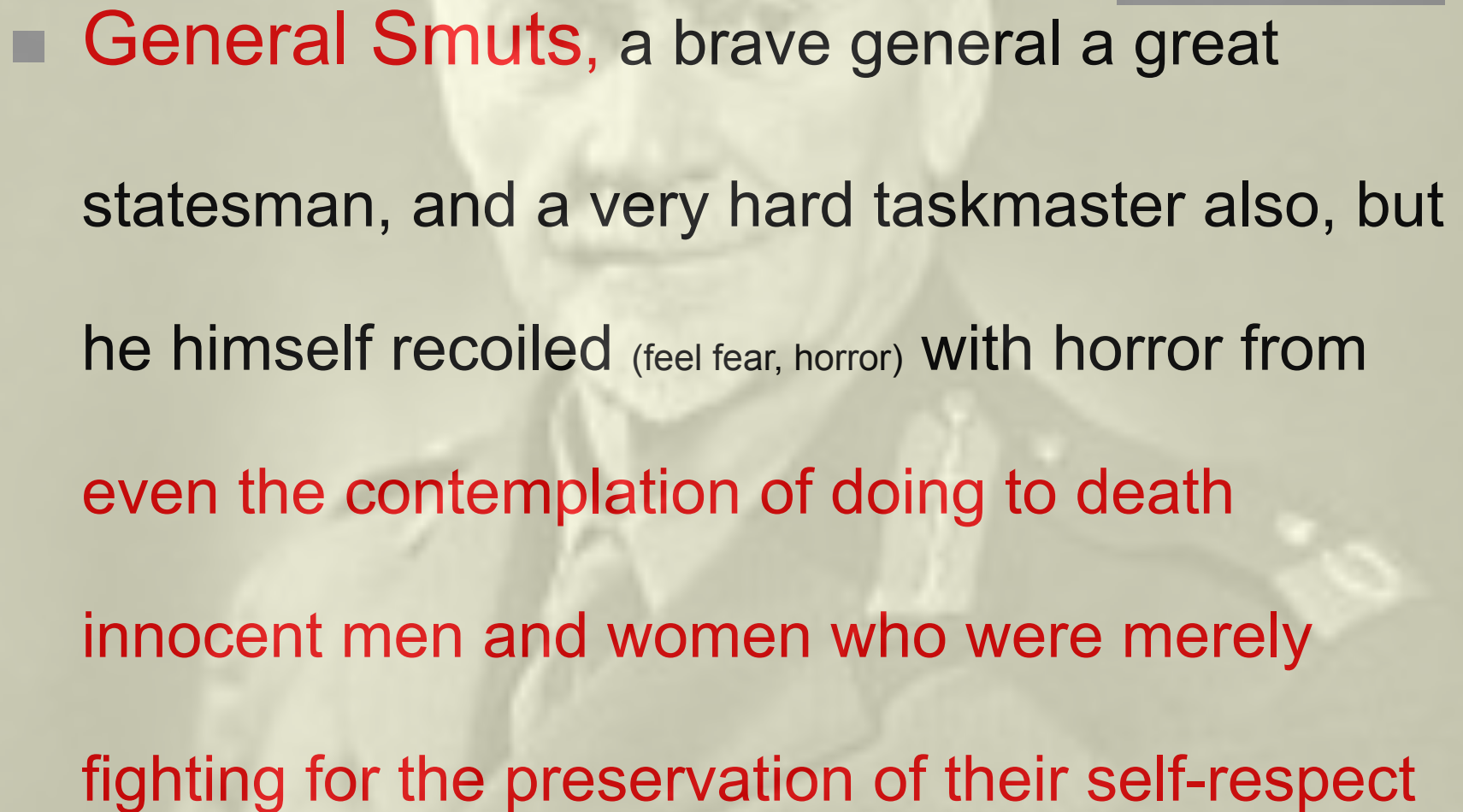
I have mentioned these things at this juncture, it is again to show that **for the sake of liberty people have fought, people have lost their lives, people have killed and have sought death at the hands of those whom they have sought to oust.**

The New Way

The Congress then comes upon the scene and devises
a new method not known to history,
namely, that of civil disobedience, and the
Congress has been following up that method.

-
- But again, I am up against a stone wall and I am told that that is **a method that no government in the world will tolerate.**
 - Well, of course, the Government may not tolerate, no Government has tolerated open rebellion.

-
- No Government may tolerate civil disobedience, **but**
Governments have to succumb even to
these forces, as the British Government has done
before now, even as the great Dutch Government after
eight years of trial had to yield to the logic of facts.

- 
-
- **General Smuts**, a brave general a great statesman, and a very hard taskmaster also, but he himself recoiled (feel fear, horror) with horror from even the contemplation of doing to death innocent men and women who were merely fighting for the preservation of their self-respect



- Field Marshal **Jan Christian Smuts** (24 May 1870 – 11 September 1950) was a prominent **South African and British Commonwealth statesman, military leader and philosopher.**

- In addition to holding various
- cabinet posts, he served
- as prime minister of
- the Union of South Africa from
- 1919 until 1924 and from
- 1939 until 1948.



- Although Smuts had originally advocated racial segregation and opposed the enfranchisement of black Africans
- his views changed and he backed the Fagan Commission's findings that complete segregation was impossible.

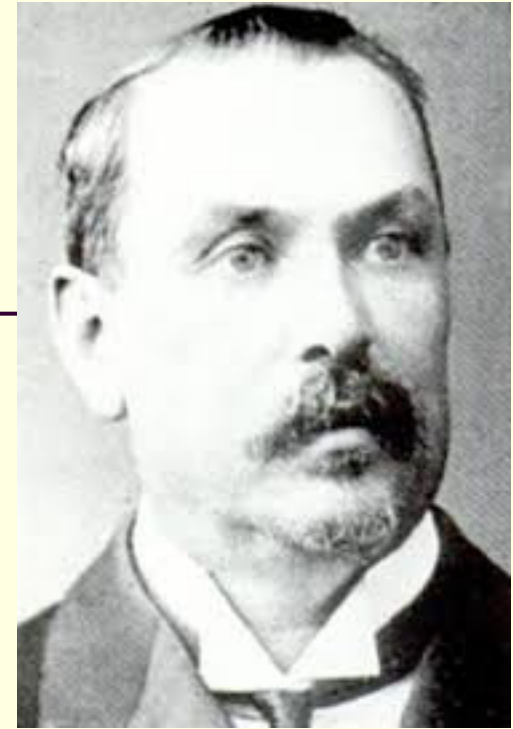
-
- Smuts subsequently lost the 1948 election to hard-line Afrikaners who created apartheid.
 - He continued to work for reconciliation and emphasised the British Commonwealth's positive role until his death in 1950



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- Things which he had vowed he would never yield in the year 1908, reinforced as he was by **General Botha**, he had to do in the year 1914, after having tried these civil resisters through and through.



