

I. India in the World Alliance

Against Fascism

"The present international situation divides the world into two camps—of aggression and anti-aggression. All those who oppose aggression and are striving for the freedom of their country and mankind should join the anti-aggression camp. There is no middle course...."

"I sincerely hope and I confidently believe that our ally Great Britain, without waiting for any demands on the part of the people of India, will as speedily as possible give them real political power, so that they may be in a position further to develop their material and spiritual strength and thus realize that their participation in the war is not merely an aid to the anti-aggression nations for the securing of victory, but also a turning point in their struggle for India's freedom. From an objective point of view, I am convinced that this would be the wisest policy, which will redound to the credit of the British Empire."—Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek in February, 1942.

A great responsibility rests today on the British people in relation to India. In the present hour of crisis of human history, when the fortunes of the freedom of mankind are swinging in the balance, the question of India stands in the forefront of world politics. The cause of the freedom of India is bound up with the cause of the freedom of all nations. The policies pursued, alike by the British Government and by the Indian nation, will have far-reaching effects on all countries.

India—this means one-fifth of mankind. India—this means one of the richest territories on earth. India—this means one of the principal strategic bases for world domination. All this fascism is now trying to conquer. And the present conflict between Britain and India is easing the path for fascism.

The question of India is no exclusive concern of the Indian nation, or of the British nation, or of the British Empire. It is an international question of common concern to all the nations engaged in the present battle for freedom against fascism. It is of concern to China, which, as the declaration of Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek quoted at the head of this chapter has indicated, desires to see a free India as an equal ally to stand by its side in maintaining the front against the Japanese attack and sustaining

the freedom of the Asiatic nations. It is of concern to the United States and Australia, which, as the declarations of their statesmen and press have abundantly indicated, look to see a free commonwealth of India as a powerful bastion of democracy in the Pacific. It is of concern to the Soviet Union, which has blazed the trail in showing to the world in practice how the path of national liberation and equality leads, not to weakness, but to strength, of mutual advantage to the former ruling nation and the former subject nation.

But it is of especial concern and a special responsibility of the British nation; for Britain is still the ruling Power in India. Britain holds the immediate power of decision, which can open the road or bar the road to Indian freedom and equal partnership in the alliance of the United Nations, and thereby settle the immediate fate, not only of the 400 millions of India, and the prospect of the war in Eastern Asia, but, by the consequences of that decision, the whole perspective of the war involving the fate of Britain and every country in the world. Therefore no British citizen can afford to be indifferent to the Indian question or to the responsibility of decision in relation to the British Government's policy.

The alternatives which rest upon that decision are plain, inescapable and urgent.

Either a Free India, fighting as an ally of the United Nations, and mobilizing the immense manpower and resources of India for resistance as only a government of the people's own chosen leaders in whom they have confidence can do, will be able, in co-operation with the allied nations, to bar the road to Japan's further advance and bring an enormous accession of strength to the democratic camp, alike for winning the war and for making the peace and building the future of world co-operation.

Or the refusal of freedom to India, the continuance of crisis and conflict, with the diversion of forces of the ruling power to tasks of repression, and the passivity, non-co-operation or active hostility of large sections of the population and their political leadership, will open the road to fascism's sweeping advance, on an even more terrible scale than in the previous experience of Burma, Malaya and the East Indies, weaken the world front of the United Nations and bring into view the menace of immeasurable catastrophe for India and the world.

This is the choice which faces us today.

The freedom of India was long urgent and overdue already before the present war. It was vital in the interests of the Indian people, for their own progress and development, to enable them to tackle the formidable problems of mass poverty and backwardness of a long subject and exploited nation. It was vital in the interests of the British people and the world to end the main basis of the old cancer of imperialist domination and strengthen the advance of world democracy. Had the national leaders of India, who in those crucial years before the war were in the vanguard of the international anti-fascist front, been in power in India when the war broke out, the present world position would be very different. But the crucial phase of the war today, with the direct menace of fascism to India, as an integral part of the supreme world offensive of fascism, has raised the question of Indian freedom to the level of an inescapable and immediate challenge which brooks no denial and admits of no delay.

"The situation in India at this moment gives no occasion for undue despondency or alarm." This statement of the British Prime Minister on September 10, 1942—ominously recalling in its complacency similar statements on the eve of the fall of Hong Kong and Singapore—is in striking contrast to the actual position.

What is the present position?

