



BEHIND CRIPPS' INDIA MISSION

London (by cable).

THE circumstances under which Cripps decided to accept the suggestion that he go to India were not auspicious. Least pleasant of all was the announcement—on the eve of the decision to send him to negotiate—that the government was acting to some extent under a direct threat of “revolt.” Allegedly this threat was cabled by Mohammed Ali Jinnah, head of the so-called Moslem League, and tossed like a hand grenade into the War Cabinet meeting. It was a pitiable thing that this Jinnah threat should actually have been presented

Cockburn on Cliveden

IT SEEMS NEW MASSES is being sued for its exposure of the American Cliveden set. I can understand that people whose actions tended to resemble in any way those of our own dear Lady Astor might grab instinctively at a libel suit, in the event of anyone being tactless enough to point out the resemblance. I can sympathize with the victims of such a suit through the courts. Because I was the first person to uncover, smoke out, and present impaled upon a pin the British Cliveden set, I was threatened with a number of libel actions running well above the two-score mark. Most of them were based on the theory that there was no such animal as the Cliveden set. I was reminded of the remark once made to me at the Morgan office in New York by Thomas W. Lamont who, disclaiming all knowledge of the existence in 1931 of anything in the nature of a “power trust,” said: “There is no trust, no conspiracy; it is just that a few of the bankers and those interested in electric power are standing around in a cooperative frame of mind.”

I suppose there is nobody now who would even attempt to deny the existence or the disastrous character of the policy that came to be known as the Cliveden set in Britain. I know from personal experience that there are many today who admit that they were only too anxious to be hooked and played for suckers by persons who romped with Herr von Ribbentrop amid the immemorial elms and the Ascot skirts in the good old days. I suppose there are no more bitter men in England than these. It is comforting to reflect that because of the timely exposure of the Cliveden set in Britain its dangerous ramifications were to some extent cut short. Anyone performing the same service in America is to be congratulated.

in the British press without contradiction from any official source. Everyone knows that Jinnah and his League do not represent more than a fraction of the Moslem population of India. Everyone also knows that the League itself is not united behind Jinnah. So that everyone naturally asks himself just why the British government, so firm and tough in the face of the pleas and suggestions of the Indian National Congress, should suddenly decide to go on paying this great deference to Jinnah. They could hardly be more anxious to please him, it would seem, if Jinnah—instead of representing some Moslem landowners and usurers—really was acting for all those elements in London who do not want to see a situation in which a Declaration of Independence for a strong central government in India will become inevitable.

NATURALLY the character of the “plan” which Cripps is taking with him to India is a strict secret. It is no secret that during the discussion of various alternative plans within the past three weeks, there were those who suggested that the thing to do was to concentrate exclusively on the strategic aspects of the Indian problem, leaving the “political and constitutional” aspects to look after themselves for the time being. It would not be difficult to imagine that the British government had on the whole found refuge in the notion that after all the major strategical considerations and objectives can be achieved without solution of any major political problems. That would be perfectly in character. To believe in such nonsense is the sort of temptation to which elements in the British government are particularly vulnerable. Let us hope that it is otherwise. However, we recall that both Mr. Clement Attlee and Sir John Anderson were certainly among those more or less unofficially mandated by their supporters to keep any proposals that might be made on an even keel. And we are probably—if we reflect upon the character and political abilities of Clement Attlee and Sir John Anderson—immune from serious disappointment.

The question then asks itself, as the French say, just what effect will this have on Cripps’ position? There are people who believe that in some sense Cripps has been “put on the spot.” Personally I do not think there is any evidence of that. I think that Cripps did not actually propose going to India at this stage—though he had originally planned and hoped to be there for some time after his return from Moscow. But I have good reason for believing that when the proposal was made to him, Cripps accepted it with enthusiasm. There are those who imagine that, first, Cripps will have a crashing failure in India, and that, secondly, this failure will have a serious effect upon his position here.

The first premise, of course, depends on just what is in the secret government plan—assuming that there really is a plan and that its whole development is not still dependent on what Cripps turns up. Obviously if the plan is, on the one hand, a large-scale concession to Jinnah and his plan for a partitioning of India, plus some absurd promise of “dominion status after the war,” the plan is perfectly useless and Cripps cannot possibly get Indian agreement. But one must not assume that Cripps’ political position here would necessarily collapse as a result of such a failure. On the morning of Cripps’ decision to leave for India, a close friend of his pointed out to me with a certain acumen that, “Whether he fails in India or not, it is

likely that in the meantime a situation can arise here in which people may once again feel that the best thing to do would be to recall Cripps. It may be felt that if only Cripps had not been absent in India at the moment, he would have prevented the rest of the War Cabinet doing what it has done." It must be realized that in the lobbies of the House of Commons there is fairly common assumption that—for reasons which unfortunately do not seem to be under our control—events can occur in the near future which may produce within a few months a government crisis somewhat more serious than the one of a few weeks ago. It may be taken for granted that the old line Labor Party leadership will attempt to use this crisis to remove Cripps from a position which they regard—and in conversation openly declare to be—insulting to them. It is equally true that there are forces on the extreme right who would also be glad to be rid of Cripps and who cherish hopes of some sort of grand counter-attack at the moment of "the next crisis." On the other hand, Cripps retains, for the time being, his enormous prestige in the country as the man who—as is commonly believed—"made" the Anglo-Soviet alliance. And there are plenty of important and realistic people in the Conservative Party who conceive that since, without question, Cripps is today a greater figure than Churchill in the eyes of the mass of the people of this country, it might after all be possible for the

moderate Conservatives to come to some sort of "arrangement" with Cripps.

I do not have the impression that Cripps would necessarily be hostile to such an arrangement. And it is at least certain that he and his associates are filled with a considerable optimism as to the prospects of Cripps'—regardless of what happens in India—being able to retain and even to increase the power which he has already attained.

It may be noted that those Labor Party backbenchers who have for years specially interested themselves in the Indian problem have received the Cripps' mission with a perhaps exaggerated scepticism and even cynicism. They imagine that all this is perhaps nothing but a new delaying tactic. On the other hand, these particular backbenchers are somewhat hamstrung by the fact that they, while tacitly criticizing Cripps, are also in sharp conflict with the executive of the Labor Party, so that it is hard for them to figure out just how to attack the one without supporting the other. The position is of importance because it is perfectly clear that a major crisis, a crisis of real gravity, is developing within the ranks of the Labor Party. And it is not unlikely that India will prove the deciding factor in a development which is of the greatest possible importance for the internal political situation here.

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