- **Louis Botha** (27 September 1862 – 27 August 1919) was a South African politician who was the first Prime Minister of the Union of South Africa—the forerunner of the modern South African state.



- A [Boer](#) war hero during the Second Boer War, he would eventually fight to have South Africa become a British Dominion.

-
- And in India, Lord Chelmsford had to do the same thing:
 - the Governor of Bombay had to do the same thing in Borsad and Bardoli.



- The **Bardoli Satyagraha** of 1928, in the state of Gujarat, India during the period of the British Raj, was a major episode of civil disobedience and revolt in the Indian Independence Movement.

-
- The movement was eventually led by Vallabhbhai Patel, and its success gave rise to Patel becoming one of the main leaders of the independence movement.

-
- I suggest to you, Prime Minister, **it is too late today to resist this**, and it is this thing which weighs me down, this choice that lies before them, the parting of the ways probably.

-
- I shall hope against hope, **I shall strain every nerve to achieve an honourable settlement for my country,** if I can do so without having to put the millions of my countrymen and countrywomen, and even children, through this **ordeal of fire.**

-
- It can be matter of no joy and comfort to me to lead them again to a fight of that character, but if a further ordeal of fire has to be our lot, I shall approach that with the greatest joy and with the greatest consolation that I was doing what I felt to be right,...

-
- ...the country was doing what it felt to be right, and the country will have the additional satisfaction of knowing that it was not at least taking lives, it was giving lives: It was not making the British people directly suffer, it was suffering.