First, fascism is at the gates of India. Japan's forces directly threaten the land and sea frontiers of India. The further plans of Hitler's offensive in the event of successes in the Middle East also look toward India, as the preliminary radio barrage and the utilization of Bose in Berlin already indicate. The immediate military threat is the Japanese threat. At the time of writing (October, 1942), events have still to reveal whether Japan will attempt the direct invasion of India in the later months of 1942, or whether the field of operations may not develop first in other regions of the Pacific. But the menace is close and obvious (indeed, in the same parliamentary debate on September 10, 1942, Mr. Churchill spoke of "the present state of affairs in India, with invasion not far off"). The intentions of the Japanese militarists are openly proclaimed. And the existence of internal crisis in India increases the danger.

Second, Japan's forces have already, within a few months since Pearl Harbor in December, 1941, overrun a vast area in the

Southeastern Pacific, covering close on one and one-half million square miles of land territory (not very much less than the land area of India) and 130 millions of population. This sweeping advance has taken place, despite the existence of considerable Anglo-American-Dutch forces for resistance, powerfully constructed strategic bases and fortifications, and the most confident declarations of leading statesmen, on the eve of disaster, of the impossibility of such an advance. In the subsequent analysis, observers of the most widely varying social and political outlooks have agreed (as notably in the famous dispatches of *The Times* correspondent from Singapore) that the main cause facilitating the rapid Japanese advance was the lack of roots of the colonial governments in the population, the failure to mobilize the populations for defense, the impossibility of holding up the Japanese with only foreign imported forces, the absence of co-operation between the governments and the peoples, and the indifference of the mass of the population, with a minority even actively aiding the Japanese.

Third, despite this colossal warning of experience, India is now reproducing this situation, which led to the fall of Burma, Malaya, Hong Kong, Singapore, Java, or Borneo, on a far vaster scale and in yet more menacing forms. With Japanese armies on the frontiers, the Indian people are not mobilized for defense. The traditional imperialist strategy still calculates to defend the vast area of India primarily with foreign imported forces, while the inhabitants of India are mainly regarded as a nuisance, or as non-combatant slaves and beasts of burden, to be kept in order. The enrollment of one million men in the Indian army from a population of 400 millions is equivalent to a scale of an army of 100,000 for Britain or less than one-half the peace-time strength of the British army. The vast industrial resources and potential industrial man-power are scarcely mobilized; it was recently boasted that 50,000 workers, or one in 8,000 of the population, were engaged in the Indian munitions factories. A recent decree prohibited the organization of voluntary defense forces. Neither politically, nor in practical organization, is there co-operation between the government and the people, or preparedness for the grim ordeal of war and invasion.

Fourth, there is grave internal crisis and direct conflict between the government and the popular forces—a situation which had no parallel in Malaya, Borneo, Java, or the other regions overrun

by Japan, except in Burma, and there only in a far more limited degree. The principal and best known popular leaders, including men who have been international leaders of the anti-fascist fight for a decade, are imprisoned. Mass civil disobedience is threatened, not by a handful of extremists, but by the recognized national organization of the Indian people, holding an electoral mandate more decisive than most cabinets of democratic countries. There are sporadic disorders, lathi charges, whipping ordinances, sabotage, arson, police firing, the use of the military against the civil population, resulting in the deaths of hundreds—a conflict which must be watched with grim satisfaction by the Japanese generals on the frontiers or the Axis propagandists in Berlin, and which cannot but provide fertile ground for the operation of Axis agents and provocateurs. These disorders are the symptom of the absence of political agreement and co-operation.

If this is not a situation to cause not “alarm and despondency” but grave and serious concern and determination to remedy it, there is something wrong with the observer. To be satisfied with such a situation is an abdication of statesmanship.

Is this conflict inevitable? Is it the outcome of some blind and suicidal frenzy of a nationalist movement which is incapable of seeing world issues or the menace of the fascist aggressor at the gates? Is the great Indian nationalist movement a “fifth column” for fascism?

On the contrary. The renegade, Bose, the tool of Berlin, was expelled from the Indian national movement six months before this war began (still in the days of Munich) partly because he was suspected of sympathy for fascism.

The Indian people are no allies of fascism. They passionately desire national freedom, and have struggled for it for decades with signal self-sacrifice, heroism and solidarity, in the course of which they have built up through their National Congress a popular movement of millions without parallel in the world—the greatest national movement in the world next to the Chinese, and our natural ally in the fight against fascism.

