

British Imperialism in India

By T. B.

INDIA is the keystone of the British Empire. To lose India means for the English bourgeoisie the doom of British imperialism.

The story of how the English came to India, of the days of the East India merchant company of the 17th century, has often been told by romantic bourgeois historians. In *British Imperialism in India*, by Joan Beauchamp, just published by Martin Lawrence, we have a book that breaks new ground written from the point of view of Marxism. The author knows her subject. In the first chapter we get a graphic picture of how the land was stolen from the people; of the ruthless despoiling of the village communities, their handicrafts and industry, to make way for British goods. In the second chapter the Marxist-Leninist contention that imperialism hinders the industrial development of the colonies is proven with a whole series of facts relating to events that continued in India up to the war. As the author says,

“British policy allows a limited industrialization of India in order that she may help in the production of war materials, aid in fighting the trade competition of Japan and U.S.A., and be a profitable field for the investment of British capital. But her industrial development is subjected to the following restrictions: (a) It must be under the control of British capital, Indian capital being *placated with a junior partnership*; (b) Indian industries must never be allowed to compete on equal terms with home industries, or to work up raw material which is required for British industries; (c) the Indian market for British manufacturers must not be interfered with; and (d) industries for the production of the means of production must not be developed.”

These statements are backed up by voluminous statistics citing industry after industry. The economic concessions found their political counterpart in the Montagu-Chelmsford report, the provisions of which have never been carried out, and which find an echo in the round table conferences and the recent proposals for constitutional reform which have split the Conservative Party in England.

The third chapter is packed full of data revealing the terrible toll of death from the sheer robbery and pillage of the country by the British imperialists. In the 19th century, for example, no fewer than 28 million people were swept away by famine. The vast mass of peasantry are crushed by extortionate rents, taxation, and blood-sucking usurers. Driven from the land, the peasantry are forced into the tea plantations, coal mines, cotton mills, etc. A shameless exploitation of women and little children goes on, recalling the coming of the factory system in England during the 18th century. Here is what the author has to say on this question:

* *British Imperialism in India* by Joan Beauchamp. Cloth 5/-. Publishers, Martin Lawrence, Great James Street, W.C.1.

"In the jute factories of Bengal in 1926, out of 319,000 workers in 76 mills, 80,000 were women and 29,000 children. The women bring their babies into the factory with them. Hours of work are from 7:30 a.m. to 7 p.m., with no regular intervals. The worker holds her baby on one arm as she tends her loom. The older children play about in an atmosphere charged with dirt and dust. Expectant mothers, haunted by fear of dismissal through absence from work, often give birth to their children in the factory itself. It was officially reported in 1924 that out of 132 women whose cases had been investigated, 102 had given birth to their children in the factories."

We could quote many such examples. It is not surprising that India should be a cauldron of illiteracy, destitution and disease.

The succeeding chapters deal with the trade unions, the rise of militancy among the workers, and the nationalist movement, in which the struggle for trade unionism and the great strike movements that led to the historic Meerut Case, Gandhi movement, the National Congress and the Constitutional Reform movement are graphically depicted.

Prepared for the Labor Research Department, London, this book can be recommended as a compendium of carefully selected and reliable data on India. The book contains a good bibliography and an excellent map showing the economic geography of India, and at five shillings is remarkably cheap. It is indispensable for a first-hand knowledge of how India is held down by the sword.