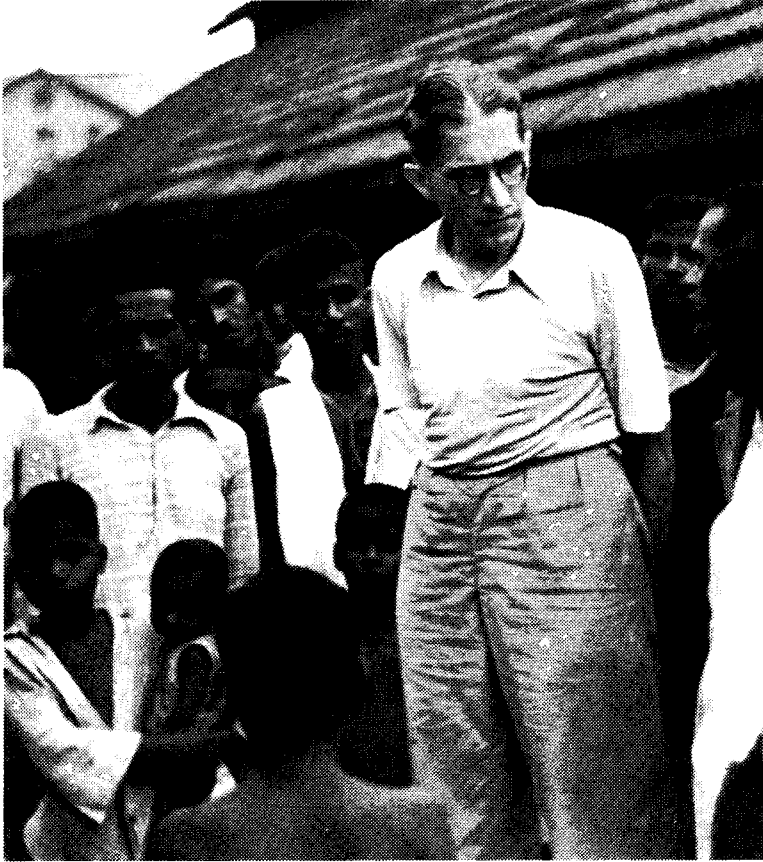


R. Palme Dutt

IN INDIA



He met Gandhi, Nehru, Jinnah, Joshi, Cripps. He saw appalling mass-poverty alongside great individual wealth. He saw the problems, met the people who, with their fighting spirit, courage and ability—will build a free and prosperous India.

Souvenir of his travels

one shilling

Introduction

FOR the first time since 1921, R. Palme Dutt was allowed by the Government to visit India.

He went to India as a Special Correspondent of the *Daily Worker*. His aim was to see first hand the conditions of the people; to get a more personal knowledge of the problems facing them and us. And to meet and discuss these problems with the leading people of Indian political life.

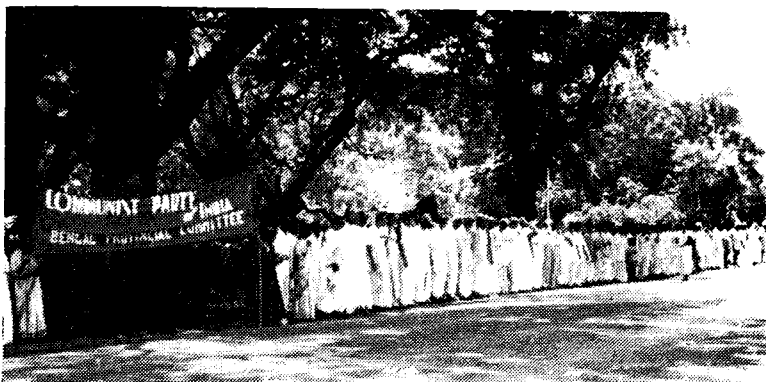
THESSE things he accomplished. That his four months in India were packed with experiences, is clear from this glimpse of one of the programmes for a week, arranged for him by the Communist Party of India. A twenty-page folder, with every minute provided for. Breakfast timed. Cars arranged. Straight from breakfast to meeting. Then to another meeting. Then to tour a slum area and speak with the people. Break for lunch. Then to interview a leading personality. Then to another meeting. And so on throughout the day, until one reads, "11 p.m. Retire to bed." A schedule like this every day. Not a minute wasted.

