

# PART IV. THE BRITISH PEOPLE AND INDIA

## XIV. The Common Interests of the British and Indian Peoples

*"In giving freedom to the slave, we assure freedom to the free."*—Abraham Lincoln, Annual Message to Congress, December 1, 1862.

*"I say there is room enough for us all to be free, and that it not only does not wrong the white man that the Negro should be free, but it positively wrongs the mass of the white men that the Negro should be enslaved."*—Abraham Lincoln, speech at Cincinnati, September 17, 1859.

### I. PERMANENT COMMON INTERESTS OF THE TWO PEOPLES

The domination of India was never in the true interests of the British people. The gains from the tribute and exploitation of India, the profits of trade and investment, the highly paid posts and pensions and sinecures, have enriched a tiny section of the nation; but that enrichment has only increased the power of reaction and wealth against the masses of the nation. The role of the Anglo-Indian Nabobs and of Die-Hard Toryism in British politics have abundantly illustrated the truth of this. The crumbs and droppings of the spoils obtained by the propertied classes from the plunder of India might fall to their retainers and a small upper section of the skilled workers or privileged labor aristocracy; but the price of this short-lived gain of a section was the degradation and deeper enslavement of the mass of the working class and the poisoning and corruption of the labor movement.

The Chartist pioneers of British democracy and the British Labor Movement well understood the truth of this, and unhesitatingly took their stand against the policies of colonial domination and for the freedom of all subject peoples. Thus the Manifesto of the Fraternal Democracies in 1846:

"There is no foot of land, either in Britain or the Colonies, that you, the working class, can call your own. . . . They, your masters, will take the land—they will fill all the higher situations, civil and military, of the new colonies—your share will be the slaughter of the combat and the cost of winning and retaining the conquest. The actual settlers on and cultivators of the soil, these are the rightful sovereigns of the soil, and should be at perfect liberty to choose their own form of government and their own institutions." (*Northern Star*, March 7, 1846.)

Marx repeatedly emphasized the conclusion to which his studies of the problems of the British working class and democratic movement had brought him, that progress in Britain imperatively required the liberation of the subject nations under British rule. He wrote, with special reference to Ireland, which then typified the colonial question:

"Quite independent of any 'international' and 'humanitarian' talk about 'justice for Ireland' . . . it is the direct and absolute interest of the British working class to break the present connection with Ireland. . . . The British working class can do nothing until it rids itself of Ireland. . . . The reaction in Britain has its roots in the enslavement of Ireland." (Marx, letter to Engels, December 10, 1869.)

Similarly the resolution of the General Council of the First International in 1869, adopted with the co-operation of the leading representatives of British Trade Unionism, declared:

"The essential preliminary condition of the emancipation of the English working class is the turning of the present compulsory union, that is slavery, of Ireland with England, into an equal and free union, if that is possible, or into full separation, if this is inevitable."

Herein was expressed the essential principle of the approach of the working-class and progressive movement to the colonial question, and to all questions of the domination of subject peoples.

The pioneers of the modern socialist and labor movement in Britain, Hyndman, Keir Hardie, Tom Mann and others, were all champions of Indian liberation, and devoted a considerable proportion of their political activity to exposing the consequences of British rule in India and awakening support for the cause of Indian national freedom.

The liberal-labor movement of the later nineteenth century, whose traditions have been continued in the official policy of leading sections of the labor movement in the twentieth century, acquiesced in and even supported the colonial policy of the ruling class. This tendency was unfortunately carried forward in the reactionary record of the two Labor Governments in relation to India, under which arrests and imprisonments reached record heights, and in various pronouncements which have been made from time to time by the National Council of Labor in relation to the Indian question, supporting official policy and repressive measures in India and criticizing the Indian national movement. This line of support for the forcible maintenance of British domination in India has reflected the traditional outlook of the privileged labor aristocracy which sought to maintain a sheltered position on the basis of empire exploitation.