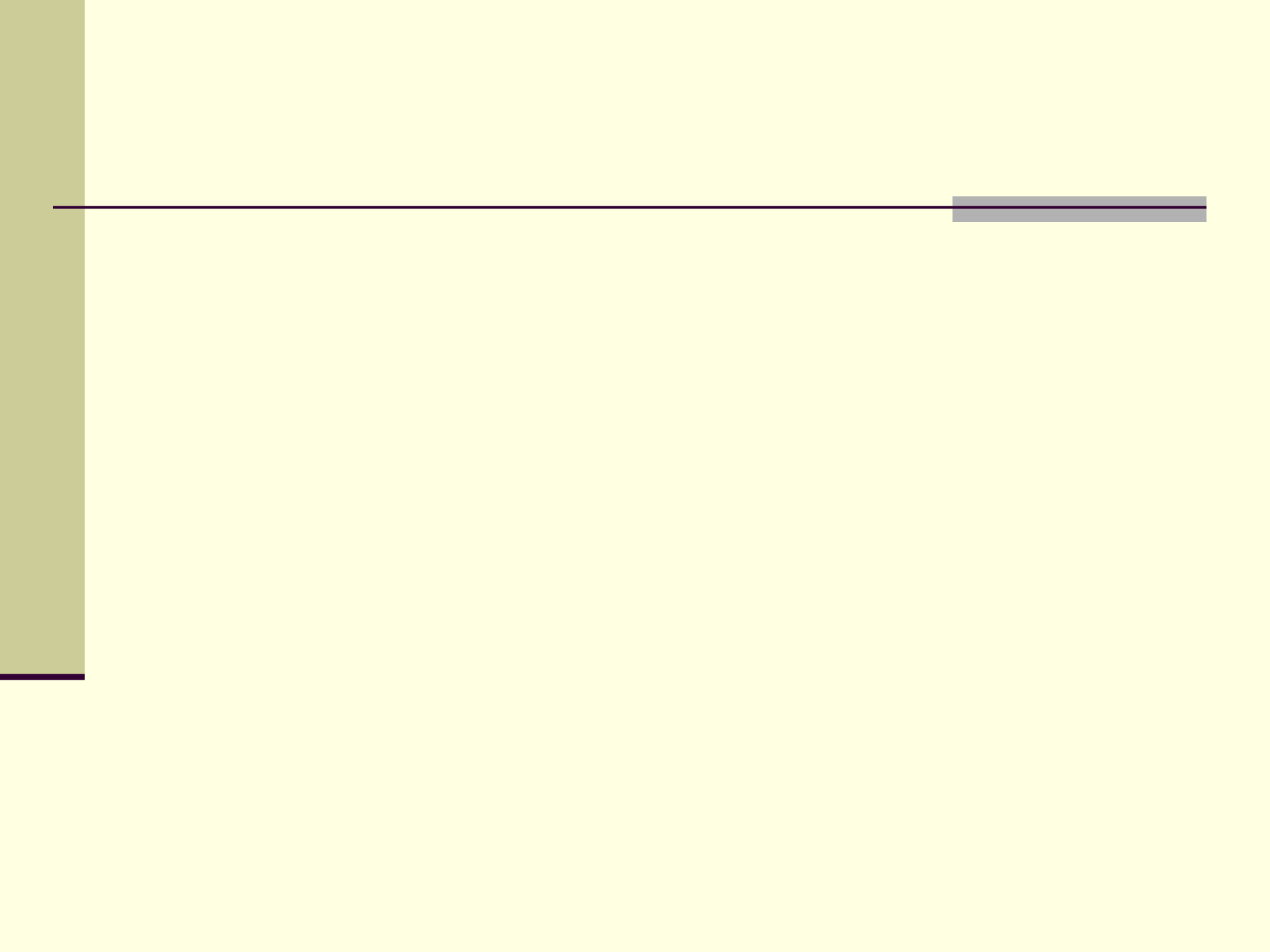
The Price

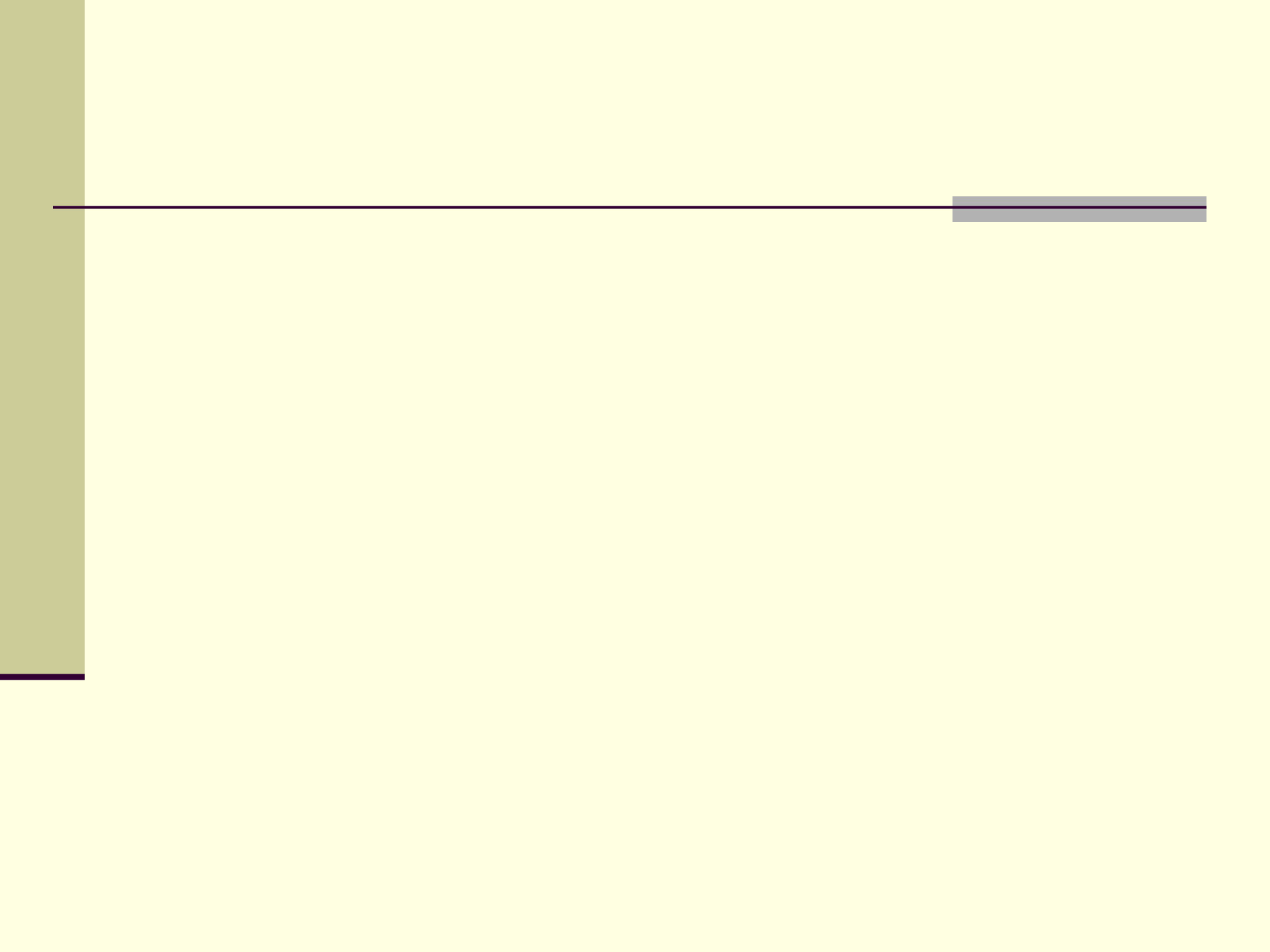


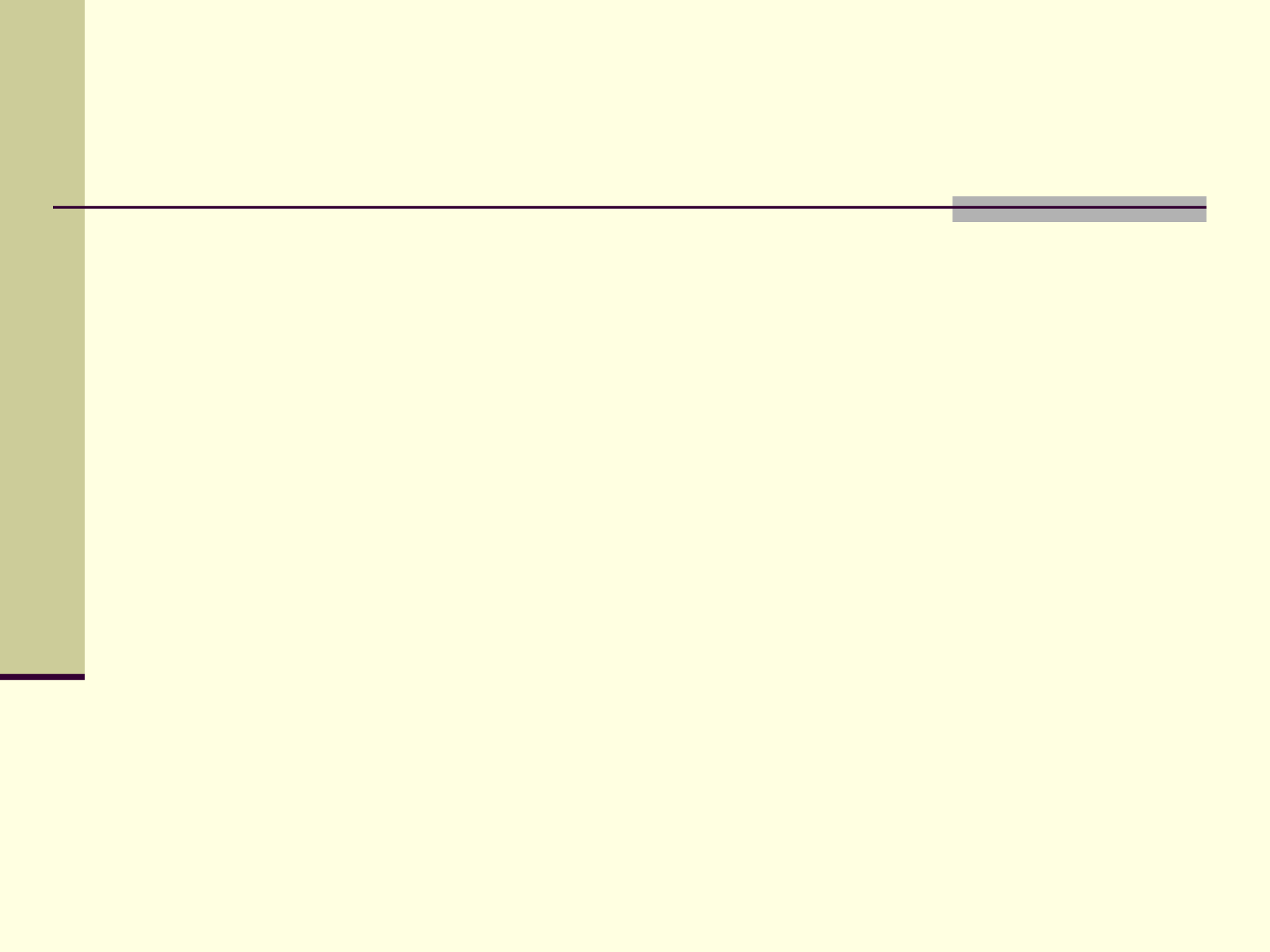
Whilst there is yet a little sand left in the glass, I want you to understand what this Congress stands for.

