

Freedom's Battle

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WHAT IS the role of the Indian and other colonial peoples in the titanic struggle that now rages?

The embattled ranks of the free Soviet people, their formidable weapons, their impenetrable armour of steel and will, hold in deadly combat the ruthless and aggressive might of Nazi imperialism. That eighteen hundred mile battle-front witnesses not only the most gigantic engagements in human history and great feats of daring and strategy, but the grim determination of a united people, who give battle or scorch their earth to destroy Fascism so that it may never rise again.

The attack on the Soviet Union aroused the spontaneous solidarity of vast sections of people in every country in the world, not excluding those now part of the greater Reich. Germans and Finns, goaded into battle by their Nazi masters, have deserted and sought their liberation in the-ranks of the "enemy." Not Quislings, not traitors or hirelings, but pronounced anti-Fascists and democrats lead this response.

Nowhere has this response been more spontaneous, more extensive or more deep-sprung than among the colonial peoples. Subject; they yearn and strive passionately for freedom which to them is the greatest of all realities. To them the victory of the Soviet Union is not merely the hope of freedom, but the guarantee of its achievement. They realise that the Soviet people have unfailingly recognised the common interests of the peoples of the world. The passions of deadly war have not shaken the Soviet people in this basic knowledge and belief; their leaders have proclaimed that the Soviet Union has faithful allies among the peoples of the world, not excluding the German people. The subject people know that the U.S.S.R. has no imperialist interests, she wages no war on any people, and covets no territories. Where rulers and exploiters have led people into war against the Soviet Union, she has brought the conflict to a victorious conclusion not only for herself, but for the people of the other country, whom she has often liberated.

The Soviet Union has consistently championed the struggles for national independence and the autonomy of

nationalities. Her own liberation from Tsarist tyranny and the dawn of a fuller life for 180 million people, not "welded" into a "nation," but members of a free and powerful fraternity, has given great inspiration to the colonial peoples, and stirred the masses in these oppressed lands to new hopes and sustained endeavour. It has also inspired and enabled national movements of liberation to recognise their role and seek to play their part in a freer world and in the world struggle for people's freedom.

In India, the national movement has reached a high stage of political development. It commands the allegiance of the overwhelming majority of the Indian people. It offers fearless and unremitting resistance to imperial domination. It has well defined objectives. It has maintained and advanced national unity in India in the face of all attacks and subterfuges by interested parties.

This alone would not, however, entitle it to claim political maturity in the present-day world. The clear recognition that the national struggle is part of the struggle for a freer world, that India and her people, even though powerless to commit or to control their government, must declare themselves in relation to world affairs is integral to the policies and programmes of the Indian national movement.

The rise of Fascism in Europe and Asia, its depredations and its allies, its increasing threat, actual and potential, to the peoples of the world, aroused deep concern in India. Soon—and sooner than in most countries of the West—it resulted in decisive alignments and prodigious mass activity. The participation in the world anti-Fascist front became integral to policy, which attained increasing clarity in formulation as the world struggle developed. Their hostility to Fascism has been enduring and intense. The support of the peoples' struggle in China and Spain and the mass solidarity with those peoples is one of the major chapters of recent Indian history. Equally, the Indian people have declared their determination to resist imperialist war or commitments imposed on them without their consent and free co-operation.

In September, 1939, the British Gov-

ernment declared India a belligerent country without consent or consultation, thus deliberately flouting public opinion. Legislation in Parliament and Ordinances in India further restricted the narrow sphere and competence of the provincial governments and substantially increased the enormous powers of the Viceroy. The numerous Ordinances promulgated affect every aspect of Indian life and provide for extreme penalties. In a few weeks, thousands of men and women of the National peasant and working class movement were rounded and put into prison, although no general resistance had been declared.

The Congress asked the British government, on the 14th September, 1939, to declare its purposes and to apply to India and to the colonial peoples the principles of liberty and national Independence to vindicate which it claimed to be waging war against the Nazis. There is no section of Indian opinion that is not anti-Nazi, and none more passionately so than the popular movements. Even the British Government and other detractors have repeatedly admitted that the Indian people are passionately anti-Fascist.

Nazi-propaganda has found Indian soil barren. The Fuhrer-von-Indian, now in an internment camp, stumped the country, thanks to official benevolence. Sir Reginald Maxwell, of the Indian Government, considers even now that the Nazis are better people than the brave Indian anti-Fascists whom it has put into concentration camps. The pro-Fascist elements in India are to be found among the young bloods of the European Associations and in other high places. It is they who have been armed—virtually a private army of a class.

The British Government, however, rode roughshod over Indian opinion, refused every reasonable request, imposed more Ordinances and behaved as though this war was its exclusive concern! There was no pretence in India that it was a people's war! Indeed, British Statesmen spoke of the "freedom of Europe."

In the twelve months which followed the declaration of India's belligerency, the Indian national movement strove patiently and tenaciously to obtain the release of the forces of freedom in India. Yet the Government ignored the vital claim of the Indian people that they were

entitled to play their part as a free people in world affairs. It chose to rely on the time-honoured weapons, coercion, "divide and rule," misrepresentation, and on its Quislings.

Having rejected the proposals of the Indian National Congress, the Government fell back on its discredited devices, and offered a plan for enlarging the Viceroy's Executive Council by the appointment of representatives of the "great political parties" to it. It also proposed an advisory committee of a larger size to enable India to assist in the war effort. The Congress ignored the British proposal, other political parties expressed disappointment and anger. Months passed, the scheme had no sponsors or supporters in India. Autocracy, which had obtained now over the larger part of India, increased coercion for war purposes, more imprisonments and suppression continued.