But the falsity of this outlook has been abundantly demonstrated in the modern period, when the crumbling of the former world monopoly of British capitalism has brought with it the collapse of the sheltered position of former privileged sections—most powerfully shown in the fate of the Lancashire cotton operatives. This has exposed the bankruptcy of a policy which sought to build prosperity on the assumption of the uninterrupted continuance of empire domination and exploitation.

In this way the lessons of experience of the modern period have driven home the necessity of finding a new basis of the free and equal relations of the British and Indian peoples, to the mutual benefit of both. The old empire basis is doomed. The attempt to continue it, with the weapons of coercion and repression against the rising hostility of the subject peoples, can only lead to increasing isolation and peril for the British people. It can only lead to continuous economic worsening, and even the prospect of economic catastrophe, if the source of livelihood is still sought to be found from the unpaid tribute of the subject peoples or the forced and unequal exchange between the exploiting metropolis and the exploited colonies.

On the other hand, the path of national liberation of India and the subject peoples holds out a new and favorable perspective for the British people. Indian national liberation would remove the burdens and barriers which at present hold the Indian people down on the lowest level in the world scale. It would open the

way to progressive social advance, the raising of the standard of living of four hundred millions, and the inauguration of the vast and long overdue works of technical and industrial reconstruction which a National Government would attempt. This would inevitably have favorable repercussions on the economic situation of the British people, as on the standards of the whole world. It would open the way to fruitful productive relations, on the basis of equality and friendship, alongside co-operation and mutual strengthening in the maintenance of democracy and world peace.

The example of the U.S.S.R. during the past quarter of a century has shown the practical path of solution of the national problem on the basis of the complete liberation and equality of the many nationalities formerly subject to Tsarism, with the final abolition of all distinction of ruling and subject nations, and with free help (not loans at interest) from the more advanced to the more backward nations to enable them to develop with the greatest possible speed to the technical and cultural level of the most advanced. This experience has shown how such a policy of national liberation and equality, so far from being utopian, is the only practical policy, and has forged unbreakable bonds of friendship in place of former antagonisms.

## 2. COMMON INTERESTS IN THE FIGHT AGAINST FASCISM

If the liberation of India has always corresponded to the real interests of the British people, and with increasing emphasis during recent years, the present war situation has made this question more clear and urgent than ever before. It has exposed with new sharpness the evils of the continued enslavement of India. It has laid bare for all to see the imperative necessity of ending this enslavement now in order to make possible the free co-operation of India in the common struggle which faces all nations today.

The contradiction between a world war of liberation against fascism, for the liberation of the nations enslaved by fascism, and the simultaneous maintenance of the enslavement of India is a glaring contradiction which weakens the cause of the peoples and is a blow in the face of the world front of the peoples against fascism. The Atlantic Charter laid down as the pledged policy of

the British and American Governments, later adhered to by all the United Nations:

"They respect the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live; and they wish to see sovereign rights and self-government restored to those who have been forcibly deprived of them."

In a speech immediately following the publication of the Atlantic Charter, the Deputy Prime Minister, Mr. Attlee, emphasized that "colored peoples as well as white will share the benefits of the Churchill-Roosevelt Atlantic Charter," and added:

"You will not find in any of the declarations which have been made on behalf of the Government of this country on the war any suggestion that the freedom and social security for which we fight should be denied to any of the races of mankind."

But on September 9, 1941, the Prime Minister, Mr. Churchill, in an official statement on behalf of the Government specifically excluded "India, Burma and other parts of the British Empire" from the operation of the Atlantic Charter, and explained:

"At the Atlantic meeting we had in mind primarily the restoration of the sovereignty, self-government and natural life of the States and nations of Europe now under the Nazi yoke."

This rejection of the Indian national demand, at the very moment when Indian national liberation is imperative for the most effective mobilization of the Indian people for defense and for participation in the common struggle, is the root cause of the present crisis. The present crisis in the relations of Britain and India, at the moment when the interests of the two nations should be most closely united, is the harvest of years of reactionary policy now reaching to a fateful climax. This harvest is bringing immeasurable dangers to the world cause of the fight against fascism.