THEN his itinerary. Landing on March 29 at Karachi Aerodrome, he went to 18 of the major towns and many villages before leaving on July 31.

DURING his tour he met Gandhi, Jinnah, Nehru, Cripps, and other leaders and spoke to peasants, workers, intellectuals and business men. He returned with his encyclopædic knowledge and his grasp of India's problems enriched by an invaluable personal experience. A glimpse of that experience is told in these pages. It should deepen our sense of responsibility to the Indian people and strengthen our determination to change British policy towards India.

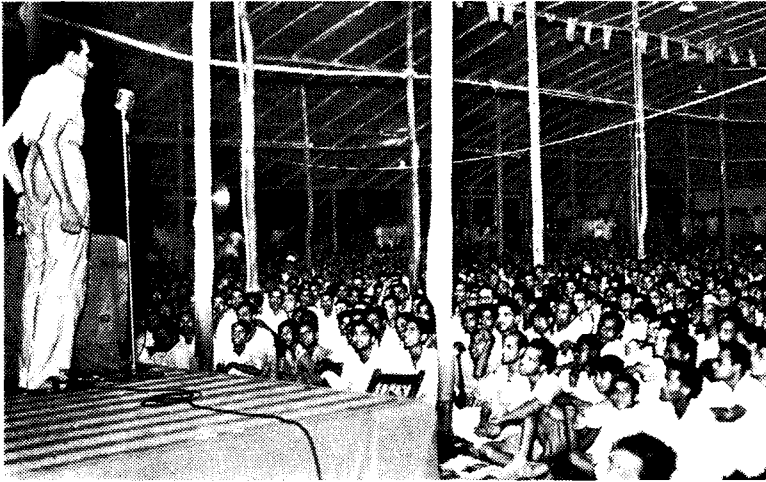
LOOK at the pictures of the famine victims—knowing we cannot avoid some responsibility. Read of the people's conditions in Bombay—and know that we have been in India for over 140 years.

And then look at the other pictures—and have confidence that with, first, our departure from India, and then our assistance, the people of India have among them all the ability, courage and understanding to build their country—for themselves.

