

BRITISH IMPERIALISM PREPARING FOR WAR AND ITS COLONIAL CONTRADICTIONS

By R. PAGE ARNOT

BRITISH imperialism is preparing for war, increasing her armaments and making diplomatic, economic and financial moves in every part of the world. Again, as before 1914, British imperialism is preparing for war in every way. But it is no longer the same world: the general crisis of capitalism has had a profoundly disintegrating effect on the oldest capitalist country, and its colonial empire. The Soviet Union holds one-sixth of the globe as the citadel of the world revolution. Soviet power has also been established over a large part of China. New antagonisms have arisen amongst the imperialist powers. New rivals of British imperialism have come to the forefront.

Nor is it any longer the same empire. Deep and rending contradictions are developing and putting entirely new problems before the British bourgeoisie. The centrifugal tendencies of the British dominions: the anti-imperialist revolutionary movements in the colonies and semi-colonies of Britain, and the growth of the revolutionary working class movement at home, have tremendously altered the whole situation.

The main antagonisms are clear. British imperialism, backing Japan and Germany, organizes the war drive against the U.S.S.R. and gets itself to hinder the operation of the peace policy of the Soviet Union. In the second place, within the capitalist world, British imperialism makes one after another long-range moves against its powerful imperialist rival, the United States of America. In the third place, contradictions exist between British and French imperialism, and in the camp of the instigators of war, namely, between Britain, Japan and Germany. Germany refuses to pay the interest due under the Dawes Plan and the Young Plan. Japan becomes a powerful trade competitor of Great Britain, especially in the colonial markets. Italy clashes with Britain in the Mediterranean colonies.

It is an undoubted fact that the interests of British imperialism clash everywhere with the interests of other powers. That "far flung battle line" of British imperialism comprises not only the empire of 1914, but the new mandated territories of the Middle East, and the warships that guard British interests on the China station, and the interests of the allied empires of Portugal and the Netherlands.

The British Empire comprises over thirteen mil-

lion square miles, with a population of four hundred and ninety-five millions, divided as follows:—

	Area in square miles	Population
Great Britain and Northern Ireland		
Ireland	94,663	46,386,000
Europe	27,125	3,241,000
Africa	3,820,274	57,995,000
America	4,008,214	13,091,000
Australia	3,278,917	9,347,000
Asia (other than India)	317,584	12,558,000
India	1,808,274	352,383,000
Total	13,355,426	495,456,000

Of this official total empire population no less than five-sevenths is India.

But this total hides the fact that a number of "independent" and "sovereign" States are entirely under British control. Egypt, with a population of fourteen and a quarter millions, was formally declared to be "independent" in 1930 (the British Protectorate had been "terminated" in 1922) but "*Defense is reserved and remains under British control*" says the *Statesman's Year Book*. Actually there is a British army of occupation about twelve thousand strong, while the chief officers of the Egyptian army are British. This is what is meant by "independence" as granted by Mr. Arthur Henderson when he was Foreign Secretary of British imperialism.

Similar is the case of Iraq. British imperialism "terminated" its mandate in 1932—but the British air force remains stationed in Iraq.

Similarly with "independent Arabia", whose many monarchs are mostly in the pay and under the control of Britain.

Altogether these various independent territories, including Tibet and the Himalayan States, with those already mentioned, swell the total size of the British Empire by over two million square miles. To this again must be added the territories of the junior imperialisms, which Britain reckons on having to defend by "the King's Ships", namely, the three-quarters of a million square miles of the Dutch East Indies with a population of nearly sixty-one million, and the Portuguese Empire of over

three-quarters of a million square miles, bringing the real grand total under British imperialism to nearly seventeen million square miles, containing well-nigh six hundred million of mankind.

THE BRITISH DOMINIONS

War greatly accelerated the growth of these extensions of the British capitalist system until now the tendency to independent economic policies has been expressed also in a frequent tension between Great Britain and the Dominions, and in resulting political concession from Whitehall. Moreover, the influence of American capital has grown in the Dominions. Capital exports from the U.S.A. into Canada grew rapidly in the post-war years. Wall Street proved ready to float an Austrian loan when the City of London tried to exercise financial control. Eventually, beginning with the signature of the Halibut Treaty by both the diplomatic representatives of Canada and the British Ambassador to U.S.A., the Dominions, headed by the Hertzog Government of South Africa, insisted on a constitutional definition of their co-equality with the Government of Britain. The Statute of Westminster passed a few years ago registered the extent to which these centrifugal tendencies of the Dominions had developed.

In the special case of Ireland, the oldest colony, which has now been given the name of a Dominion, British imperialism maintains its warships in all the Irish harbors and waterways and wages a bitter economic warfare with the Irish Free State.