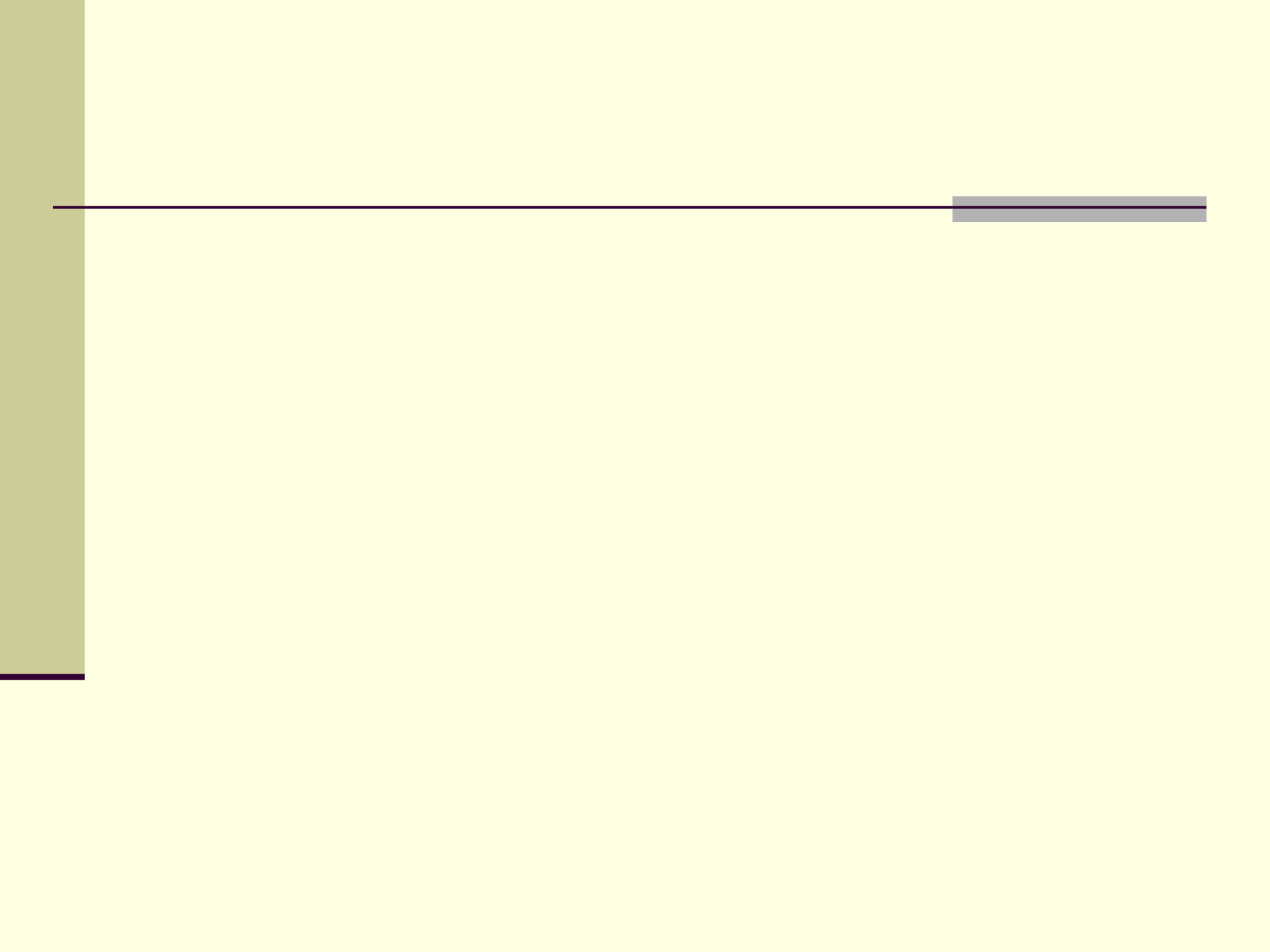
My life is at your disposal.

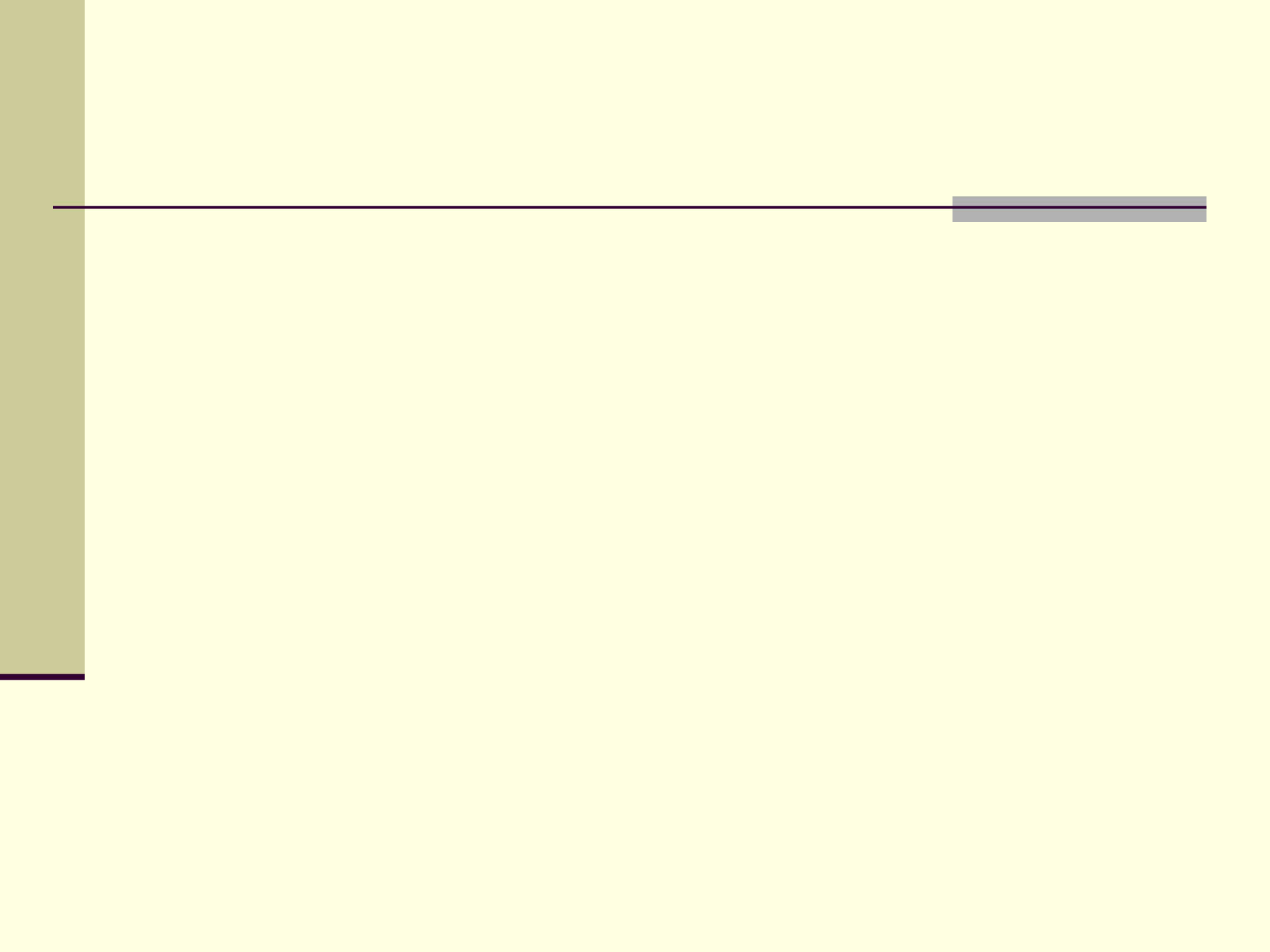
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- The lives of all the members of the Working Committee, the All-India Congress Committee, are at your disposal.
 - But remember that you have at your disposal the lives of all these dump millions.