The experience of the war in the Far East has shown that the battle against Japanese aggression cannot be effectively waged only by foreign imported imperialist forces, which are divorced from the friendly support or fighting reserves of the population of the countries attacked, and which are therefore compelled to treat the territories and nations of Eastern Asia as only theaters of war or spoils of conquest. This strategy only plays into the

hands of the Japanese and their deceitful propaganda of "Asia for the Asiatics" (meaning "Asia for the Japanese War Lords"). Nor can the man-power and resources and popular enthusiasm of these countries be mobilized or organized by a colonial bureaucracy, without roots or permanent home in the country, and created and designed for an entirely different purpose, for the maintenance of a system of exploitation and for repressing any popular movement, and not for any major constructive tasks, for which they have already shown themselves incapable in peacetime.

This lesson has been driven home successively by the experience of Hong Kong, Malaya, Singapore, Java, Borneo and Burma. The classic exposition of this lesson was given by the dispatch of *The Times* special correspondent in the Far East on *Why Singapore Fell*, which was published in February, 1942:

"The Government had no roots in the life of the people of the country. With the exception of certain sections of the Chinese community—some inspired by Free China's struggle for survival, others by Soviet precept and example—the bulk of the Asiatic population remained spectators from start to finish. . . .

"The absence of forceful leadership made itself felt from the top downwards. . . . The same lack of dynamism, of aggressive energy, characterized the upper ranks of the civilian administration. Perhaps it is impossible to retain these qualities after a lifetime spent in the easy-going routine of colonial administration. . . .

"Singapore had a civilian population of 700,000 people. Unlike Moscow, the bulk of this population were apathetic spectators of a conflict which they felt did not concern them. . . .

"This caused acute difficulties in the field of labor. Bomb-craters on airfields were not filled up because no Asiatics, and not enough Europeans, were available for work. Early in the war, of the labor force of 12,000 Asiatics employed at the naval base, only 800 were reporting for duty. There was no native labor at the docks. Soldiers had to be taken away from military duties to load and unload ships. Many small ships and launches that could have brought many thousands of people away from Singapore were anchored out in the harbor; but they

never sailed because the native crews had deserted and there were not enough Europeans to man and stoke them." (*Times*, February 18, 1942.)

Such was the exposure of the colonial system, no longer in the complacent pages of blue books or self-congratulatory reports to parliament, but in the stern ordeal of war. "Against this structure, the military and civilian weaknesses of which have been indicated," *The Times* correspondent concludes, the first assault of the Japanese offensive meant that "one good push has sent the structure crashing to the ground." Yet this lesson was to be repeated in the East Indies and in Burma, and has not yet been learned for India.

The front against Japan in the Far East has been weak or strong precisely in proportion to the degree of mobilization and co-operation of the population inhabiting the regions attacked, and that co-operation has been proportionate to the degree of freedom they have won. Thus the fully colonial territories, like Malaya, Singapore, Java, Borneo and Burma, have collapsed most rapidly before the Japanese advance. With this may be contrasted the relatively more protracted resistance in the Philippines, where a large measure of self-government had been granted, with an elected Filipino President, Cabinet and elected National Assembly, and a fixed date for complete independence by 1945; where conscription and general military training of the population had been established before the war; and where "the Filipinos have outshone every military hope and have fought with Americans like blood-brothers." (*Daily Herald*, February 7, 1942.)