Precisely because they stand for freedom, they are opposed to fascism. Their sympathies are with the United Nations. Their leaders have understood and proclaimed, with a breadth of international outlook rare in a purely national movement, that the cause of Indian freedom is bound up with world freedom and

with world victory over fascism. For the past ten years they have played their part in the front ranks of the international anti-fascist front, for China, for Ethiopia, for Spain, at a time when many of those who today in the places of power in Britain dare to denounce them for failing to join up in the fight against fascism were themselves praising and helping fascism and betraying China, Ethiopia and Spain. India is far more deeply and sincerely anti-fascist than many National Government Ministers in Britain.*

The Indian people have no wish to be overrun by the armies of Japan. They wish to fight in alliance with the United Nations against the aggression of fascism. Their demand is for a National Government, in order that they may mobilize their full strength, their manpower and their resources under their own leaders in whom they have confidence, as an ally of the United Nations in the common struggle. "Free India will become the ally of the United Nations, sharing with them in the trials and tribulations of the joint enterprise and struggle for freedom." (Indian National Congress resolution of August 8, 1942.)

It is true that they have accompanied this demand with the threat of civil disobedience in the event of refusal—a threat which, if the situation continues to worsen, may become a campaign in practice. Such a policy in the midst of the war of the United Nations against fascism is equally opposed to the true interests of the Indian nation as of all the nations engaged in the present struggle for freedom. Such a policy can only lead to division of the forces opposed to fascism, and thus open the way to the fascist enslavement of India and the world. But it is essential for sympathetic British opinion to understand how sincere Indian patriots and anti-fascists, goaded and provoked by the refusal of

* Indian political opinion has not forgotten that the present Secretary of State for India, Mr. L. S. Amery, who in his recent broadcast denounced Indian national leaders as "arch-saboteurs" surrendering to Japan, himself declared in the House of Commons on the occasion of Japan's attack on Manchuria: "I confess that I see no reason whatever why, either in act or in word, or in sympathy, we should go individually or intentionally against Japan in this matter. Japan has got a very powerful case based upon fundamental realities. . . . Who is there among us to cast the first stone and to say that Japan ought not to have acted with the object of creating peace and order in Manchuria and defending herself against the continual aggression of vigorous Chinese nationalism? Our whole policy in India, our whole policy in Egypt, stand condemned if we condemn Japan." (Rt. Hon. L. S. Amery in the House of Commons, February 27, 1933.)

their reasonable demands, and unable to see any positive alternative policy, felt driven as a last desperate expedient to adopt this policy of non-co-operation, believing it to be their only weapon and their only way to the free mobilization of the people for the establishment of a National Government and effective defense against fascism—although, in fact, it could only mean division before fascism, suicidal to the interests of Indian freedom. It is necessary to recognize that they were pleading to negotiate before launching any campaign—when the arrests precipitated the conflict.

While we must deplore the failure of leadership which could even contemplate such a threat, or launch such a campaign, in this grave hour, we cannot but recognize that the heaviest responsibility rests with the reactionary policy which refused India's just demands and thus provoked such an outcome.

This is the tragedy of the present situation and of the present conflict. It is a conflict which is needless, unjustifiable, indefensible. It is a conflict between opponents of fascism, between two nations who are equally opposed to fascism, and who should be equal allies in a common cause.

At this moment of the supreme Axis offensive throughout the world, when the fortunes of the United Nations are swaying in the balance, a nation of four hundred millions, one-fifth of humanity, has been treated as an enemy for the crime of demanding to be an ally. This is the fantastic but unfortunately true epitome of the present Indian situation.

When all the charges and criticisms in the world have been laid against the Congress leadership and tactics, the fact remains that the Congress was asking for the recognition of a free India as an ally of the United Nations. This demand, because it was accompanied with the threat of civil disobedience in the event of refusal, was met with police cells, lathi charges, whipping ordinances and firing squads.

To have reached such a position represents a bankruptcy of statesmanship on the part of the ruling Power which parallels the worst military fiascoes of the war. With all the cards stacked against fascism in India and on the side of the United Nations, with ninety per cent of articulate political opinion eager to fight on the side of the United Nations, the policy pursued up to the present by the Government in India has succeeded in performing

the brilliant feat of turning the bulk of this popular movement and feeling into bitter hostility or even active resistance.

What are we to think of a policy which has produced such fruits in practice, however self-righteous and self-satisfied its sponsors appear to be with the outcome? What are we to think of a policy by which a Nehru, a symbol of international anti-fascism, finds himself against his will thrust into a position in which he appears lined up in a front of struggle objectively hindering the war effort of the United Nations against fascism and opposed to the front of the United Nations as represented by the British Government in India?

We cannot be satisfied with such a position. The situation in India is serious, but not yet irreparable. But we need to act quickly if we are to remedy it in time.

A solution must be found which will make possible the free and honorable co-operation of the great Indian nation in the alliance of the United Nations for the defeat of fascism and for the freedom of all nations, including India.