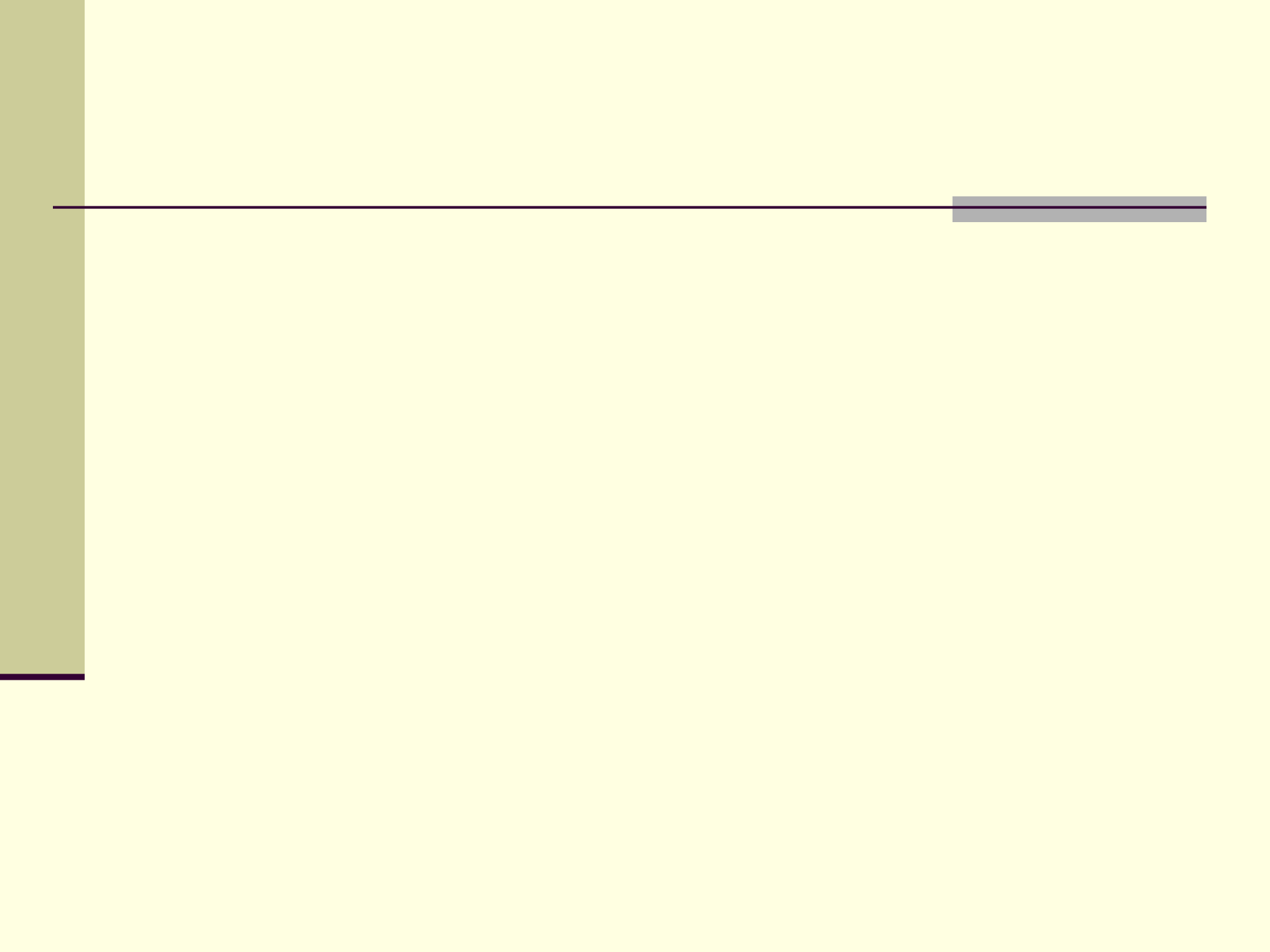


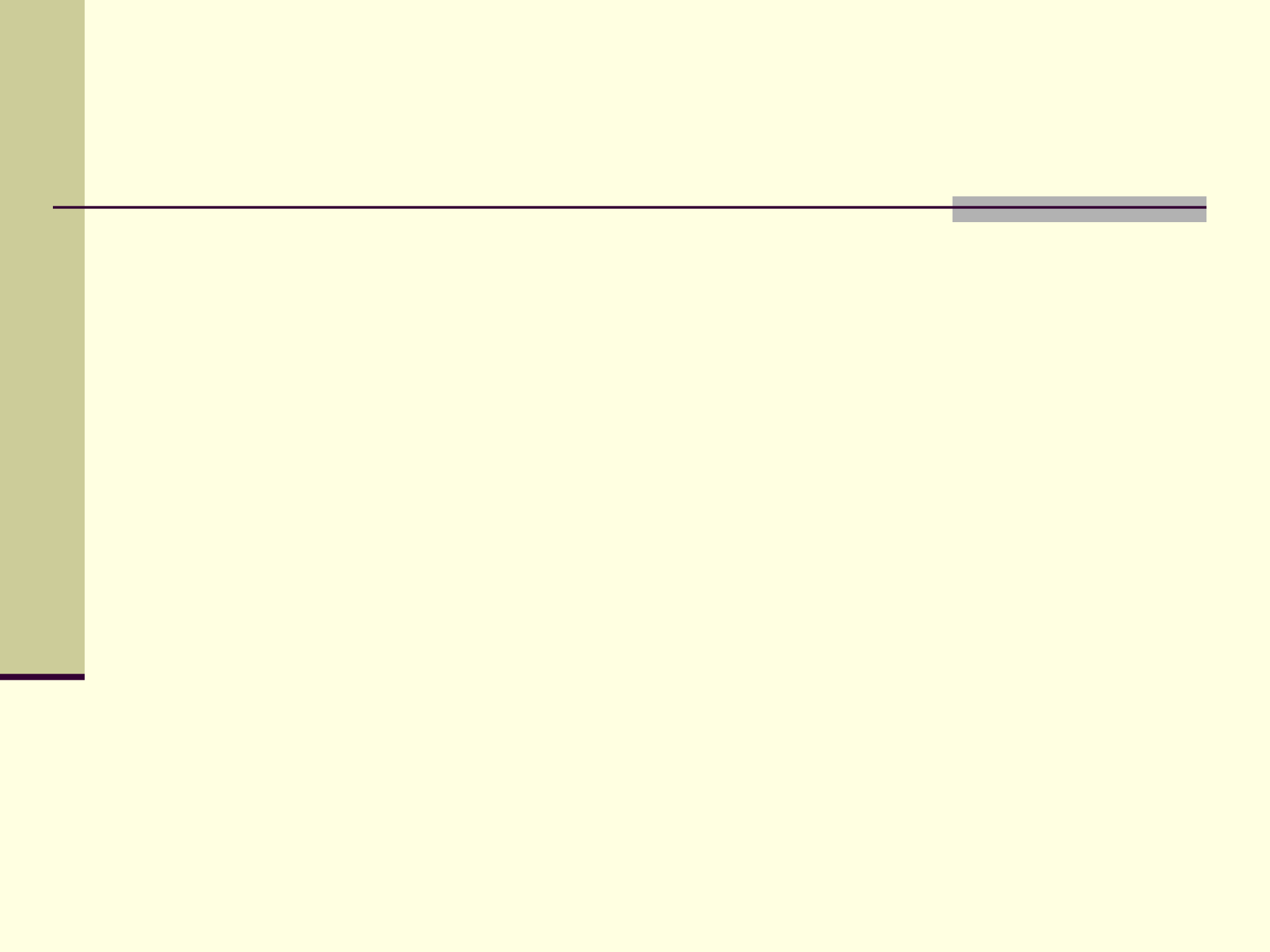


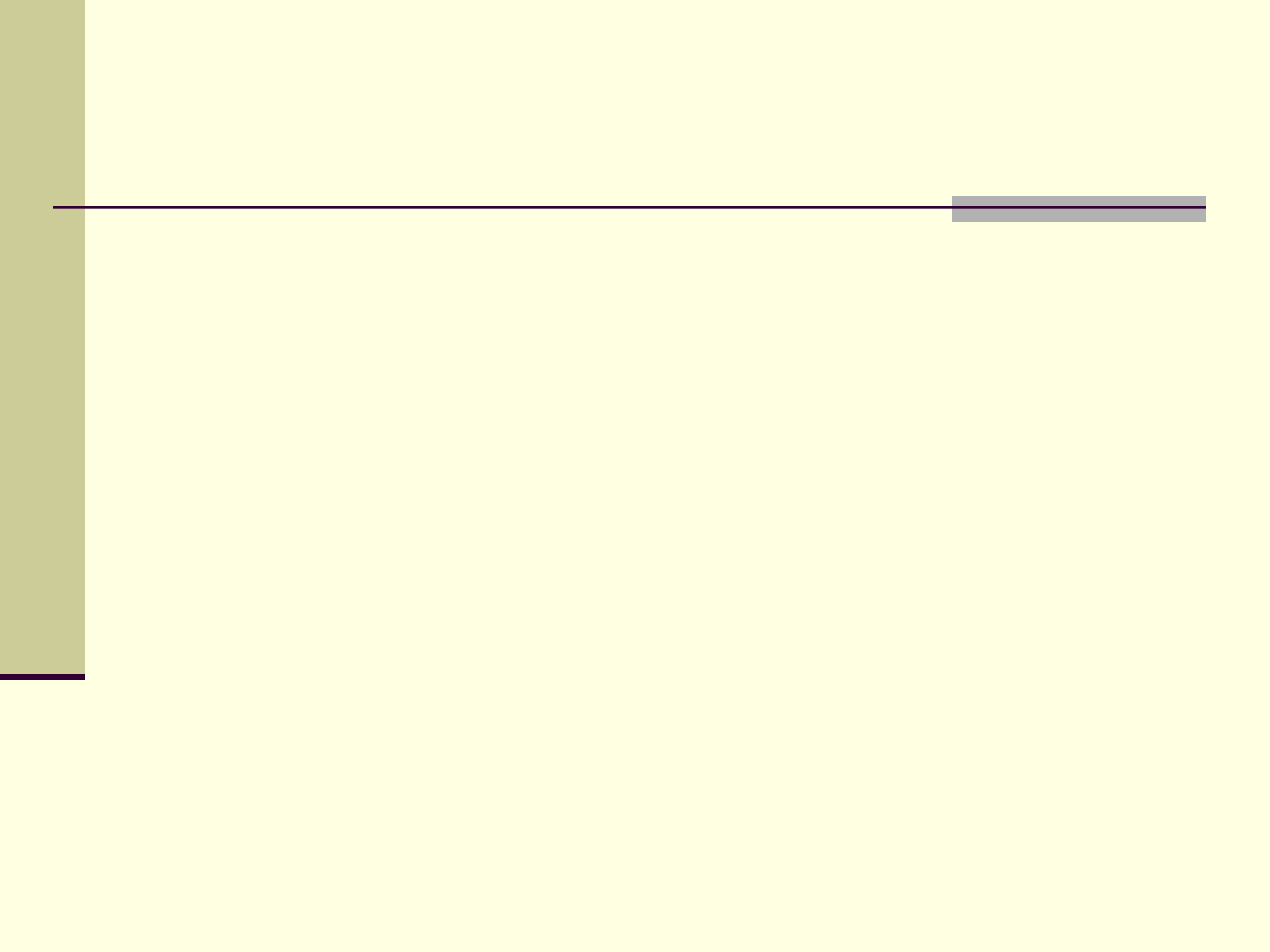












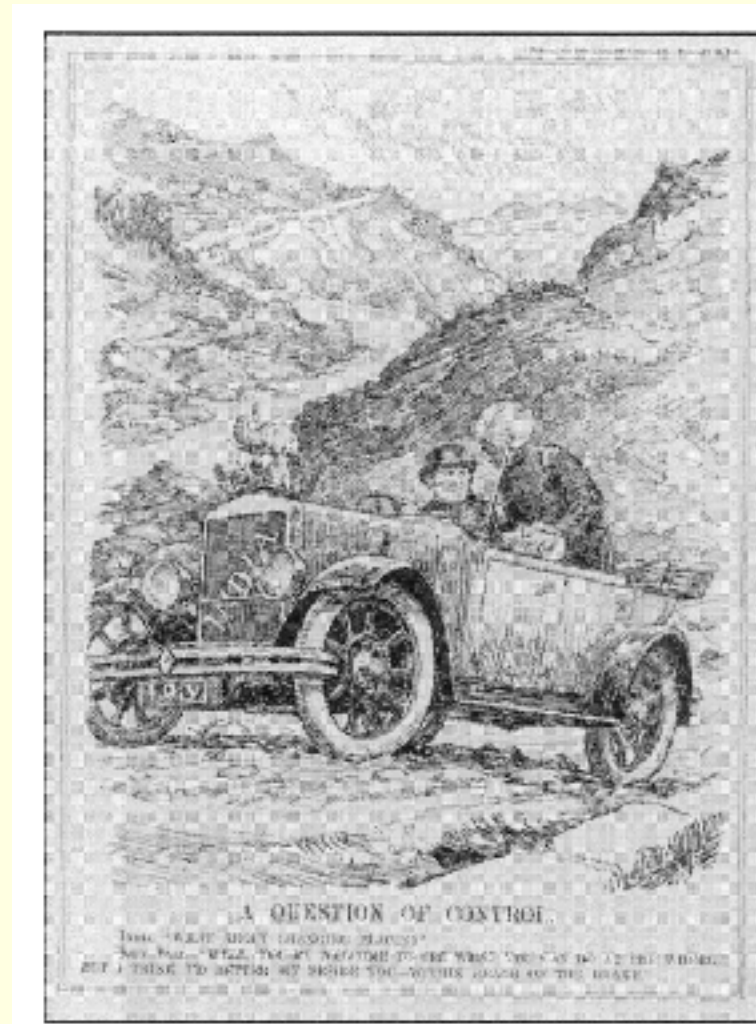
- Gandhi's speech was widely appreciated by its wisdom, commonsense, intelligence and balance. Though the conference ended without yielding any positive result, Gandhi was able to transmit his charisma and message of non-violence and truth, and the cause of India's freedom to the thinking minds of Britain.

The Round Table Conferences, 1930-32

Things to consider:

1. How did the British react to Salt-March Campaign?
2. What did the Gandhi-Irwin Pact achieve?
3. Why did the Gandhi-Irwin Pact irritate some people?
4. On whose authority, and to what extent did Gandhi “speak for all Indians”

The relationship between Britain and India: what does this cartoon, which was published in Punch Magazine in January 1931infer?



The Round Table Conference

Three sessions:

- The First sat from November 1930 to January 1931
 - It was chaired by P.M. Ramsey MacDonald (Labour)
- The Second sat from September to December 1931
 - By this time the Labour government had fallen and had been replaced by a Conservative dominated National Government, led by Ramsey MacDonald. The conference was supervised by the new Secretary of State, Sir Samuel Hoare (Conservative)
- The Third sat from November to December 1932
 - It was supervised by Samuel Hoare

Viceroy of India, Lord Irwin

- Following the Simon Commission and Congress's demand for *Swaraj* (self rule) the viceroy:
- Announced a round-table conference, 31st January 1929
- It would settle India's constitutional future
- **The First Round-Table Conference** assembled in London on 12th November 1930
- It started with 89 representatives:
 - 16 from the main British political parties
 - 16 Indian Princes
 - 57 nominees of the viceroy, which included Muslims, Sikhs and Indian Christians
 - Also included were a number of representatives of the lowest Indian caste (dalits / untouchables)
- However, Congress was not represented and, as Gandhi was in Yeravda prison he could not attend!