The power of national independence to inspire and mobilize a people to fight in their own defense has been shown for all time by the heroic example and leadership of Free China. In the face of a thousand obstacles and shortage of arms, equipment or developed productive resources, the Chinese National Republic is now in the sixth year of unbroken and united resistance to the Japanese assault. They have held the front against the main bulk of the Japanese armies, at the same time as first-class imperialist armies were going down like ninepins before a considerably smaller proportion of the Japanese forces. After having been at the mercy of every rapacious Power in the past, and the supposed predestined victim of partition, China under its National Government has won its rightful position of equal partnership among



the leading four Powers at the head of the United Nations. After having been subjected to every rebuff and boycott at the hands of representatives of Britain and the United States in the early years of their struggle, at a time when the British Empire and the United States were providing the main bulk of the supplies for Japanese armaments, they have now turned the tables to such an extent that they have sent trained soldiers to the relief of British and Australian forces in distress, and may yet have to play a crucial part in relation to the defense of India.

These are the plain and inescapable lessons of the war in the Far East which now point the way for the supreme and decisive test of India.

*Shall India travel the Malaya road or the road of Free China? This is the heart of the issue in relation to India today.*

The alliance of Free China and Free India must be the cornerstone of freedom and the fight for freedom in Eastern Asia. This is the political-military-strategic key to victory over the Axis in Asia and to the whole future in Asia.

What will a Free India mean as an ally of the United Nations?

First, it will mean the immediate strengthening of the defense of India, by the full mobilization, support and co-operation of the population, in place of the present passivity, suspicion, obstruction or conflict; the bringing into play of reserves at present unused; and the formation of popular forces and levies (even if mainly of a guerilla type and under-armed at first, but capable of rapid development under war conditions) to fight alongside the allied forces in the defense of India.

Second, it will mean thereby the possibility to bar the road to the Axis conquest of India, not merely by the precarious barrier of a handful of imperialist forces which may be overpowered and withdrawn, as in so many other regions of Eastern Asia, but by the united and unbreakable resistance of a nation of four hundred millions fighting for their freedom with the same spirit as the Chinese are fighting; and thus to remove the menace which the Axis conquest of India would mean for the whole future of the war.

Third, it will mean thereby the release of allied forces for other fronts (even the release of forces at present used for repression would be important), so that the solution of the Indian issue would have the most direct bearing on facilitating the conditions

for the establishment and maintenance of the Second Front in Europe.

Fourth, it will mean the enormous strengthening of the liberation appeal of the cause of the United Nations to all the peoples of Asia, including those at present under the Japanese yoke.

Fifth, it will mean the very practical strengthening of the reserves and resources of the world front against fascism, by the release of the powerful reserves of potential manpower, resources and productive power which India represents, but which only a liberated India under a National Government enjoying the confidence of the people can effectively release.

India represents a vast reservoir of manpower and resources on the side of freedom which is at present barely tapped. The very great reserves of potential manpower, resources and productive power of India are at present largely unmobilized and unused under the existing system, which distrusts and fears the Indian people, opposes popular initiative and throttles any large-scale development.

This is strikingly shown in relation to manpower. The Indian army so far raised amounts to between one and one and a half million men out of a population of nearly four hundred millions; recruitment is limited; masses are turned away from the recruiting offices.

“There is no lack of men; since the outbreak of war recruiting offices all over the country have been congested with volunteers from every class, community and occupation to such an extent that it soon became impossible to deal with their numbers.” (*India at War: Government Report, 1941.*)

In proportion to population the manpower would provide twice the armed forces of the Soviet Union. On the Canadian scale of recruitment, it would provide 15 to 20 millions. The Nehru plan was for the immediate organization of an army of 5 millions, with preliminary training to extend to 100 millions. China has mobilized 20 millions. But in India today the actual outcome is one-quarter of one per cent of the population, or a total less than that of a secondary European State. Even this figure has been stated to be “largely a paper figure. Arms are lacking for the training of a mass army, and as a result recruiting, until recently, was rather discouraged” (Military Correspondent of the *Observer*,

March 8, 1942). The Chinese example has shown the possibility, under national leadership, of organizing and training armies even with limited resources, capable of meeting the Japanese armies; but the Chinese Command's offer to send military instructors to India to assist in solving the problem of training has not so far been accepted.