During the world economic crisis, Downing Street tried to recover some of its hold over the Dominions by means of financial pressure through the Bank of England. It was partly successful in Australia, while in the case of New Zealand, the subjection to British finance capital is still more complete. In Newfoundland, where a popular revolt compelled the Dominion bourgeoisie to call on the armed forces of the British Crown, the right of self-governing Dominion status has been "temporarily" surrendered: and that colony strategically placed under the lee of North America, is now being governed by a Commission directly appointed by His Majesty's Government.

What would be the attitude of these Dominions if the antagonisms in the Pacific developed into war between Japanese imperialism and American imperialism? Britain has been and is now backing Japan. For twenty years up to 1922 a formal military alliance existed between Britain and Japan, until the Washington Conference. But the belief that a secret understanding exists up to this very day between these two powers is frequently voiced in the American press: and is borne out by events of the

last three years. Before 1914 a declaration of war by His Majesty's Government involved all the Dominions; but now their separate assents must be received. Nor is this mere form. In the autumn of 1922, when Lloyd George threatened war with Turkey at Chanak, the Dominion of Canada made it clear that it would not participate.

Would assent be given to support of Japan by the Dominions? The whole tendency of Canada, Australia and New Zealand was against Japan, even during the currency of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. Canada's policy towards Japan has been similar to that of the United States. For over thirty years, Australian Governments have proclaimed the "White Australia" policy against Japanese immigration. This antagonism has by no means been weakened.

Lastly, support by Britain of Japan in a Japanese-American war would find a large section of the Irish Free State backing America. The attitude of the de Valera Government to Britain depends largely on the United States. The American government is very keenly aware of this situation: it is no accident that the American Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Kellogg, had no desire to visit London while at the same time paying a ceremonial visit to the capital of Ireland.

Efforts are being made to counteract the anti-Japanese line of the capitalists in the Dominions. A trade mission has gone from Australia to Japan which has been hailed as "Australia's best customer for wool" and an Australian Legation has been established in Tokio. But whatever softening of antagonisms is expected from these efforts is very largely offset by the hostility which has arisen between cotton and other manufacturing interests within Britain itself. In the case of Canada, much American stock has been repaid; and in this last year Canadian loans have been floated in London. Newfoundland has been brought under administrative control of Britain, and New Zealand under financial control. Nevertheless the centrifugal tendency remains.

An Anglo-American war, therefore, even in the partial stage of an American-Japanese war in the Pacific, brings up sharply before the British imperialists the problem of Dominion support and of empire disintegration.

But there is one war in which capitalists in every Dominion would be fully united with Britain. All the Dominions have shown themselves in full agreement with the anti-Soviet policy of the British Government. The capitalists of Canada, itself a secondary imperialist power, even took the lead two years ago in pressing for a breach of Anglo-Soviet trade relations. Likewise in Australia the Labor Prime Minister of New South Wales, Lang, the "Leftist of the Lefts", joined in the slave-labor cam-

paigned against the Soviet Union. In South Africa, where the whole policy of the South African capitalists is concentrated on the oppression of the natives, a single "nationalist" party has now been formed by Smuts and Hertzog, to hold down the natives: and there also the influence of the Soviet Union's example is dreaded. The Irish Free State, strongly under the influence of the Pope, who launched the anti-Soviet religious campaign of 1930, would be nothing loath to see the end of Communism in the Soviet Union.

Under such circumstances, it is not surprising that the problem of the centrifugal tendency of the Dominions is one of the factors that has dictated Britain's present tactics of organizing a war drive against the Soviet Union, backing Japan and Germany and striving to extend the anti-Soviet front.

THE COLONIES

But the Dominions are only the first part of the new problem.

Whereas in the Dominions centrifugal tendencies had begun to show themselves, though in a less marked degree, before the war of 1914, the anti-imperialist movement in the colonies is almost entirely a product of the years after 1914. The twentieth century's first decade had seen the awakening of the Indian masses, represented by the Gadr Party, the Terrorists and other small groups, but it was only with the deepening of exploitation in the years after 1914 that it developed into a mass movement. The same is true of Ireland, of Egypt and in general of the whole colonial world. The colonial world became a blazing hearth of revolt, with the development of the general crisis of capitalism, one of the fundamental and important spheres of which is the liberation movement in the colonies. It was these colonial revolts which, in 1920 and 1921, were factors of tremendous importance in compelling all-powerful British imperialism to conclude a trade agreement with the R.S.F.S.R. on the one hand, and on the other to submit to the demands of its American rival (naval equality; cancellation of the Anglo-Japanese Treaty; payment of the American Debt, etc.). In the years that followed, the Chinese revolution raised the spectre of Communism in Hong Kong and Singapore and led to new ferocities, new repressions in all the Far Eastern parts of the Empire. In Polynesia, the mass strikes in Fiji were followed by the still unsubdued movement of the Mau in New Zealand's mandated territory of Samoa. Right throughout Africa, from north to south, and from east to west, now in one colony and now in another, the flames of colonial revolt have burst forth.