The Times summed up the opinion of many:

- *“No Indian delegation without Gandhi or the two Nehrus could possibly be looked upon as representation”*
 - Discuss
- Furthermore; whilst Gandhi was in prison he was a focus for protestors and of protest – so if by imprisoning Gandhi the British thought to neutralise him – they were mistaken!
- Lord Irwin released Gandhi from prison so that negotiations could take place – they met face to face in February 1931
- Their *‘frank and open discussions’* led to The Gandhi-Irwin Pact, which was signed on 5th March 1931

The Gandhi-Irwin Pact

After negotiations; Gandhi agreed that:

- Congress's civil-disobedience campaign would end
- He would continue to peacefully support Indian goods whilst not threatening the sale of British products
- Gandhi would participate in the 2nd Round Table conference in London

If Gandhi called off the civil-disobedience campaign Irwin promised:

- Future political changes would be in the interests of India
- To release from gaol supporters not guilty of violent crimes
 - 19,000 were released
- Confiscated property was returned to its owners
- Some emergency restrictions were relaxed

Reaction to the Gandhi-Irwin Pact

- Many Indians were unhappy and felt betrayed by Gandhi
 - Why?
- Congress approved the Gandhi-Irwin Pact but there was a lot of criticism that Gandhi had abandoned another popular campaign that was likely to achieve their goal of *Swaraj*
 - Compare with the abandonment of non-cooperation in 1922
- In Britain some conservatives accused Irwin of giving too much away and in doing so he was weakening the Empire
 - Lord Willingdon was annoyed that Gandhi had been treated respectfully by Irwin, and thus awarded credibility

There were expectations and assumptions on all sides

- W.S. Churchill, who later resigned from the opposition front-bench to actively campaign against Congress, made his feelings clear by declaring that it was