Such a solution can be found. An examination of the problem will show that there are no insurmountable obstacles, given the will to overcome the obstacles and the recognition of the urgency of the situation.

But to reach such a solution, British opinion will have to throw aside many time-honored political prejudices, just as the Indian national movement will need to make, and has in fact shown itself ready to make, far-reaching concessions from its standpoint—granted the essential national demand—in reaching a provisional settlement on a basis of co-operation with a British Viceroy or a British Commander-in-Chief in the present common struggle.

The present hour is too grave for a parade of the old debating points which have in the past been allowed to obscure a sincere and objective discussion of the Indian problem; the hoary proofs of the incapacity of the Indian people for self-government; the demonstration of the hopeless divisions of the Indian people; the attempted burial of the Indian nation in an ocean of warring communities; the magic telescope to reduce the National Congress (with a more overwhelming electoral majority than any political party in England has ever known) to a microscopic minority, and to inflate minute splinter organizations without membership into weighty representations of the Indian voice; the make-believe

with sham constitutions to conceal the absolutism of alien dictatorship; or the wizard's wand of will o' the wisp promises of future constitutions as a substitute for present action. All this paraphernalia of wishful self-deception will have to be ruthlessly thrown overboard; for the present time demands action and statesmanship, not spiteful fairy tales to hoodwink the public, conceal the truth and prepare disaster.

Democrats who may have been shaken by this conventional anti-democratic propaganda into a conception that they must deny to India what they are simultaneously demanding for the nations of Europe will do well to remember that all these arguments to prove the present impracticability of Indian self-government have always been used against every subject people on the eve of freedom—until freedom proved their falsity. The same arguments of disunity were used against the American nation on the eve of the American Declaration of Independence—until the American War of Independence exploded them into thin air. But we cannot wish to have an Indian War of Independence in the midst of a world war against fascism, in order to resolve the doubts of the skeptics.

British democratic opinion has been too long content to remain indifferent to the Indian question, and to leave the field to the reactionary enemies of democracy who have posed as experts. The truth about modern India has been concealed behind a thick veil of censorship, prejudice and propaganda. All the phantasies and myths which used to be spread a quarter of a century ago by these same experts and semi-official authorities and repeated a millionfold in press publicity, about the old Tsarist Russia on the eve of the Russian Revolution, before the Russian people took power—the pictures about the millions of moujiks worshipping the Tsar as their "Little Father," and the description of the political revolutionary leaders as a microscopic minority of agitators without mass influence or understanding of the "soul" of Russia—all these have been paralleled and eclipsed by the current publicity about India, about the political situation in India, the outlook of the Indian peasant masses, or the role of the national and popular movement. The legends and calumnies which were spread for a quarter of a century about the Soviet Union, and whose fictitious character has now been universally admitted when the supreme test of war has exposed their falsity, are also

a salutary warning to be on guard against this kind of publicity.

British opinion needs now to awaken to the truth about India. The responsibility of judgment is here. Such judgment can only be based on an informed opinion.

The present book has been prepared to assist in the development of such an informed opinion about India. Its aim is to present in rapid summary form for the plain man and woman the essential facts about the Indian situation, the background of the Indian question, and the present crisis of India and the war, and to suggest the possible lines of a provisional solution.

Even if Hitler were to collapse tomorrow, and if the Japanese military power were to dissolve in sudden defeat, the Indian question would remain clamorous for solution, and the responsibility of British democracy would remain. But in fact the solution of the Indian question is a vital preliminary necessity to assist in the speedy defeat of Hitler and Japan. Hence the special urgency of the question today.

The plan of the present book corresponds to this task.

Parts I to III deal with the background of the Indian situation; the Indian people, their country and their problems; the record and outcome of British rule in India, and why national emancipation is now a vital necessity for Indian progress and development.

These sections are largely based in summarized form on a previous book of the present author, *India Today*, which appeared in 1940 and is at present out of print. Much of what is here treated in condensed form (in part, also, rewritten and brought up-to-date in relation to recent facts and evidence) will be found more fully treated in the previous book; and the reader who should wish to pursue these questions further, or to query some of the statements and judgments here made with only limited evidence, must be referred to the earlier book for a very much fuller discussion and the fuller evidence in detail of what is here set out.

Part IV is in its entirety newly written, and deals with the present crisis; India and the war; the policy of the national movement; the Cripps Mission; the question of non-co-operation and the ensuing conflict; and the present political situation.

The concluding chapter discusses the possibility of an immediate practical solution in the common interests of the Indian people, the British people and the United Nations.