Similarly in respect of resources and war production. The widely publicized optimistic official statements about Indian war production, proclaiming that "India is producing 20,000 out of 40,000 items of ordnance stores," ignore the fact that the list of items actually produced consists largely of forks, spoons, hair combs, mess tins, etc., and does not include planes, tanks or heavy artillery.

It has been already shown (see Chapter III) that India has abundant resources of all the key raw materials for war production, with the exception of nickel, molybdenum and vanadium. But only the tiniest fraction is utilized. With coal reserves of 36,000 million tons, the annual production before the war reached 25 million tons, or one-tenth of the British level; and coal output dropped in 1940. With iron ore reserves of 3,000 million tons, the output of steel on the eve of war was not yet 1 million tons, or one-thirteenth of the British level, and below the level of pre-war Poland. By 1941 steel output had advanced to  $1\frac{1}{4}$  million tons: "the expansion might have been larger, but . . . we are large importers of pig iron from India. It would have meant absorbing in India pig iron which was urgently needed for our industry here" (the Duke of Devonshire, Under-Secretary for India, in the House of Lords, February 3, 1942). Thus shipping, urgently needed for war transport between Britain and the Far East, is used to transport pig iron from India to Britain and finished steel back to India, rather than manufacture in India.

Up to the present there has been no development of motor industry or aero-engine industry; India is dependent on overseas supplies for all its heavy weapons: planes, tanks and heavy artillery. Yet India with industrial development could have been the arsenal of the war in the Far East. The Government announced in the House of Commons on October 9, 1941, that the manufacture of internal-combustion engines in India would not be "a practical proposition so far as the present war is concerned." By the spring of 1942, after two and a half years of war, it was announced that

an exploratory commission was being appointed "to examine the question of production of components of internal-combustion engines or complete engines." Indian industrialists have vociferously complained that, in contrast to the gigantic industrial development in the Dominions since the war, industrial development in India has received a setback.\*

The gigantic available man-power for war production is thus scarcely used. Despite the inexhaustible resources of raw materials for industrial production, and the inexhaustible reserves of man-power, not 1 per cent of the population is employed in factories, mines, railways or docks. It was reported as an achievement in November, 1941, that 50,000 workers were then employed in the Government Ordnance Factories, or one in 8,000 of the population. In September, 1942, it was announced that 123 (one hundred and twenty-three) Indian workers had returned to India from industrial training in England under the Bevin scheme. And meanwhile the authorities here wring their hands over the problem of manpower.

Thus the present policy in India means the failure to mobilize gigantic available resources on the side of freedom against fascism—at a time when every resource is needed for a desperate struggle and the fate of the world is in the balance.

What stands in the way?

Not the lack of will of the Indian people to play their part in the common struggle. The Indian people, through their accredited national leaders, and through the leaders of every political section, demand their national freedom now in order that they may mobilize their full strength and resources as an equal ally of the United Nations.

The common interests of the British and Indian peoples in the present world battle are plain and unmistakable.

The main obstacle is the reactionary policy which still resists

\* Thus the speech of the President of the Indian Chamber of Commerce, Sir Badridas Goenka, in May, 1941—after twenty months of war: "After describing economic conditions in countries like Canada and Australia, and contrasting them with the situation in India, Sir Badridas said that while there had been an all-round improvement in industrial and business activity in those countries, conditions in India had suffered a setback." (*Calcutta Statesman*, May 23, 1941.)

With this may be compared the judgment of the semi-official journal *Great Britain and the East* and the *American Pacific Affairs*, quoted on pages 27-28.

Indian freedom, even at the risk of thereby opening the gates to Japan; which would rather surrender the control of India to the Japanese militarists than to the Indian people; and which opposes the demand of the Indian people to be an equal ally of the United Nations.

This is the unhappy chapter in the recent relations of Britain and India whose record we must now trace, in order to seek to find the path forward to a solution, for the mutual benefit of the Indian and British peoples in the present urgent world situation.