In East Africa (Kenya) the first attempt to or-

ganize a trade union was met by the imprisonment of its leader, Harry Thuku, while in the "model" colony of West Africa (Nigeria) forty-four women were massacred under the second Labor Government for refusal to pay taxes. In the Middle East the mandates held by Britain as a "sacred trust of civilization" failed to meet with the grateful acceptance of the masses of Arabistan. Even the Mediterranean colonies, Cyprus and Malta, were affected by the colonial revolution. It seemed as though British imperialist exploitation had been planted on volcanos that were not extinct but only slumbering and now beginning to erupt.

Every possible maneuver has been resorted to by British imperialism, in order by fraud and force to quell the colonial revolts. But every step taken, every move made by the ever-extending trusts and combines to squeeze the ruined peasantry of the British Empire still further, results only in a still more formidable accumulation of volcanic forces underground. This time as the British imperialists prepare for war they must take into their reckoning, as they did not have to do before 1914, that the outbreak of a new world war may detonate the colonial volcano. Moreover, the influence of its rivals, of the U.S.A. in Latin America, of Italy in the Near East, of Japan in the Far East, is much stronger and more penetrating than before 1914.

INDIA

But the problem of problems of British imperialism is India, with its 350,000,000 population, well-nigh a sixth of mankind. For over one hundred and fifty years the British capitalist system has grown up with India as its colony, sucking the life blood out of India. British imperialism has retarded the development of the natural resources of India, destroyed its manufactures, kept hundreds of millions in poverty and suffering under conditions that have in two generations reduced the expectation of life in India from thirty years to twenty-three years. Every movement of the Indian people for liberation has been met with unparalleled ferocity, rising to a climax with the British Labor Government's bombing of villages, burnings, floggings and imprisonments of sixty thousand political prisoners. In the Burmese war of liberation in 1932-3, the British put a price on the heads of the "rebel" leaders and gave them no quarter.

But an agrarian revolution advances with the inevitability of a natural process. Now that consciousness is spreading amongst the peasantry; now that the workers themselves are becoming more and more class conscious, and advancing to the leadership of the whole movement for national emancipation, British imperialism is seeking to make a bargain with the

capitalists of the Indian National Congress in order to maintain and strengthen their dictatorship over the toiling millions. The Indian White Paper, as the "Proposals for Indian Constitutional Reforms" is called, will actually strengthen the feudal-imperialist regime in India under the pretense of granting a Constitution.

In particular, all control of the armed forces will be despotically administered by the British Viceroy. For India, "the brightest jewel in the English Crown", is not only to be guarded against a rising of the masses, but is also likely itself to be a central strategical focus in the new world war.

"For unthinkable ages", wrote Karl Marx, eighty years ago, "there have been in Asia only three departments of Governments—that of Finance, or plunder of the Interior; that of War, or plunder of the Exterior; and finally that of Public Works. . . . The British in India have taken over from their predecessors the departments of Finance and War, but they have entirely neglected that of Public Works."

The two departments of war and finance form a single problem for British imperialism on the eve of the second world war. Political-economic problems affect strategy, and strategy creates new political-economic problems. The Simon Commission, in its Report published in 1930, was compelled to admit that the current expenditure on arms of the British Government in India was over three-fifths of the total expenditure, "a higher proportion, in fact, than in any other country in the world". Fifteen years after the outbreak of war, when armament expenditure in Great Britain had increased by half, in India it had gone up by one hundred per cent. For over two generations the frontiers of India had been steadily extended; buffer states have been created beyond the frontiers, and as these buffer states have been subjugated new buffer states have been created beyond them again.

The external strategy of making India "safe for British imperialism" begins with its protection by sea and the protection of the air and sea routes thereto. The center of the eastern marine protection is at Singapore in the Straits Settlements, where the construction of the great new naval base has occupied all the post-war years. Here a hostile fleet coming from the east is to be stopped. But since the Dutch East Indies lie within the sphere of British Malaya, the Dutch colonies must also be protected. Much to the chagrin of Japanese imperialism, as expressed in June by the *Asahi*, the arrangements for the protection of Dutch Indonesia have been carried further forward by the visit of Field-Marshal Lord Allenby and the Conference of Admirals at Singapore.