 - **“alarming and also nauseating to see Mr Gandhi, a seditious Middle Temple lawyer, now posing as a *fakir* of a type well-known in the East, striding half-naked up the steps of the vice-regal palace while he is still organising and conducting a defiant campaign of civil disobedience to parley on equal terms with [the] representative of the King-Emperor. Such a spectacle can only increase the unrest in India, and the danger to which white people there are exposed”**

Winston Spencer Churchill, 1874-1965

- Grew up surrounded by Imperialist beliefs in the superiority of white people and Christian values
- With 50 other Tory MPs and a few Lancashire Cotton kings (Industrialists) he formed the Indian Defence League
- He gave passionate speeches about the “*proper and permanent subjugation*” of Indians and their “*total unsuitability*” to engage in democracy
- Discuss...



The second session of the Round Table Conference

Opened on 7th September 1931



Gandhi represented Congress

- He was **mandated** to demand *purna swaraj* and make NO concessions!
- Gandhi questioned the right of his fellow Indians to be at the conference table as **he alone** spoke for fall India
- Regardless of what Gandhi thought he was doing, his attitude provoked anger from other representatives (see over)

Debate: On whose authority, and to what extent did Gandhi “speak for all Indians”

Frank Mores in *Witness to an Era* pointed out:

Gandhi made the fatal error of claiming to speak for the Muslims and depressed classes. The spokesmen of both communities repudiated him, and since the Muslims then numbered nearly thirty per cent of the population and the depressed classes about twenty per cent, it was difficult for him to sustain his claim that he represented 95 per cent of India.

The second round table session ended without agreement

- Consequently, on August 4th 1932 the British government announced the **Communal Award**, which was a separate representation for “recognised minorities” and for the “scheduled castes” (dalits/ untouchables)
- Gandhi demonstrated his opposition to this by going on an indefinite fast
 - He believed that Congress, or he personally, was the best protector of the dalits
 - **The Poona Pact** later attempted to resolve disagreement.