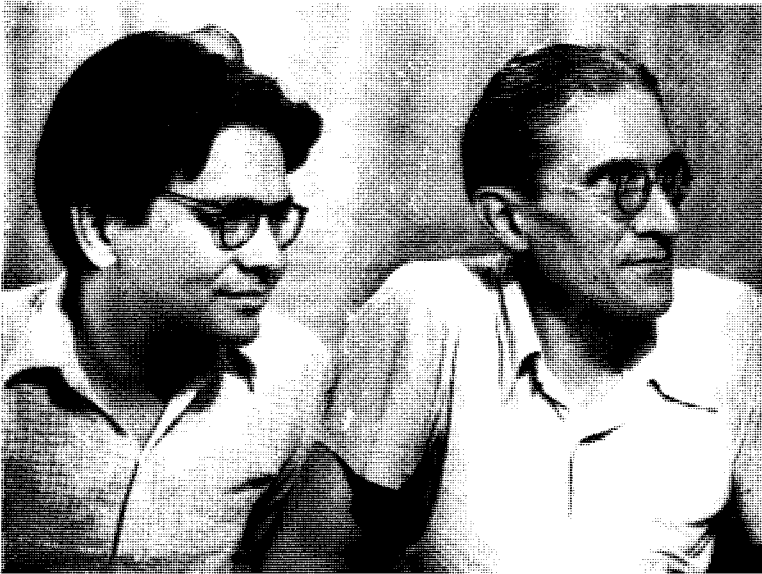


DUTT WELCOMED AT KARACHI AERODROME

Dutt addresses a “selective” meeting

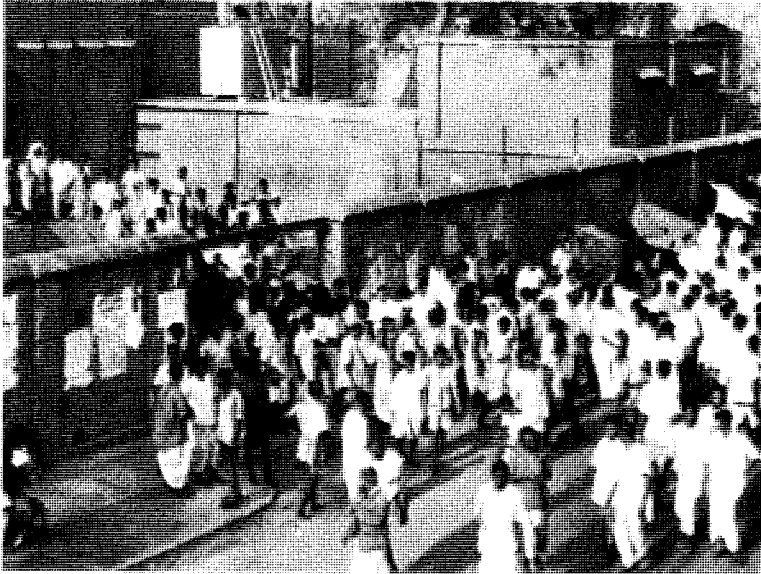


R. Palme Dutt was asked to speak to a reception meeting of selected English-speaking Communists and sympathisers in Calcutta. Expecting two or three hundred, he was told there would be 5,000 present. There were 8,000 at the meeting.



P. C. JOSHI, SECRETARY OF THE INDIAN COMMUNIST PARTY, WITH R. P. DUTT.

May Day 1946 in Calcutta



WORKERS SWARM OUT OF A FACTORY TO ATTEND THE GREAT MAY DAY RALLY AT WHICH R. P. DUTT SPOKE.

Impressions of Calcutta

“THE town is much shabbier than Bombay and the poverty more glaring. The rickshaws, with a weak, undersized coolie dragging two healthy, fat clients, added to the sense of repulsion. I had seen none in Delhi or Bombay. Overcrowding in Calcutta is no less marked than in Bombay; the population here has trebled during the war to 4½ millions. In the bustees, or working-class quarters, the sanitary conditions are worse than in Bombay, the close lines run with an open drain between. Taps average one to five or six hundred; in one case there were five taps for 8,000 people.

ALTHOUGH the intense political divisions have greatly weakened Bengal, the organisation of the working class and of the Communist Party is impressive. The Calcutta Party runs its own daily newspaper, which occupies the ground floor of the great block of the provincial headquarters building. When I asked the provincial secretary how many full-time workers they had for Bengal, he replied, about a thousand. For Calcutta there were seventy. I visited a unique institution, the Red Aid Hospital, splendidly run, with two full-time doctors and sixteen beds, where the victims of the election hooliganism were being cared for. He showed me with pride the microscope which had been presented by the Socialist Medical Association. This institution deserves help.

“I was able to meet many leading personalities in Calcutta and draw from them very interesting impressions of the peculiar situation in Bengal.”



THIS WOMAN, VICTIM OF BENGAL FAMINE, IS 35 YEARS OLD. SHE LOOKS 65.

Famine in India

DURING the past four years, there have been three famines in India. The Bengal famine in 1943 killed one and a half millions of people (official estimate). Unofficial observers say three million died.

The two pictures on this page are but an indication of the terrible effects of famine. And the famines were not only due to the war and the world food shortage. The reasons are to be

found basically in the economy of India, which is the result of a century and a half of British rule. For this we personally have some responsibility.