The final break between the Congress and the Government could not be postponed. In October, 1940, Congress embarked on civil disobedience, severely restricted at first, and later extended, but only by selected individuals. Nehru was arrested and sentenced to four years' imprisonment for speeches made to the peasantry at Gorakhpur, "illiterate villagers and therefore highly inflammable material," said the Magistrate. Others followed, almost all leaders of the Congress, former Congress Ministers and the majority of Congress members of legislatures. In a few months the number swelled, though resistance was still strictly controlled by Mr. Ghandi, and at the end of May there were twenty thousand men and women in prison for their advocacy of the Congress cause. In addition there are over 800 in concentration camps, among them well-known Socialists and Communists; Hindus, Moslems, men and women, students, peasants, workers, leaders, followers, and every one of them a convinced anti-Fascist. The penalisation of opinion, of pro-Soviet views, of agitation for improvement of standards of life and wages of workers, restrictions on the Press, and an insistently directed hostility to working class, Communist, student and peasant leaders is a feature of the nation-wide repression that now obtains.

Such is the disastrous spectacle that is the consequence of British policy in India to-day. *Men who should be lead-*

ing the fight against Nazism are in British prisons, those who could mobilise the vital forces of freedom in India for world freedom are languishing in jails and concentration camps, subject to humiliation and much cruelty.

This does not complete the picture. More and heavier burdens have been placed on the peasantry. Price fixing Ordinances hit the producers hard while the cost of living rises and the prices of imported goods soar. The war effort sees India selling raw material at controlled prices and buying imported goods at high prices. Raw produce such as jute, corn and grain lie unsold and unexported owing to the loss of markets and Ordinance regulations. Distress increases. Large scale strikes and peasant demonstrations have vastly increased. In spite of the war and the great needs of war production, Indian industrial development is surprisingly limited, taking all-round figures.

* All this is not the picture of an unhappy past which we may, without loss forget, but is the stark reality. It is believed that the British Government, having failed to secure any support for its plan in India, is about to impose it. * It may then be proclaimed to the world that Indian co-operation has now been secured, but facts will contradict the claim. The Government plan is as futile as it is dangerous.

Meanwhile, world events move with unprecedented rapidity. No event in our time so emphatically proclaims the compelling nature of the new situation as the Anglo-Soviet Alliance. There have been Russo-British alliances before, open and secret. Some of them are the more sinister chapters of European history. They were the alliances of two empires (and of Royal relations) against a newer and more energetic rival. An alliance between the Soviet Union and Britain is a fundamentally different arrangement. Indeed, it was this difference that stood so adamantly in the way of such an alliance in the days prior to the war and made the opposition to it their corner stone of Imperial foreign policy and insisted on its maintenance till the entire world situation was transformed by the Soviet Union leaping to arms as the effective champion of resistance to Nazism in its path of world Empire. Britain is not now in alliance with the

Russia of the Czars, not with another empire who equally seeks with the defeat of a rival imperialism, but with a mighty people's State, which is the antithesis of Empire. The Soviet Union seeks no territories or imperial gains of trade or commerce or colonisation. The civilisation which it is fighting to defend is incompatible with the domination of peoples at home or abroad, or with participation in world imperialism. Its role is as that of the leader and the bulwark of the people against world empire, which is Hitler's objective. It transforms the character of the world struggle to the colonial peoples.

Nazi imperialism has hurled itself against the mightiest bulwark which stands between it and world domination. Its challenge summons the peoples of the world to action. It calls for the fullest mobilisation of all the forces of freedom everywhere. Nowhere are those forces so vital, so awaiting release, so ready to take a place in the world-front against Nazism as in India. The Indian people are aware of the basic purposes of the U.S.S.R. and her contribution to world peace and national independence. They are conscious of the newer and vital elements which have now entered this world-battle. They know that the battlefield is no mere Russo-German battlefield. Their enslavement alone hampers the fulfilment of the task which the world situation demands from them. From this bondage they must secure their release. That release is no mere national ambition, it is no exclusive national concern or destiny. It is part of common world purposes.

Every practical consideration, every moral argument, every reasonable calculation points to the conclusion that the emancipation of India is now supremely imperative. There are no insurmountable obstacles to the establishment of free co-operation with India. It is too late in the day to argue that there are minorities which bar the establishment of Independence. By that token Poland Czechoslovakia and Syria would all be condemned to subjection. Nor can it be contended seriously that it takes twenty-eight years to make a General and that India, therefore, could not defend herself. Soviet achievement, China and Spain, and on the opposite side France, in recent years, have discredited this argument.

At this historic hour, freedom's battle

* The forecast here given was borne out by Mr. Amery's announcement in parliament on 22nd July.

calls for the fullest mobilisation of Britain's moral and material resources. It calls for the release of all the forces now enchained, crippled or stultified by narrow and sectional interests of privilege, profit or empire.

The suppression of India is one of the major factors in the present situation. It diverts the energies of the British from the field of the real battle of the British

people. It confuses British purposes and makes it less capable of that wide acceptance which is imperative at this juncture. It hampers the Indian people from playing their significant part in the world struggle for people's freedom.

*Release India! Release India for
freedom's battle!*

July 20th, 1941.