Meanwhile:

- Whilst Gandhi was in London the brutal and repressive measures by which Britain ruled India persisted
- Ordinary Indians continued to suffer brutality at the hands of those who claimed authority
- Viceroy, Lord Irwin was replaced by Lord Willingdon
 - The new viceroy had Gandhi arrested within a week of his return

Lord Willingdon, 1866 -1941

- Spent many years in India
- Governor of Bombay, 1913-18
- Governor of Madras 1918-24: during Moplah riots
- Viceroy of India 1931-36



Anonymous cartoon c. 1931/2: analyse and discuss



LORD WILLINGDON'S DILEMMA

Lord Willingdon's imperialist views made clear

- Telegram from Lord Willingdon's office to Gandhi, December 1931". . . His Excellency feels bound to emphasize that he will not be prepared to discuss with you the measures which the Government of India, with the full approval of His Majesty's Government, have found it necessary to adopt in Bengal, the United Provinces and the North-west Frontier Province. . . ."
- Discuss

Congress requested discussions with the new viceroy, which he ignored

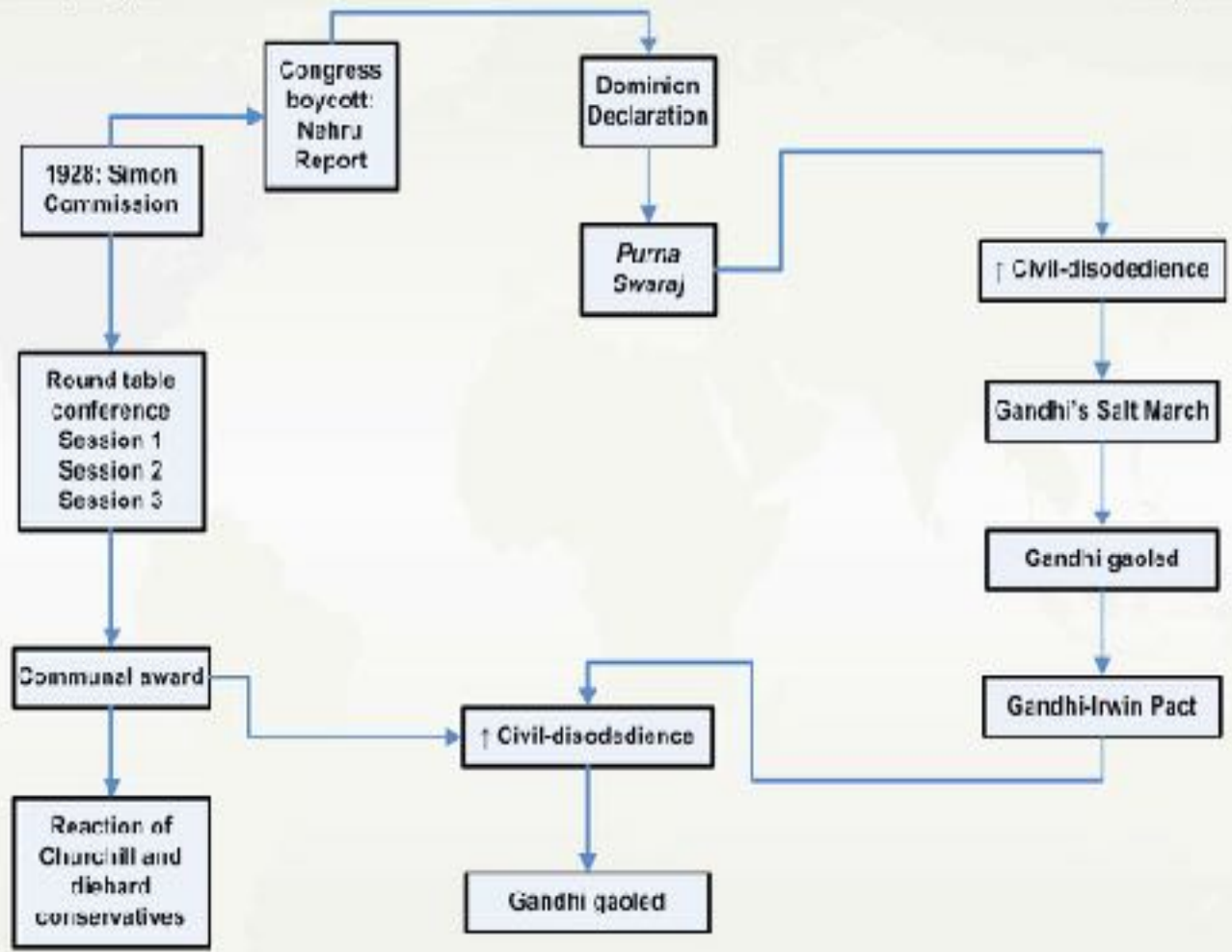
- 1st June 1932 Congress declared that
 - In the event of a satisfactory response not forthcoming from the viceroy, the Working Committee calls upon the nation to resume civil disobedience, including the non-payment of taxes
- Government responded by granting itself emergency powers:
 - Outlawed machinery of government by which Congress operated
 - Local branches, committees and offices
 - C. 100,000 people were placed under immediate arrest
- Gandhi advised Congress to end civil disobedience and he asked the British to release the prisoners – both parties refused

The third session of the Round Table Conference

- Any chance of agreement was lost due to a variety of reasons
- Ramsey MacDonald's reputation was in tatters
 - He had lost the support of the Labour party
 - His continued premiership was in question
- Gandhi and many others did not attend

Summary diagram:

Friday, January 16, 2009



The Government of India Act

- 1933: British government published a white-paper on the constitution of India
 - White-paper: a political document (Bill) that sets out proposals that lead to legislation (Act)
- There was significant opposition
 - Conservative imperialists were outraged and demanded “no surrender”
 - Radicals believed it did not go far enough
- The bill gained royal assent on August 2nd 1935 and thus became the Government of India Act and came into effect in 1937

Main provisions of the Act

- Expand electorate to 35 million people, c. 10% of the Indian population (thus not a full franchise)
- Give provincial control to India including those that had been “reserved” under previous reforms
- Creation of provincial governments with legislative powers
- No change in central administration
- Responsibility for defence and foreign policy retained by viceroy
- Emergency powers reserved and held by central government

Reactions & Elections

- A bit of an anti-climax many Indians were very disappointed with this outcome
- Congress was divided:
 - Some wanted to oppose the Act in principle
 - Others wanted to use the Act to squeeze out of it as much power as possible
- 1937 elections excited the political situation
 - Created a sense of 'success'

Question: Use Sources 1, 2 & 3 and your own knowledge

- Do you agree with the view that Gandhi's campaign methods in the 1930's were effective? Explain your answer using Sources 1, 2 & 3 and your own knowledge.
 - 40 marks