The average length of life of an Indian is under 27 years as against 56 years for an Englishman. The national income is estimated at 2d. a head per day. Wages range from 6d. a day for an unskilled woman worker (often even less for agricultural workers) to about £1 a week for the top level of skilled workers. Tiny children labour long hours for two or three pence.

There is no unemployment or health insurance. provision for old age. There is little protective industrial legislation.



CHILD VICTIMS OF THE FAMINE. DO WE NOT BEAR SOME RESPONSIBILITY FOR THEIR TERRIBLE CHILDHOOD?

Bombay



*Reprinted from R. Palme Dutt's Travel notes
published in the "Labour Monthly," July 1946*

DURING the Easter recess, while the Cabinet Mission departed to fish for trout and shoot wild duck in the cool heights of Kashmir, I took the opportunity to visit the crowded industrial centres of Bombay. It was an inspiring experience. Here I was able to meet some of the outstanding trade union and working-class leaders of India and to visit the Communist Party Headquarters, where 120 full-time workers live, work, eat and sleep in the more than Spartan simplicity of their "Commune." On the roof of the provincial headquarters I had an unforgettable meeting of welcome with 1,500 workers crowded on every inch of space, and as large an overflow meeting outside. They gave me a wonderful display of their songs. These songs are turned out on every current topic (sure enough, as soon as I arrived a new song was composed in my honour with the chorus thundering out the unmanageable syllables of my name and somehow turning them into melody). I wish space would permit me to give the text of some of these songs, which were translated for me; they are simple, lively mass agitation, full of humour and vigour, with a catching refrain. Half the mass propaganda, Joshi told me, is done by these songs. Their effect is so powerful that when a team of seven singers visited the Central Provinces for the election campaign, the only thing the authorities could find to do to counteract this was to arrest the whole team for a dacoity (robbery with violence) committed 100 miles away.

ONE evening I spent in the homes of the workers at a time when they had got back from the factories. The housing conditions of Bombay have won an unenviable notoriety throughout the world. There is no improvement today. On the contrary, as the population has doubled during the war and now stands at 3½ millions, the overcrowding has grown much worse.

The chawls are lines of rudely built single-room huts set back to back in close rows. Each is about 12ft. by 10ft., with an uneven earth floor, with no window or ventilation. The darkness inside is only pierced sometimes by a guttering oil wick, while there is an oppressive heat from the tiny stoves and cooking on the ground. In each of these tiny sheds whole families live, eat, sleep, cook, and go through all the processes of life, of birth, sickness and death in these few feet of space. The occupants of the first hut I visited numbered ten; they paid Rs. 7 per month as rent for this wretched home. In the next there were no less than 13 tiny stoves or primitive means of cooking, indicating 13 households; my guide pointed out that this would mean at least 20 people living here, but the occupants feared to give the exact number lest their rent should be raised.

THE first set of chawls I visited consisted of three rows of ten. For these thirty huts, representing about 300 persons, there were three taps

in all available with water only during the morning and evening hours coming in a slow trickle. There were three lavatories in all—holes in the ground directly over the drain; one was overflowing and unusable. The next set of eight chawls comprised 160 of these single-room huts. For these 1,600 people there were six taps in all with water running only from 6 to 8 in the evening and 2 to 7.30 in the morning, although in the well-to-do quarters of Bombay, the water is available all day. One solidly built small building was set apart, brilliantly lit with electric light and well-equipped with furniture. This was the rent-collector's office. Thus electricity was, in fact, laid on, but none is available for the people. These chawls were mostly thirty-five years old and untouched since they were built. The landlord does nothing but take the rents. The municipal regulations are of the most elementary, sketchy description, and are seldom enforced; the inspectors, corporation and landlords all work together; even if there is a prosecution it only results in nominal fines of a few rupees. Yet in the midst of these grim conditions, the spirit of the workers is unbroken.