But the fortifications extend still further. A new Hadrian's Wall is being built along the air route that runs down from Burma and Eastern Bengal through the Federated Malay States, down through Java and Sumatra and Portuguese Timor right to North Australia. Nor is there any fear that these junior allied imperialisms can be broken away from British imperialism. Holland and Britain are strongly linked together by a thousand ties, including the enormous Royal Dutch-Shell Oil Trust, headed by the open enemy and opponent of Bolshevism, Sir Henry Deterding, and the Great Unilever Trust, which plunders Equatorial Africa for the joint benefit of British and Dutch share-holders. As for Portugal, it is within the pocket of the British Empire these last two hundred years. Therefore British imperialism is safe as far as its capitalist junior partners are concerned. But here the strategic problem is involved with the possibility of social revolution, for the Indonesian revolt of 1926 was echoed again in the heroic mutiny of the sailors of the *De Zeven Provinciën*, when European and Malay sailors fought together for the first time in history.

On the western sea-route, Britain holds the Suez Canal, has turned the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf into British Lakes, has constructed the air and motor routes from Egypt and Palestine across the Desert of Basra, and has made colonies, mandates or feudatories of all the hinterlands to these routes. So thus "independent" Iraq serves at once as a buffer state and an air base for war upon the Soviet Union, while if in Southwest Arabia the Eman Yahia of the Yemen becomes too friendly with Italian imperialism, the British feudatory, Ibn Saud, brings him to heel in the war that was concluded last month.

But the strategic problems of British imperialism on the land frontiers are much greater than before 1914. Siam, bordering on Burma, has been subjected more and more to Japanese influence, while all round the north, northwestern and northeastern frontiers, the Tsarist empire and the Chinese empire have been transformed by revolution. The radiations of revolution cross the most impassable mountain barriers. The moment the hour of revolution struck. British imperialism began to prepare for the defeat of that revolution from India as a base lest they themselves be defeated inside India by the revolutionary movement of the masses. Thus British imperialism, whilst consolidating its influence in South China and ceaselessly patrolling with its warships the Yang-tze-Kiang River, began in 1925 to establish a new frontier on the Chinese borders of Burma as a stage to the occupation of the districts in Yunnan and Szechwan. Only last December Pan Hung, the rich mining district of

Yunnan, was invaded by two thousand British troops. In proportion as the Chinese Soviets take root and grow, British imperialism advances from the west. Twenty-two years ago, when the Manchu Dynasty was overthrown, Lenin, in his article "Backward Europe and Advanced Asia", called attention to the way in which British imperialism proceeded at once to extend its influence in Tibet as a step in the partition of China. Since then the penetration of Tibet has gone steadily forward, until now the strategy of British imperialism, expressing its counter-revolutionary political aims, is to advance into Sin-Kiang (Chinese Turkestan) where it can threaten the flank of the Middle-Asian Soviet Republics.

For what the British imperialists term "the strategic defence of India" actually means the partition of China, imperialist war against the Chinese Soviets and imperialist war against the U.S.S.R. The advance to war in these regions is prepared by all sorts of "scientific expeditions", mountaineering and orographical, aeronautic and archeological, anthropological, philological and "humanitarian" expeditions.

But each such advance extending the area of exploitation extends also the arena of the colonial revolution against British imperialism in the East Indies and the Middle East.

Therefore, British imperialism, in attempting to solve by political strategic preparations for war the new problem of the colonial revolution, only creates further extensions and intensifications of that problem.

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British imperialism is making preparations for war again, as was done before 1914. This time it faces a new round of problems. First, in the Dominions, and second, and more important, in the colonies. The two problems are bound together in that British imperialism endeavors to make out of the "White

Empire" a garrison to hold down the "Colored Empire". Feverishly, measure after measure is being taken to meet the contradictions that are rending and tearing within British imperialism. Allies are being sought and found among the feudal classes, amongst the National Reformists, and everywhere in the parties of social-democracy. An Empire fascism, with oppression multiplied upon oppression, is being built up in Britain, in the Dominions, and in the colonies. British agriculture, by tariffs and quotas, is being placed upon a war footing. Two years ago, the Ottawa Empire Conference was held—a war preparations conference, whose immediate results were increased hostile relations with the United States of America on the one hand and the Soviet Union on the other.

But above all, in relation to the colonies, British imperialism depends on the support of social-democracy. Whereas, before the war of 1914, social-democracy in *words* was against war, only to betray the working class movement when war broke out; this time social-democracy has helped to prepare the war. The General Council of the Trade Union Congress is at present elaborating the formula with which they will assure British imperialism of the support of social-democracy *before* the war breaks out. But deeds are still more important than words. Therefore the calculations of British imperialism for overcoming its problems by the help of social-democracy are based on the bloodthirsty practice of the Labor Government in its treatment of the colonies, in its brutal repression in India, Palestine, and throughout the world.

But there is one factor which can upset these calculations. That is the growth of the consciousness amongst British workers that "no nation which oppresses another nation can itself be free"; that the class struggle at home is bound up with the class struggle in the colonies and that it is a common struggle of the British workers and the colonial masses against a common enemy.