WHEN I had seen the chawls

I thought I had seen the bottom level, but there was worse to come. We next visited the Matunga Labour Camp, or sweepers' colony beyond the outskirts of the city. There was here a series of municipal huts built for sweepers and outcasts. Far beyond the relatively small number of municipal huts stretched a mass of crude huts and tents built by the occupants themselves on the waste ground. These were the most ramshackle constructions of bamboo, straw, rags and brown paper. With the most constricted interior space

the uneven earthen floor was broken by holes and tunnels of rats. The space between the huts were barely two yards, in some cases one yard wide. Rats and vermin swarmed. There had recently been three cholera deaths here. Mosquitos fill the air. There was a "shop" on the bare ground with tiny fragments of rotten dry fish. At one spot a drain had broken open and overflowed: the spot seethed with crawling life. There were about a thousand huts with an average of ten people in each; for all these there were only thirty-two taps, or one for 300 persons. Even the outside verandahs of a few boards with a low covering were often occupied. In one space little more than a kennel 4 ft. by 2 ft. I saw a family crouched, a sick old woman on the ground moaning and coughing, two children huddled beside her and an old man behind. Yet even here in this nightmare inferno of human misery, where no Congress or League representative dares enter, the Red Flag proclaims its hope and defiance and the task of organisation has been begun; there is a Party group of 25; we were given a tremendous reception, old men and women and tiny children raised the clenched fist and we were shown with pride one entire hut which was the hut of the Friends of the Soviet Union, with an aged man in charge, and portraits of Lenin and Stalin and a garland within.

THE memory of the Matunga labour camp will remain with me to my dying day; and with it, this feeling above all: hatred of the system that has done this to human life; and honour for those who, living under such conditions, have not gone under, and have carried forward human struggle and comradeship and the fight for the future.

India Demands

We in Britain have a duty. The Labour movement stands pledged to fulfil a policy undoubtedly desired by the majority of the British people—achievement of real Indian freedom.

We must demand that the Government take immediate steps to make good the shortcomings of the Cabinet Mission's plan and especially to:—

(1) Issue a declaration of recognition of Indian independence as the starting point of any further negotiations.

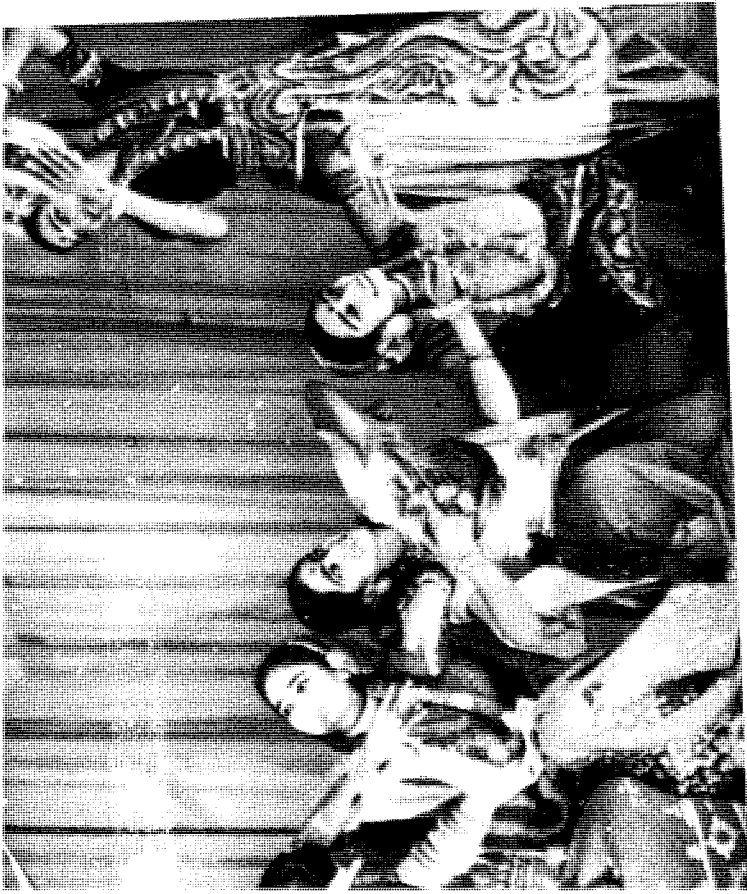
(2) Provide for democratic election by universal suffrage of a Constituent Assembly in India, on the basis of redrawing the existing provincial boundaries on linguistic-cultural lines so as to allow for the exercise of the right of national self-determination if desired in any region.

(3) Hand over power to a provisional National Government of Indian leaders, either of the Congress and Muslim League jointly, if they reach an agreement, or in the absence of an agreement, to the major political organisation, the Congress.

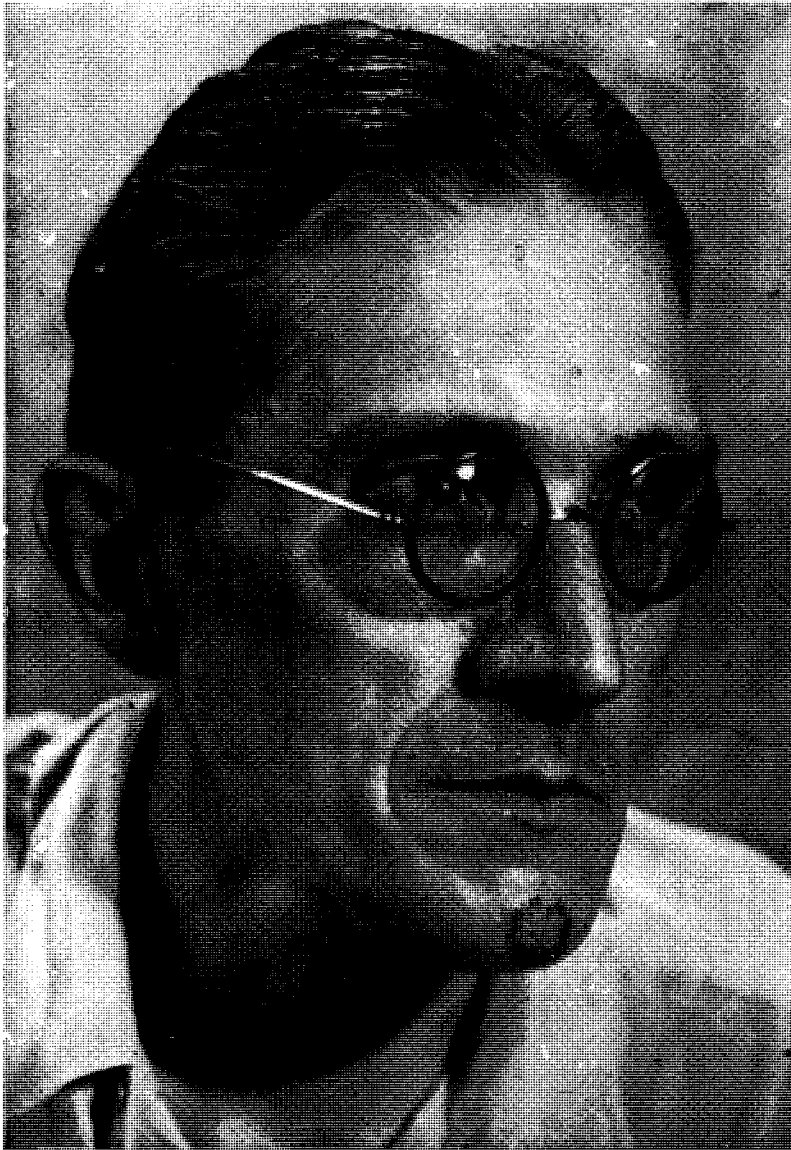
Such a settlement is vital, not only for the 400 million Indian people, but also in the interests of democracy and of world peace.



P. C. Joshi, Dr. Adhikari and B. T. Ranadive of the Political Bureau of the Indian Communist Party.



the Indian Ballet. R. P. Dutt was greatly impressed.



R. PALME DUTT

Member of the Executive Committee of the Communist Party. Editor of LABOUR MONTHLY, world-renowned Marxist and authority on India.

STAND BY THE INDIAN PEOPLE

A personal message from R. P. Dutt

WHEN I left India after my four months' visit, I pledged myself to do everything in my power to bring the knowledge of the conditions I had seen in India to the British people, and to strengthen our common struggle against a common enemy.

NEVER was there a greater need for close understanding between the British and Indian people. The terrible events which have taken place in Calcutta are a warning how grave the situation is since the departure of the Cabinet Mission.

Remember how only last November the crowds were demonstrating in the streets of Calcutta, Hindus and Muslims alike, under the slogan of "Hindus and Muslims Unite," "Down with British Imperialism." The same great demonstrations took place in Bombay and other towns and reached their height with the Naval rising in February, when the Indian warships ran up the joint flags of the Congress and the League. The British authorities feared this Hindu-Muslim unity. They feared the end of British rule in India.

THEN the Cabinet Mission came to India. Their whole tactics were based on playing off Hindus against Muslims—the Congress against the League. The proposed constitution and machinery of the Constituent Assembly is based on placing Hindus and Muslims in separate compartments. In the same way the first proposal of an Interim Government was based on balancing Hindus and Muslims. Inevitably these tactics have intensified communal antagonism and helped to bring about the present dangerous position.

Now the Nehru Ministry is in process of formation and may be formed by the time these words appear. Every well-wisher of India will hope that the establishment of this Ministry of Indian leaders will help to bring an improvement of the situation. At the same time we cannot afford to be blind to the very difficult and dangerous conditions under which this Ministry will have to function.

The Nehru Ministry is not an independent National Government, but in its constitutional policy an enlarged Viceroy's Council with full overriding power still resting in the hands of the Viceroy.

BRITISH military occupation still continues in India. Indians justly ask how can there be talk of Indian independence or of a free Constituent Assembly determining India's future, so long as the Interim Government and Constituent Assembly have to function under the shadow of British military occupation.

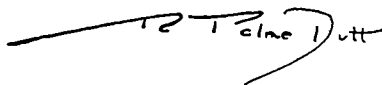
The Congress have only been invited to form a Ministry on the understanding and their explicit declaration that they accept the British plan for India "in its entirety." But this plan does not give India freedom. The proposed Constituent Assembly is neither democratic nor sovereign. It is based on indirect election from a restricted electorate and is divided into Hindu and Muslim groupings with a right of mutual veto. One quarter of the seats are allocated to the Princes with no provision for democratic representation. The proposed constitution partitions India into separate Hindu and Muslim groupings alongside the Princes' States, and provides only for a weak central Government with power restricted to foreign policy and defence, and with no power for any economic or social planning.

FINALLY, the Congress Ministry is faced at present with the sharp antagonism of the Muslim League, which has called for direct action. In consequence, there is danger, unless Congress-League co-operation is established, that a position could arise in which the Congress Ministry would find itself dependent on British armed forces for suppressing the League. This would be a most extreme and dangerous development of the methods of divide and rule.

THE Communist Party of India is conducting a magnificent fight for Indian National Unity and real independence. They advocate Congress-League unity and urge that the differences can be settled on the basis of the principle of national self-determination within a free India. They urge a joint Congress-League-Communist common front to win Indian freedom.

From my visit I have carried away a deep and lasting impression of the universal desire of all Indians for the freedom of their country. I have also carried away a very deep impression of the heroism and fighting capacity of the masses of the Indian people, and their determination to win a better future.

WE have the duty in this situation, to stand by the Indian people's fight, for their interests are common with ours in the struggle against Imperialism and reactionary policy. We need to spread understanding of the conditions and problems of the Indian people. We need to combat the illusions which have been spread with regard to the Cabinet Mission's plan as already giving India freedom. We must demand full and effective independence for India, the withdrawal of British troops and the right of the Indian people to determine their own future through a democratically-elected and sovereign Constituent Assembly.



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